

lato en el que asistimos con curiosidad a una serie de sucesos extraordinarios que parecen indicar que todo transcurre al revés en el entorno de su protagonista.

La mayoría de todas estas historias quedan sin concluir o sin explicación lógica. Parece que Pàmies, quien ha afirmado en alguna entrevista que no le gustan aquellos libros donde todo queda perfectamente ligado y redondeado, ha preferido, una vez más, concederle al lector la posibilidad de crear un final o de dar una respuesta a cada una de sus narraciones, sugerirle en lugar de imponerle una realidad. El resultado es la hábil construcción de una serie de inquietantes situaciones que no se basan en el efectismo de la sorpresa final sino en un estilo directo y eficaz y en la claridad de unos hechos narrados entre la ironía y el pesimismo, entre el sarcasmo y la ternura, entre la magia y la sordidez.

Sergi Pàmies irrumpió en las letras catalanas con dos libros de cuentos, *T'hauria de caure la cara de vergonya* (1986) e *Infecció* (1987), a los que siguieron las novelas *La primera pedra* (1990), *L'instint* (1992) y *Sentimental* (1995). todas sus obras han sido publicadas en castellano por Anagrama, traducidas al francés y, varias de ellas, al alemán. Con *La primera piedra* ganó el premio Icaro 1991 otorgado por el *Diario 16* y *L'instint* recibió el Prudenci Bertrana 1993. Pàmies, que ha sabido compaginar su labor de escritor con diversas colaboraciones en prensa, radio y televisión, ha logrado convertirse en una de las figuras más destacadas de la escena literaria de los últimos años. Con *La gran novela sobre Barcelona* retoma sus orígenes literarios y confirma una vez más su maestría y talento narrativos.

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Rosa Montero. *La hija del caníbal*. Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1997, 338 pp.

The unanimous awarding by a prestigious jury of the I Premio Primavera de novela (1997) to Rosa Montero's seventh novel, *La hija del caníbal*, affirms once again the importance of this contemporary novelist to the Spanish literary scene. Whereas to the uninitiated each of Montero's novels appears to be very different from the preceding ones, this latest novel being no exception as it chronicles the colliding worlds of a children's writer (Lucía), an aging anarchist (Félix), and an aspiring young musician (Adrián), in reality Montero's work forms a coherent narrative that is based on the concept of external structural change that both camouflages and supports internal continuity and evolution. Moreover, the evolution of the author's work is already teasingly suggested in the title by the use of the word «caníbal», which alludes not only to the protagonist's relationship with her father but also refers to the purposeful dialogue between this novel and Montero's second novel, *La función delta* (1981).

A trademark of Montero's narrative is the careful construction of the novel's structure that, as in previous novels, is intimately tied to the principal themes. Divided into thirty sequences, the story is structured around three narrative lines. The primary line is the first-person recounting of forty-one year old Lucía's life and the kidnapping of her husband. This line alternates with two important sub-lines that center on the youthful adventures of her eighty-one year old neighbor Félix and Lucía's romance with a much younger (21) upstairs neighbor, Adrián. The conscious differentiation of generations in the three narrative lines is accompanied by specific genre distinctions as well; the primary line employs elements of the detective and adventure genres whereas the sub-lines are based on elements of the historical and romance genres respectively. As in *La función delta*, it is the fictional memoir genre that bridges the narrative lines and in the final chapters integrates them and confirms the interconnections of the three levels on a personal and universal level.

As noted, structural elements serve as foundations for thematic concerns. For example, elements of the romance genre serve to elaborate upon Montero's characteristic concern for amorous relationships. Once again the differences between passionate love and compromise love, first presented in *Crónica del desamor* and a constant throughout her novelistic trajectory, are explored in the relationships of all three characters. These ideas, however, have clearly evolved over the almost two decades that Montero's novels span. Passionate love and compromise love are no longer posited as diametrical opposites but rather as differing approaches to love that form part of a spectrum and that correspond to emotional-age needs. New as well is the examination of unequal-age couples that is tied to structural generational differences. Montero explores negative stereotypes surrounding the older-woman/younger-man relationship and the amorous interests of the elderly by straightforwardly, and with touches of humor, showing the naturalness of both and once again linking them to emotional-age needs. However, probably the most surprising element for Montero habitués is the presence of the first successful couple of the entire narrative. Although they are clearly labeled as an oddity, they are emblematic of Montero's narrative evolution.

Despite the importance of love in *La hija del caníbal* it is not the predominant theme; this role is occupied by a group of closely-related themes that, although characteristic of the author's narrative, here acquire special significance: aging, death, identity, and the word. The phases and effects of aging are contrasted through the structural generational differences (youth, middle-, and old-age) and the historical narrative line that focuses on Félix's adventures. However, the stark terror of aging attributed to its proximity to death that is an earmark of Montero's novels is in this one somewhat tempered. Although the negative aspects of both physical and mental aging are examined, it is made

clear, especially through Félix's character, that these are counterbalanced by moments of beauty and comprehension.

The acquisition of knowledge associated with the experiences of aging are especially important for the understanding of one's relation to the universe, which in *La hija del caníbal* is conceived of as having a certain structure within the apparent chaos. The intimation of order, which is clearly biological and not religious, is the hopeful incentive that postulates the possibilities of identity construction in the fight against death. Death, as in previous Montero novels, is envisaged primarily as an interior enemy, something that we carry inside us (affirmed by recent genetic research on cell life span) and against which we do battle. In Montero's writing this battle is waged and achieves some success through the power of the word. It is by means of the dual search for and creation of an identity and its subsequent communication to others that one is able to survive one's physical self.

In the novel identity is clearly conceived in postmodern terms as non-stable, fragmented, and elusive. This is reinforced by the structural use of elements of the historical and detective genres. The historical genre, in its postmodern manifestation and in this novel, emphasizes the slippery role of memory and the concept that «facts» are subjective creations; just as recent detective fiction has highlighted that its characteristic search for «truth» is equally subjective and that the reconstruction of the crime narrative by the detective is a fictional creation. Thus in the protagonist's construction of identity Montero consciously plays with the interface between the real and fictional worlds through the use of elements such as metafictional references and unreliable narrators. Yet, despite the unresolved and shifting nature of identity, in conjunction with the word, be it spoken or written, its power in the war against death is clearly asserted on several levels within the text, by the text itself, and most explicitly in the words of the protagonist, «Aquí estoy, inventando verdades y recordando mentiras para no disolverme en la nada absoluta» (316).

Clearly the significance of *La hija del caníbal* does not reside in thematic innovation but rather its treatment of these themes. For those readers familiar with Montero's work, *La hija del caníbal* is a crucial stage in the evolution of the author's work for its pointed thematic dialogue with *La función delta*, a detailed discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this review. Yet even when considered out of its narrative context, the novel strongly reinforces Montero's position in contemporary fiction. Her engaging story-telling capabilities and her skillful use of current literary tendencies are external layers of a deeper commitment to metaphysical inquiry and a self-discovery approach to living that locates this author squarely in a long-standing Spanish tradition characterized by authors such as Larra, Baroja, and Marsé.

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