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The Freedom of the Aesthetic: Montserrat Roig's Use of the City in "Ramona, adéu"

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THE FREEDOM OF THE AESTHETIC: MONTSERRAT ROIG'S USE OF THE CITY IN *RAMONA, ADÉU*

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ABSTRACT

This article suggests that over recent decades Catalan literary criticism has paid too little attention to the aesthetic attributes of Catalan literature and emphasised the social, political and cultural at the expense of discussions of narrative poetics. Through an analysis of Montserrat Roig's metaphorical use of the city in her first novel *Ramona, adéu*, I put forward the view that the aesthetic features of Catalan literature need to be re-claimed. This article provides a critical analysis of the aesthetic importance of Roig's representation of the city in her first novel and argues that she uses Barcelona as a critical tool through which to explore questions of both female emancipation and aesthetic freedom. Following a detailed discussion of Roig's descriptions of how her female characters interact with particular urban spaces, I examine how Roig makes subtle shifts in her semantic register during these narrative accounts when her prose moves into the realm of the poetic. I conclude that this technique enables us to read her accounts of urban space as metaphors for aesthetic freedom and are inextricably linked to her wider concerns on the importance of liberating Catalan literature from the discourse of political nationalism.

For a number of years now, it has been unfashionable for literary critics to discuss novels using aesthetic categories and terms, even though writers themselves have continued to rely on metaphor, allegory and symbol as primary literary tools to facilitate the creative expression of their ideas. The rise of cultural studies has played a significant role in foregrounding the literary text's relations to its historic or political circumstances, which has produced new and illuminating readings and significantly broadened the framework of literary criticism over the past two to three decades. Nevertheless, some of these readings have emphasised the historical and political at the expense of the aesthetic, and this phenomenon has become particularly apparent in the field of Catalan literary criticism. In the early 1990s Jordi Llovet noted this phenomenon when he lamented "el menyspreu de la dimensió estètica" in the work of his fellow literary critics (qtd in Nadal 194). One obvious explanation for this phenomenon lies in the unique political circumstances Catalonia faced following the repressive years of the dictatorship, and the need to lay

claim to the nation's rich literary history during the re-establishment of democracy and the concomitant rebuilding of Catalan cultural institutions. However, the tendency to read Catalan literature solely through the prism of national culture and politics may have led to the partial restriction of Catalan literary studies, since only conceptual discourse—that of a text's or writer's relationship to the nation—is given consideration and soon becomes the dominant mode of reading a literary text (Cramerí, Fernández, King). Through an analysis of Montserrat Roig's metaphorical use of the city in her first novel *Ramona, adén*, this article proposes an additional critical methodology to existing approaches to the study of Catalan literature, one which does not seek to denounce the relevance of readings that prioritise the national context, but which ascribes equal importance to the aesthetic claims of Catalan literature as, first and foremost, literature. This article will therefore consider Roig's novel within the context of the much broader literary field of the aesthetic, paying attention to what Murray Krieger has termed "the freedom of the aesthetic" (Krieger 226). Krieger suggests that the literary text's aesthetic uniqueness always already acts to resist assimilation into any conceptual or political discourse: "the role of any text, when we allow it to function in an aesthetic mode for us, is not to counter one ideology with another, but rather, to reveal the inadequacies of ideology itself, as conceptual discourse, to deal with errant particularity" (227). What therefore follows below is an attempt to consider the aesthetic importance of Roig's representation of the city in her first novel, as well as a concluding discussion of how her descriptions of urban space may be read as metaphors for aesthetic freedom, illustrating how, in the words of Roig, literature remains "un petit espai de llibertat totalment intransferible i individual" (Nadal 130).

The importance of the city of Barcelona in Montserrat Roig's novels has been noted by a number of literary scholars (Davies, Riera, Dupláa, Tatum). However, their discussions have tended to rely on a limited analysis of the aesthetic use to which Roig puts the city in her fiction.¹ Over forty years ago, David Weimer argued that literary cities should not necessarily be analysed through historical, sociological, or even epistemological readings, since these failed to address the aesthetic category of the metaphoric (Weimer 7). Similarly, Robert Alter has recently argued in his discussion of the literary city that metaphor is the primary vehicle for the urban writer, and that the city he or she imagines represents "a playground for the imagination," rather than an accurate impression of the real objective referent (Alter

¹ The exception is Kathryn A. Everly's study. Everly acknowledges the metaphorical importance of the city. See pp. 114 and 132.

102). Roig herself stated that "les geografies literàries es tracen damunt els mapes de la imaginació," and that it was not the role of the urban novelist to write *about* a city but that it was more important for writers to explore the symbolic and metaphorical potential afforded by the city to creative writers (Roig, *Digues que m'estimes* 156). It is argued here that throughout *Ramona, adéu* Roig was primarily concerned with these metaphoric and symbolic possibilities and was not simply relying on Barcelona's urban topography and history to locate the events of the narrative, even though these must also be acknowledged as important features of the novel. This article seeks instead to examine how Roig represents the city as a metaphorical interlocutor for her female characters, and that it is this relationship between urban space and their minds that assists them in restructuring their gendered *mirades*. It is also suggested that on a deeper metaphorical level, Roig's imaginative use of the city conveys an important aesthetic idea in relation to both her own search for artistic freedom and her desire to rise above prescriptive political or social agendas, particularly those that involved linking literary creation in Catalonia to Catalan nationalism.

Opponents of the aesthetic approach to literary criticism might level the claim that it seeks to impose an organic unity on the text, over-emphasises the psychological and pays scant regard to the wider socio-cultural discourses that have shaped the text's production. However, this is simply not the case since the literary critic who prioritises an aesthetic reading is often aware of the limitations of studying a text in isolation from historical forces; language, after all, is rooted in the world and does not exist outside of this connection. Balanced aesthetic readings of literature are therefore able to trace both the stylistic particularities of a text and their relationship with wider philosophical, metaphysical or socio-historic phenomena.² The starting point is nevertheless always the aesthetic space of the text, and it is from here that the literary reading emanates, rather than commencing an analysis with the application of a theoretical discourse, conceptual idea or political agenda which is external to the text.

In the case of *Ramona, adéu*, it is clear that the novel's aesthetic features, especially those displayed in relation to the representation of the city, are inextricably linked to wider social concerns regarding the position of women in contemporary society. In her first novel, Roig sought to provide a critique of the restrictions that had been placed upon women as a consequence of patriarchal culture (which she did not believe had been ameliorated in Catalonia with Franco's death and

2. The literary criticism of Raymond Williams is but one example of this mode of reading. See in particular, *The Country and the City*.

the re-establishment of Catalan institutions). Through its representation of her female protagonists' relationship with the city, *Ramona, adéu* suggests that women's vision of themselves and their interactions with the environment had been severely distorted by the dominance of patriarchal culture, and had resulted in what she termed the "mirada bòrnia." She defined it in the following terms: "en un ull, hi duem un pedaç, i això ens permet seguir mirant cap endintre, escoltar la nostra veu, la no expressada o no admesa com la Gran Veu, la dels Sacerdots que regeixen els cànons a seguir, tant a la crítica com a les universitats, mentre que l'altre ull mira cap enfora, vola lliure" (Roig, *Dignes que m'estimes* 80-81).³ Roig believed that women had to take an active role in removing the *pedaç* that blinkered their vision of themselves as well as their role in society.⁴ Women had to alter their *mirades* and, by implication, resist the mechanisms that had gendered their conscious and unconscious minds, and in order to achieve this transformation, women had to learn to "mirar obertament" (*Memorial Montserrat Roig* 28).⁵ Roig turns her concerns with this wider social phenomenon into an aesthetic challenge, which she rises to through her imaginative treatment of the city as a metaphorical interlocutor for her female characters. Here lies the aesthetic importance of the city in *Ramona, adéu*. Roig utilises urban space to explore the interaction of her female characters with their environment and explore the possibility of removing the restrictive *pedaç* of the "mirada bòrnia" that limits their independence. As this article will now go on to demonstrate, each of the Ramonas experiences a moment when she is able to replace the "mirada bòrnia" with an open, genderless gaze, and this occurs when she is observing the city either from an unfamiliar or altered perspective. As has also been suggested above, these narrative moments also point, on a deeper metaphorical level, to Roig's own philosophy of writing as a space of liberation from all restrictive discourses.

Ramona, adéu explores the lives of three women from the Catalan bourgeoisie—a grandmother, mother and granddaughter—and covers

3. The feminist critic Rachel Blau DuPless suggested that the impact of this insider-outsider status led to a "double-consciousness." See Showalter's "For the Etruscans" pp. 271-91, 278.

4. While Roig believed that patriarchy had been a key mechanism in generating women's false consciousness, women had to take action themselves against "su propia inseguridad y contra la victimización interiorizada" (Roig, *Mujeres en busca* 63).

5. Roig did not provide a detailed theoretical account of how women were to achieve this liberated gaze, but she did outline how she herself underwent a transformative experience which enabled her to deconstruct her own "mirada bòrnia." This event took place while she was standing in front of Strasbourg cathedral (Roig, *Dignes que m'estimes* 102-09). This account provides a useful insight into the metaphorical use to which Roig puts the city in *Ramona, adéu*.

the period from the late nineteenth century to the late 1960s. The novel commences with the first half of the mother's story, which is printed in italics and takes place during the civil war.⁶ The story then shifts to an extract from the grandmother's diary, dated December 1894, in which she records her experiences and personal reflections. Written in the style of nineteenth-century naturalist fiction, the grandmother's moods and changing emotions are metaphorically projected through her descriptions of Barcelona.⁷ The grandmother's gaze is restricted by the limited physical space of her apartment, where she remains isolated from the life of the streets. Her frustrations are conveyed through her diary entries, which reveal her secret yearning to expand her *mirada* beyond the domestic sphere, and to break away from the bourgeois lifestyle and social etiquette that she is bound to obey due to her sex and her class.⁸ This is made apparent in an account of her honeymoon in Paris when she writes of her longing to explore the dark, seductive Parisian side streets from which she is debarred:

I em fa basarda només de pensar que me n'aniré d'aquesta ciutat, voluble i apassionada, sense haver-la coneguda de debò. Hi hauré passat com aquell que fa visites, d'esquitllentes. Ni els carrerons negres i sinuosos que albiro des del cotxe de punt, uns carrerons ombrívols i sinistres però que m'exciten el cor, ni les dones que passegen soles per damunt de la neu, ufanoses dels seus pecats, ni els artistes, ni els poetes de la bohèmia romàntica, no deixaran en mi cap altra petjada que un alè vague d'enyorança (Roig, *Ramona*, adéu 46).

This narrative sequence reveals the effect to which Roig puts the city (in this case Paris) as a metaphorical space through which to examine her female characters' restricted access to the public sphere. The grandmother cannot enjoy Paris because she is not free to enjoy the city, "No respiro l'alegria de París, l'alegria de viure oberta i anhelant que solament posseeixen els qui tasten la llibertat..." (47).⁹ Unlike Charles Baudelaire's *flâneur* who wandered Paris capturing the city within his gaze, Roig's female character is restricted from engaging in

6. For the purposes of this article each character's experiences of urban space will be discussed chronologically, although this does not reflect the actual temporal structure of the novel.

7. Roig stated that Narcís Oller's *Pilar Prim* influenced her representation of the grandmother in *Ramona*, adéu (Nadal 131).

8. Roig undermines the image of the orderly, sensible and well-mannered Catalan bourgeois woman embodied in the protagonist of Eugeni d'Ors's novel *La Ben Plantada* (1911). For a good discussion of Roig's critique of this idealised representation of Catalan women see Dupláu, *La voz testimonial* p. 81.

9. These words are directly linked to those voiced later on in the narrative by her granddaughter, who also longs to "mirar l'univers com un ample ventall de possibilitats, com ho feia en Jordi" (Roig, *Ramona*, adéu 45).

the art of *flânerie* due to the "mirada bòrnia."¹⁰ Yet despite the grandmother's inability to break free from her gendered social role as a bourgeois wife, Roig uses the city to illustrate the possibility of observing the world without the restrictions of the *pedaç*. This opportunity is represented through a description of the grandmother walking around Vista Alegre in Barcelona, a place that once afforded panoramic views of the entire city, accompanied by her husband. Her diary entry recounts how the sight of the city spreading out beneath fills her with the urge to "saltar i de ballar" (64).¹¹ Observing the city in its entirety, she describes how she was overcome by an odd sensation of vertiginous rapture: "La ciutat m'obsessiona i, en veure-la tan menuda, als meus peus, em vaig sentir emportada com per les boires de l'alcohol" (64). For an instant, an alternative vista is opened up to the grandmother, which results in a temporary alteration in her behaviour and mental state. The *pedaç* which restricts her gaze is momentarily removed and she feels empowered: "em veia reina de la muntanya, senyora de Barcelona" (64). Overwhelmed by a new sense of liberation growing within her, she begins to run wildly about the hillside, describing herself as a butterfly. However, her sense of freedom is short-lived and she suffers a miscarriage as a result of her euphoria. The grandmother's brief taste of liberation, initiated by a shift in her visual perspective and altered mental state whilst looking down on the city, is foreclosed; the reprimanding voice of her male doctor awakens her when she regains consciousness at home and reminds her of her position as a bourgeois wife. This event does not constitute a moment of full self-realisation for the grandmother, since the restrictive *pedaç* which limits her gaze is replaced following her experience. Roig's representation of the event nevertheless highlights how she uses the interaction between her female character's consciousness and the city to explore the possibility of transforming

10. Janet Wolff has investigated the absence of the *flâneuse* in the literature of modernity, suggesting that "such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" (Wolff 45). Evidence of the *flâneur* in early twentieth-century Catalan poetry reveals that it is the male gaze that follows the movements of the "dona inconeguda" through Barcelona's streets or observes her on the tram. See for example Guerau de Liost *La ciutat d'ivori* in *Obra poètica completa* pp. 463-89. See also Joan Salvat-Papasseit's "Encara el tram" in *L'irradiador del port i les gavines* collected in *Joan Salvat-Papasseit, Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel, Màrius Torres. Poesia*, p. 26.

11. Roig may have been influenced by the poetical panoramic descriptions of Barcelona in the work of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Catalan writers. In Narcís Oller's *La febre d'or* (1890-1892) a character surveys the city from a *torre* that affords spectacular views of Barcelona's expanding industrial cityscape. Jordi Castellanos has discussed how several Catalan modernist writers used panoramic images of the city in their fiction in order to reflect upon wider social, political and economic changes taking place within Catalonia as a whole. See Jordi Castellanos, *Literatura, vides, ciutats*, pp 148-49.

the female gaze. The city therefore functions as a significant aesthetic tool which aids Roig to express the novel's central theme.

However, it is the mother's story of her experiences in Barcelona during the civil war that exemplifies Roig's deployment of the city as a metaphorical vehicle through which to explore the theme of the transformation of the "*mirada bòrnia*." As in the case of the grandmother, the mother's personal awakening is nevertheless curtailed, signalling the Franco regime's repression of the legal reforms that had been passed during the second Spanish Republic and had benefited women in both Catalonia and Spain.¹² Written in the first person and printed in italics, the colloquial style of the opening sequence replicates that of an oral story being narrated to others and recalls the fictional style of Mercè Rodoreda.¹³ It is only later in the novel that we comprehend the full relevance of the mother's story, which she tells to herself and her daughter over and over again, as it marks one of the most intense and liberating moments of her life. The novel opens with an account of her searching for her husband Joan on the bombed streets of Barcelona. This experience constitutes an entirely new and highly courageous adventure, of which she feels her sexually-liberated and free-thinking friend Kati will be proud: "*jo vull fer el cor fort. La Kati, quan ho sàpiga, em dirà que sóc valenta*" (10). Kati's *mirada* has been liberated as she believes that women have an active part to play within society, yet her views and lifestyle are criticised by men such as Joan, who describes her as "*massa lliure*" (10). The long night that the mother spends traversing the city streets of Barcelona in search of Joan appears to initiate a transformation in her perception of her role in society. Once again, it is the interaction between the female character's mind and the city environment that Roig employs as a means of expressing metaphorically the metamorphosis of the mother's "*mirada bòrnia*." However, in the case of the mother, it is not the panoramic vista of Barcelona that stimulates this process, but the unfamiliar images of bombed buildings that have been blasted into fragments that interact with her sensory and perceptual awareness. Familiar urban scenes and places have been replaced with distorted images that reverse conventional notions of private and public space:

Sentia el tuf de les boques del metro, d'olor de taronges fermentades, i m'aguantava la respiració quan passava pel costat de les escales. Però encara em feia més

12. Roig's mother believed that "*la gran perdedora de la guerra fue la mujer. En la República, más o menos se vislumbraba un futuro distinto para la mujer, pero después, era imposible*" (Nichols 183).

13. The opening sequence reveals the influence of Mercè Rodoreda's technique of "*escriptura parlada*" (Arnau 118).

angúnia la bafarada de peus, de suor de peus, de la gent refugiada que s'arreglava vora els forats, o als soterranis perquè no tenien casa de cap mena (7).

M'esgarriava veure Barcelona plena de deixalles, d'escombraries en estat de putrefacció. Tot feia olor d'ous podrits i del col bullida. Hi havia moltes cases esfondrades i d'entre les ruïnes sortien cadires, taules, de vegades bressols i nines de drap (11).

Roig's depiction of the distortion of normal conditions of urban life underscores the revisionary intentions of the novel, and reveals how well she uses descriptions of urban space to focus the narrative on the novel's wider theme of deconstructing the "mirada bòrnia." Amongst the debris, the mother makes her way to her Aunt's home to ask for help in finding Joan and, when this is refused, she begins to feel a new sensation stirring within her: "Vaig sentir un gust estrany, molt nou, una mena de gust que em deixava l'estómac buit i l'enteniment net, quan totes dues em van dir que no m'acompanyarien a buscar en Joan" (16). As the mother gains inner strength from the prospect of acting alone, the narrative switches to more positive images of Barcelona, illustrating a profound shift in her consciousness and the beginnings of an alteration in her *mirada*: "Barcelona prenia per a mi un color insòlit, els meus ulls anaven descobrint un espectacle desconegut, de gent, de moviment, era com si fos una altra ciutat" (16). On a textual level, the rest of the mother's story is placed at the very end of the novel, after the stories of both the grandmother and granddaughter have ceased. During the novel's closing narrative sequences, Roig continues to rely on the city to transmit an impression of the metamorphosis that is occurring in the mother's *mirada*. The narrative returns to a description of the mother walking through the bomb damaged city. At this point in the novel, the horrific descriptions of mutilated bodies and devastated streets that marked the first part of the mother's story, give way to a more fluid poetic prose style, reflecting the state of the mother's new vision, which has been divested of the *pedaç* associated with the "mirada bòrnia":

La nit se n'anava i l'atmosfera era de gasa, hi havia una mena de claror estranya, una claror allargada i molt blanca, que feia tavelles. Les cases s'agrisaven a poc a poc. Sentia un oratge de roses i eren roses que s'enfilaven per una paret. [...] Els carrers es desvetllaven, ja havien oblidat els bombardeigs. I és que la nit ja no hi era i la claror cada vegada era més blanca i més neta. Hi havia cases en ruïnes amb els ferros retorçats i ofegades per la tristesa. Les seves parets estaven plenes de pols que s'esfilagarsaven com si fessin pluja de farina. Però d'altres cases miraven el cel, contentes d'estar vives (165)

By this stage, her *mirada* has undergone a complete transformation and she begins to experience a sense of mental clarity: "les ombres del

meu cervell ja havien desaparegut del tot, eren clarianes de llum" (166). The process through which the mother arrives at the threshold of enlightenment when she revises her perceptions of herself and the external world, functions as a paradigm for the entire narrative. Barcelona has once again been presented as a metaphorical interlocutor, which the female character interacts with as she alters her gendered *mirada*. At this point it must be emphasised that it is not possible to state that the city itself acts to alter the character's cognition and self-identity; rather, it is the idea of the relation between mind and city environment that Roig is keen to explore. Roig does not represent Barcelona as a place that possesses agency that is independent of the human subject. Biruté Cipliauskaitė's interpretation of the novel's ending, which suggests that Barcelona itself triumphs in the closing pages of *Ramona, adéu* does not therefore accurately convey Roig's treatment of the city; she states: "es la ciudad la que sale victoriosa en las últimas páginas y la que infunde valor para continuar con la vida" (Cipliauskaitė 50). What in fact appears to triumph at the end of the novel is Roig's adroit use of city space as a metaphorical tool to express her wider concerns on women's position in society and, as I will go on to demonstrate below, her own beliefs on literary creation as a liberatory practice.

Roig continues her exploration of the metaphorical potential of the city through the granddaughter's story. Despite the fact that she experiences a more liberal lifestyle—she attends university, stays out all night, moves around the city freely and has casual sexual relations—the granddaughter still experiences many of the restrictive controls of patriarchal society that existed during her grandmother's lifetime. Her father is a domineering presence in her life, and her lover reveals his poorly disguised male chauvinism. In the case of the granddaughter, Roig again uses the city as a metaphorical interlocutor in order to illustrate the process through which her *mirada* undergoes an alteration. As in the case of the grandmother, the youngest female protagonist is placed in a position from which she observes the panorama of the city lying beneath her. As she watches the illuminated skyline of nocturnal city, she is suddenly invaded by, "un silenci desfogat" (92). The sight of Barcelona lying beneath her fills her with a sense of empowerment and a desire to "conquerir l'inconegut, els milers i milers de misteris que omplien les cases" (Roig, *Ramona, adéu* 92). The vast urban space is captured all at once within the onlooker's sphere of vision, and as the granddaughter begins to appraise this new cognitive experience, she begins to read the external world, and human relations, from a new perspective: "Potser era allò el poder, aquella ambigua necessitat de conèixer les coses i els homes. Com si, a la seva mà, hi cabessin totes les cabòries, tots els secrets, i els pugués desfer a bocins, esmicolar-los, fer-

los desapareixer i tornar-los a construir de nou. Era absoluta en els seus judicis" (92). The interaction between the granddaughter's mind and her environment registers the beginning of a process of self-realisation, a process that culminates in the dissolution of her relationship with her lover Jordi and her leaving the parental home. Through her newly found independence from the family and her male partner, the granddaughter is the only woman from her family who will be able to maintain her newly discovered *mirada* and break the cyclical repetition of traditional female roles that has been perpetuated by her mother and grandmother. In so doing, the granddaughter finally lays the *pedaç* to rest and, as the title of the novel suggests, bids farewell to the restrictive gaze that has been handed down through patriarchal culture and has limited the life experiences of her mother and grandmother before her. In all of the examples illustrated above, Roig's metaphorical use of the city as an impetus to opening up the female gaze, albeit momentarily in the case of the mother and grandmother, underscores the novel's central narrative theme of removing impediments to women's exploration of their self-identity. Roig's treatment of the city as an aesthetic tool to her creative writing highlights her belief that it is not the writer's job to write "sobre una ciutat, sinó a partir d'ella" (Roig, *Digues que m'estimes* 166), and although he or she may wish to refer to real urban places, the literary city, as Weimar and Alter noted, must finally be understood from within the realm of the metaphoric, since through the metaphoric power of language, it is transformed into a creative space wrought by the writer's imagination. Roig's use of the city throughout *Ramona, adéu* acknowledges this view.

By way of conclusion to this analysis of Roig's use of the city in her first novel, a much deeper metaphorical interpretation of her descriptions of her female characters' encounters with urban space must be considered. Her representations of how each Ramona interacts with the city, and loosens the grip of patriarchal culture, are marked by subtle shifts in the semantic register as her prose style shifts towards the poetic. This occurs in each of the three examples cited above. For example, when the grandmother looks down on Barcelona, Roig's narrative style moves into an alliterative poetic mode: "Érem al capvespre i Barcelona semblava lívida de llums, amb els núvols estriats, de color de poma vermella" (Roig, *Mujeres en busca* 64). A similar switch occurs during the account of the mother's vision of the city following the bombing of the city: "Sentia un oratge de roses i eren roses que s'enfilaven per una paret", and, "Hi havia cases en ruïnes amb els ferros retorçats i ofegades per la tristesa. Les seves parets éstaven plenes de pòls que s'esfilagarsaven com si fessin pluja de farina" (165), Roig's representation of the granddaughter's transformative

experience also displays a marked instance of poetic virtuosity: "Ara, en el silenci entebeit de la nit barcelonina, desitjava sentir-se empassada, engolida, dins la seva somorta personalitat. No ser ningú entre un formiguer de ningú" (95). These are all good examples of what Flaubert described as "harmoniously-singing, well-turned sentences" which mark out poetic writing (Flaubert 47). Roig's turn towards poetic language in all of these examples extends the narrative ever further into the realm of the metaphoric and seems to suggest a celebration of language itself. Her poetical descriptions of the city illustrate her belief in the power of words in themselves as a potent liberatory force. For Roig, writing literature was not linked to any political goals, national or otherwise. She stated: "jo no tinc cap altre militància que la d'escriure bé" (Nadal 139). Writing was instead an intrinsic act of liberation: "Escriure...per alliberar les paraules de la presó. De totes les presons" (Roig, *Digues que m'estimes* 44). This aesthetic vision is unveiled during her narrative descriptions of her female characters' encounters with urban space and may indicate the extent to which Roig was herself striving to remove the *pedaç* from her own writing, in order to "mirar, tocar, olorar i escoltar com si fos nou" (13). Roig's representation of the city may therefore be interpreted as a metaphor for the power of aesthetic freedom, which, as Krieger noted, can provide "a healthily subversive antidote to the political abuse of discursive power" (Krieger 226). It is this understanding of literary aesthetics that may signal an additional methodology for the study of Catalan literature in the future.

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