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***Role-Playing and the (De) construction of Catalan Identities in
Montserrat Roig's L'òpera quotidiana***
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ROLE-PLAYING AND THE (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF CATALAN IDENTITIES IN MONTSERRAT ROIG'S *L'ÒPERA QUOTIDIANA*

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Critical responses to Montserrat Roig's work have tended to focus, above all, on her novels, short stories and non-fiction within the tradition of Spanish and Catalan women's writing. For example, the British hispanist Catherine Davies, although recognising that one of Roig's principal aims was to write in Catalan, states she "is more concerned with Montserrat Roig as a woman writer than as a Catalan speaker" (Davies: 8). Catherine Bellver also privileges a gynocentric approach, arguing that Roig's use of history, in particular Catalan history, functions only as a temporal skeleton providing the backdrop to the main narrative which focuses on the situation of women in Spain (Bellver: 161). Recently, however, studies have begun to examine the importance of Catalan culture and the Catalan literary tradition in her work (Stewart, Navajas, Dupláa, King). These studies have principally focused on her work as a means of contesting Spanish grand narratives, such as Castilian language and history as representative of all things Spanish. Without diminishing the importance of women-centred approaches to Roig's work, they demonstrate that her work can also be read as participating in the construction of Catalan identities (Stewart, Navajas) or as giving voice to Catalan culture and history as a means of resisting the silence imposed on Catalonia by the Franco regime (Dupláa, King). Roig herself has seen literature in this way:

Els qui vam néixer després de 1939 hem hagut d'anar desbrossant el nostre passat recent, un passat que ens ha deixat massa tares per a poder restituir del tot la nostra salut històrica [...] A banda l'atracció que sento pel món de la ficció, sempre m'he sentit atreta per la història del meu país. El silenci que han fet planar per damunt dels catalans, dels republicans, dels vençuts de la guerra, m'ha semblat, tot sovint, que era un silenci que volien fer planar per damunt dels meus i de mi mateixa. Veia que si no retornàvem la paraula als qui l'havien de tenir quan els pertocava, nosaltres no la tindríem mai en la seva totalitat (Roig, *Els catalans*: 11).

This defence of Catalan language and literature does not mean, however, that Roig is uncritical of, or glosses over, the contradictions and problems in contemporary Catalan culture. Just as her articulation

of Catalan culture and history challenges Spanish grand narratives, Roig also questions the internal coherence of Catalonia by focusing on the marginalised in Catalan society, such as women, immigrants and the poor.

In light of Roig's questioning of Spanish and Catalan hegemonic discourses, this article seeks to explore the process by which Roig simultaneously constructs and deconstructs Catalan identity in her penultimate novel *L'òpera quotidiana*. In order to do so, I read *L'òpera quotidiana* in light of Judith Butler's theory of role-playing and women's identity, as elaborated in her article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". Although Butler's theory centres on the importance of role-playing in the construction of gender roles, it can go beyond the issue of gender to explain the formation of other identities, such as cultural ones.

Butler, following the phenomenological theory of "acts" elaborated by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Mead, questions whether reality is ontological, that is, whether we are born with an unchanging essence which we carry with us throughout our lives. Instead of seeing identity as based in this ontological essence, Butler examines how identities are constructed via language, gestures and socially symbolical acts. Using as a starting-point Simone de Beauvoir's famous phrase – "one is not born, but rather, *becomes* a woman" – Butler argues that de Beauvoir perceptively captures the idea that there is no ontological identity which precedes various acts but rather that identity is "instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler: 270). As such, female identity can be seen to be constructed via the reproduction of certain socially representative marks of "woman". Identity, in this sense, only exists in the acts produced by each actor.

The value and importance of these acts lies in their ability to give "the appearance of substance" (Butler: 271). That is to say, they constitute a role (or a representation) which the public and the actors themselves accept and play as if it were "real". Without the public and the actor's belief in the truthfulness of the part, the role would be considered false, fictitious and hence easily relegated to the world of imagination and play (Butler: 278).

Despite identity being a series of acts this does not mean that one can play any role or that the public would accept any role as real. According to Butler, social roles are limited by history. That is to say, women's identity has been restricted traditionally to those roles which coincide with the historical idea of woman: being a woman means adopting certain characteristics which are considered to be "expressive of a gender core of [female] identity", such as reproduction, nurturing, etc. (Butler: 278).

Butler's analysis is also a helpful tool for examining the formation of cultural identity. In the Catalan case, for example, the literary historian Joan-Lluís Marfany persuasively demonstrates how turn-of-the-century catalanists articulated their cultural identity via certain acts which signified "catalanness". Marfany argues that although these Catalanists believed a Catalan essence existed, they also felt the need to invent certain traditions symbolical of Catalonia and everything identified with it. These acts included the institutionalisation of the *Diada de Catalunya* –*l'Onze de Setembre*– in 1895, the Catalan flag, the national anthem –*Els Segadors*–, Catalan stamps (which had no purpose other than giving the illusion of a "normal" and sovereign country), *l'excursionisme*, choirs, the *sardana* and, of course, the Catalan language (Marfany: 293-352). These manifestations, from celebrating the *Diada* every eleventh of September to speaking Catalan, offer a spectacle of Catalan identity which links the performers –the Catalans– to their supposedly immutable essence. They, in effect, serve to dramatize the Catalan national patrimony.

Cultural and personal identity as role-play is at the heart of *L'òpera quotidiana*. Apart from in the title's obvious operatic and theatrical allusion, this can be seen in the novel's structure which reflect that of an opera. It begins with "*L'obertura de la senyora Patrícia Miralpeix*", followed by the "*Primera part (duets, cavatines i recitatius)*". There is a brief "*Intermezzo*", followed by the second part made up of "*duets, àries, cavatines i recitatius*" and the novel ends with a one page "*cor*". Also contributing to the operatic nature of the work, one of the characters, Mari Cruz, employs theatrical references to make sense of *la senyora* Altafulla's stories. She mentions on two occasions that acts have ended: "Aviat el teló baixaria: s'hauria acabat el primer acte" and later she describes the tempest scene which *la senyora* Altafulla recounts as "l'escena culminant del segon acte" (Roig, *L'òpera*: 58, 89).

Furthermore, as the epigraph which opens the novel suggests, the text is fragmentary, presenting a multiplicity of voices each of which is necessary in order to understand the work as a whole:

A òperes com Nabucco, Aida, Rigoletto, La Traviata, Otello, Simon Bocanegra, Il Trovatore i Falstaff trobem sempre la dosi exacta i un perfecte equilibri entre els diversos factors relacionats, que si individualment ens poden semblar convencionals i fins i tot trivials, considerats dins del seu context escènic i articulats als restants components de cada obra adquireixen sentit i relleu (Roig, *L'òpera*: 5).

The novel tells the stories of four principal characters –*Patrícia Miralpeix*, *Horaci Duc*, *Mari Cruz* and *la senyora Altafulla*– from

alternating points of view. These stories, without privileging any one story and, in fact, often contradicting each other, provide a wider perspective than that which any individual story could offer on its own.

L'obertura, Patrícia Miralpeix's brief story, opens the narrative. In this monologue, Patrícia Miralpeix tells of her solitude and how this loneliness has led her to rent a room in her house in order to alleviate her economic problems and to provide her with some company in her twilight years. As she states, "no vull morir sola" (Roig *L'òpera*: 11). Her advertisement in *La Vanguardia* is answered by Horaci Duc, one of the principal characters. Patrícia Miralpeix's first person narrative then gives way to the first part of the novel, made up of "duets", compositions for two voices represented by the conversations which Horaci Duc and Patrícia Miralpeix hold whilst they breakfast each morning: "cavatines", short songs for a solo voice depicted by Mari Cruz's first person monologues, and "recitatus", sung narratives which in the text are expressed in the third-person narrative involving Mari Cruz and *la senyora* Altafulla. The second part of *L'òpera quotidiana* includes, apart from these musical examples, arias which tell/sing Mari Cruz's and *la senyora* Altafulla's stories in greater depth. The work concludes with a brief "chorus", which, in the third-person voice, provides a summary of the fate of all four principal characters.

Within this operatic structure, *L'òpera quotidiana* questions Catalan sacred myths and the influence that these myths have had on the people who live in Catalonia, and this questioning, in turn, examines the constructed nature of cultural identity. The narrative which Duc recounts to Patrícia Miralpeix each morning over breakfast focuses on the story –told exclusively from his perspective– of his life with Maria, his girlfriend and later, his wife. Duc, a lower-middle-class Catalan who has recently retired from his job as a butcher, tells how the tumultuous Civil War and postwar in Catalonia forced him to adopt a role –that of a "Catalan"– in order to resist Francoist repression. This role is effectively scripted by Pagès, a friend of Duc's, who interprets the significance of the triumphal entry of the nationalist soldiers into Barcelona for the future of Catalan culture. He states: "ens han vençut, Horaci, però nosaltres hem de continuar, ara ens tocarà callar, però per dintre hem de cridar ben fort perquè no ens robin les paraules" (Roig, *L'òpera*: 60) and thereby recognising that the public face of Catalan identity would cease to exist. Like the title of Luis Martín-Santos's 1962 novel, Duc, Pagès and the Catalan community at large are facing a time of silence. The Francoist victory heralded a new way of living in the Spanish State, a way of living which would replace their previous cultural identity with one which conformed to Franco's rhetoric of "*España, una, grande y libre*". This

new way of life under the Francoist regime meant the need to abrogate one's own identity and to conform to a role assigned by the regime, a role whose principal characteristics were enshrined in Catholicism and the Castilian language, history and culture.

Duc, heavily influenced by Pagès, rebels against these homogenizing aims and, in doing so, reclaims Catalan culture via an alternative role to that offered by the regime – a Catalan one. Just as occurred during the *Renaixença*, the nineteenth century revival of Catalan culture and literature, this vindication of Catalan culture is articulated via, and based in, language. To this end, Duc sees a way of resisting the totalizing aims of the Franco regime in the figure of Maria, an illiterate immigrant from Córdoba:

vaig convertir la Maria en una autèntica catalana. Jo, tot sol, ho havia fet. Havia retingut les paraules per a ella, només per a ella. Pensava que aquesta era la meua manera de contribuir que la nostra terra no desaparegués, encara que aleshores fos al soterrani... (Roig, *L'òpera*: 61-62).

For Duc (and others) Catalan identity will continue whilst the Catalan language still exists. Giving voice to it is a means of opposing the “terror silenciós” (Roig *idem*: 139) which the regime had imposed on Catalonia since its victory in 1939. Yet, Duc can only achieve this conversion by negating Maria's personal history and identity; for him, she is simply a blank slate on which he can inscribe a new history and identity. He describes her as “una joia en brut, i jo em sentia com l'escultor que pot modelar una obra d'art amb un tros de terra primitiva” (Roig *idem*: 31). Her past erased, Duc teaches her to be Catalan, which he achieves by teaching her to speak Catalan and to decipher the symbols of Catalan culture. In the process, he transforms her from “una noieta gairebé salvatge, [que] no sabia res, [que] a penes si llegia les quatre lletres de l'abecedari” into an “autèntica catalana” (Roig *idem*: 28, 62).

The most important part of Maria's transformation from *xarnega* to Catalan is played by the Catalan language. Duc is obsessed by the purity of Catalan language because he sees it as the principal source of cultural identity. He says on one occasion to Patrícia Miralpeix that “la llengua, la nostra llengua, és sagrada” (Roig *idem*: 29-30) and thus, in order for Maria to become an “authentic” Catalan she must speak the language correctly. To this end, Duc takes on the responsibility of correcting her, and through his corrections he assures linguistic, and hence, cultural purity:

Maria, no diguis *barrecha*, que pronunciem barreja, no diguis *enchegar*, sinó engegar, no obris tant la boca en pronunciar casa, fes les eles des de la gola i no des de les dents... Em mirava i, amb els ulls enriolats, repetia les paraules i els

sons amb mi. Mai no he vist una persona, una dona, amb tanta disposició (Roig, *idem*: 30).

The presence of mispronounced Catalan words in Maria's speech, such as those mentioned in the above quote, threatens the wholeness of the Catalan identity which Duc has invented as his means of opposing the Francoist regime. Her mistakes must be corrected because they represent her previous condition as Other –an Andalusian– which Duc attempts to deny constantly.

Apart from teaching Maria to speak Catalan correctly, Duc also teaches her certain Catalan myths and history which he considers to be representative of Catalanness. For example, he states that:

Amb els dies, li vaig anar explicant què era Catalunya, a poc a poc ho vaig fer. Perquè volia que hi entrés amb amor, no per la força, com havien fet amb nosaltres. Li vaig parlar dels herois de l'Onze de Setembre, que arribaria un dia en què tornariem a anar en peregrinació a l'estàtua d'en Casanova, i que la cobriríem de flors. També, li vaig dir que les dones havien estat molt valentes, a la nostra terra. I que, si volia fer-se catalana, hauria de ser com elles, que van resistir el setge, malgrat que es morien de fam... (Roig, *idem*: 39).

And later he increases the number of what Butler calls "socially symbolic acts" in order to give greater depth to her Catalan role:

li havia ensenyat a desxifrar les imatges del monestir de Ripoll, li havia parlat de les fetes dels nostres mariners, li havia recitat poemes de Joan Maragall, l'havia duta a Montserrat i li havia fet sentir tot allò que se sent quan canta l'escolania... (Roig, *idem*: 75).

These marks of cultural identity –Ripoll, Maragall, Montserrat, *L'Onze de Setembre*– form a narrative of Catalanness whose transmission assures the continuity of Catalan culture. To learn, to understand and to employ these myths is, according to Duc, absolutely necessary in order that Maria's transformation into a Catalan be complete. Following Butler's analysis of identity formation, these myths are important because they offer an identity which can be represented, followed and acted. They, in fact, form a script which the actor must employ if they are to conform to the role. In this sense, Maria, by using these myths and speaking Catalan –by performing the appropriate role– manages to assume a Catalan identity, to become Catalan. In Maria's transformation from *xarnega* to Catalan, Roig convincingly shows that there is no "essence" of catalanness with which one is born.

In order to correspond to the image of catalanness which he has, in part, constructed for himself, Duc manages to convince Maria that he too is a hero like Pagès, Casanova, Villarroel and other historical defenders of Catalonia. That is to say, that he too plays the appropriate role. However, later in the novel, when Maria sees Duc's patriotic idealism for what it really is – a fantasy – she loses respect for him and she rebels against what he has taught her through the subversion of his "sacred" language. On more than one occasion, Maria reverts to what Duc calls her "*català apitxat*": "estic farta d'estar-me tot el dia a casa, estic farta de ser una papallona de nit, d'esperar-te, m'avorreixo, m'avorreixo, m'avorreixo, ho va dir tres vegades, i totes tres vegades va convertir la x en una ch..." (Roig, *idem*: 66). Furthermore, when she refuses to allow him to correct her, Duc begins to lose his authority over her: Duc tells Patrícia Miralpeix that "vaig deixar de corregir-li el català perquè, si ho feia, ella em mirava d'aquella manera que em glaçava per dins" (Roig, *idem*: 74).

When Maria catches Duc burning clandestine pamphlets explaining the history and significance of *L'Onze de Setembre*, she realises he is not only not one of the Catalan heroes he praised so often but is, in reality, a coward. With this realization, she frees herself from Duc's hold on her. In losing his authority over his "autèntica catalana", Maria's previous identity, which Duc had tried so hard to keep buried, resurfaces. After the final separation between them caused by the arrest and subsequent death of Pagès at the hands of the Francoist authorities, Duc tends to describe Maria almost exclusively in terms of this previous Andalusian identity. He states that Maria's use of swear words is attributable to "la xarnega que duia a dins" (Roig, *idem*: 84) and on the last day they spend together Duc emphasizes to Patrícia Miralpeix that Maria prepares "truites de patates [...] com les fan a Andalusia" (Roig 1991: 138). Now that he is unable to exercise control over her, Duc emphasizes her difference, comparing her with the "noieta gairebé salvatge" which he had first met. Thus, Duc denies Maria's acquired Catalanness and treats her as if she were a palimpsest, rewriting her Andalusian identity over the Catalan one he had previously scripted for her. However, this attempt to deny Maria's Catalanness fails because Duc's (ex-)friends, representative of the Catalan community at large, accept her as Catalan and, instead, turn their backs on Duc, believing that he had denounced Pagès to the authorities because he suspected Maria and Pagès were lovers.

Despite his experience with Maria, Duc repeats the same mistakes in his brief relationship with Mari Cruz, whom at times he confuses with his ex-wife (Roig, *idem*: 72, 87, 97–98, 105, 148, 170). For Duc, the similarities between the two abound: "em recordo de la Maria [...] Té la mateixa ànsia de viure, i és quasi analfabeta com ella. També és argila

pura, m'entren ganes de modelar-la. [...] I, també, perquè no em pregunta mai res. S'està al meu costat i prou" (Roig, *idem*: 92). Once again, Duc is confronted with a submissive and quiet woman whom he can teach to speak Catalan and hence, convert into a Catalan. In an almost word for word copy of his description of Maria, Duc, speaking of Mari Cruz, states that "amb mi es convertirà en una catalana de debò. No m'agrada el seu català apitxat" (Roig, *idem*: 167). Once again, Catalaness is primarily obtained through language. Just as happened with Maria, Mari Cruz's "català apitxat" must be corrected because it threatens Catalan wholeness. However, Duc also loses Mari Cruz as he once lost Maria because they are unable to communicate and because Mari Cruz's submissiveness dissipates as she comes into her own identity (Roig 1991: 130). Duc's attempts to model Mari Cruz into a Catalan like he had done with Maria fall on deaf ears as he explains to Patrícia Miralpeix: "[a Mari Cruz] no li interessa la nostra Història, no vol tenir memòria. Jo dic una paraula i ella no m'entén" (Roig, *idem*: 106).

Despite propagating the myths and symbols of Catalaness to Maria and Mari Cruz, Duc confesses the destructive effect which these myths can have on individuals. In an emotional scene which at times seems pathetic and bombastic given his use of the preterite tense instead of the periphrastic form common to Catalan speech, Duc explains that:

La culpa, la tenen ells. Ells que m'obligaren a representar un paper des que he nascut, que em forçaren a tenir valor, a creure en unes idees que em venien fetes... Ells, que entraren a la ciutat plena de ruïnes un dia tèrbol de gener, que feren plorar en Pagès com una criatura, ells, que condemnaren a sobreviure, a transmetre el que diuen que feren els meus avantpassats, ells, que van fer befa de la llengua que parlava, que l'enaltiren tot esclavitzant-la, que ens compel·liren a fer d'herois i de màrtirs sense ser-ne, [...] que em portaren a convertir la Maria en una altra dona, a no saber-la estimar com ella era, a transformar-la, a fer-la tornar a néixer per mostrar, només, que aquesta terra no morirà mai, terra feta de dolor, de claudicació, ells, que amb la vesània i la brutícia em feren creure que jo seria millor del que era, que esmicolaren els meus somnis d'adolescent, que convertiren en merda la meua fe, íntima, privada, la meua fe en la vida, i que no em deixaren respirar tal com jo volia ser, una ànima i un cos, una proposta d'home, un projecte... Ells i la Història, que em van estrènyer, enmig de la nit, a buscar una llum falsa... Ells, que no m'han deixat ser home sinó una deixalla, deixalla seré, pols i cendra, pols i cendra, Mari Cruz... Mari Cruz (Roig, *idem*: 172-173).

In this scene, Duc angrily lashes out at any person or thing which he sees as having forced him to act in a specific way instead of just allowing him to be. In doing so, he simply refuses to take

responsibility for his actions, blaming different groups –Catalan heroes and Francoists alike– and even history itself because instead of being allowed to live like a normal person, he has felt trapped by, and tied to, a role and a tradition which he has not created and which he has now begun to doubt. He has felt forced by History –especially the events of 1939 and the *Onze de Setembre*– to be a patriot, to play the role of “Catalan”, a role based on the actions of others like Pagès and Casanova, who rebelled against what they interpreted as Castilian imperialism. “*Ells*” –Catalans and Francoists– as well as the weight of History have not allowed him to live in the way which he would have liked to live.

In order to justify his actions and the fact that he no longer conforms to the Catalan role, Duc attempts to change the script, rewriting the history of Catalonia and in doing so attacking the myth of the *Onze de Setembre*. For example, at the beginning of the novel, a curious Patrícia Miralpeix enters her new boarder’s room and finds among Duc’s papers writings which attempt to demythify the role played by the great figures of Catalan history. In Duc’s revised version, Villarroel “volia capitular” and Casanova “havia estat covard” (Roig, *idem*: 17-18). Horrified, Patrícia Miralpeix stops reading as she remembers the poem her late husband, Esteve, had written in memory of Casanova and how, since the re-establishment of democracy following Franco’s death, the monument to Casanova is covered in flowers. She simply cannot believe that “potser en Casanova era un covard i que la Història sempre menteix...” (Roig, *idem*: 18). These scenes clearly demonstrate the destructive effects which rigidly defined identities and history can have on individuals. Duc is left to ponder frustratedly the life he could have led but did not.

Other characters in the novel also act out different roles in order to cope with the events of the Civil War and its aftermath. *La senyora Altafulla*, for example, plays a different role to Duc’s. Like him, though, her assumption of a new role is due to a profound crisis in identity provoked by Franco’s victory. Since it was impossible to act out her identity as she had before the war had broken out, “l’única possibilitat de sobreviure [la guerra i postguerra] era oblidar els teus somnis anteriors, fingir, fer teatre, convertir la teva vida en una obra on l’autora series tu” and that also “calia representar dalt del teu escenari una comèdia callada, sotmesa, on podies interpretar tots els papers dramàtics menys un, el de l’ésser que pensa i que participa dins de la vida col·lectiva” she says to Mari Cruz (Roig, *idem*: 139). In order to survive the postwar period, *la senyora Altafulla* takes refuge inside her apartment, cutting herself off from society (except for her maid, Mari Cruz, and the occasional visit by her cousin, *la senyora Antonieta Tresserras*) and within the safety of this apartment she constructs her

own world plagiarised from romantic stories like Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Verdi's *La Traviata*. In these stories she lives/dreams her great romance with *coronel* Saura, a handsome and dashing Republican officer, with whom she decided to part "a fi de que la nostra relació no esdevingués rutina..." (Roig, *idem*: 135). Yet, Mari Cruz discovers that the handsome officer who retired to Menorca after the war was, in fact, a short, unattractive man, unbecoming as an officer and instead of being *la senyora* Altafulla's great love, Mari Cruz reads that she would make fun of him (Roig 1991: 163-164). As the novel progresses, *La senyora* Altafulla becomes increasingly unable to recognise the difference between reality and her own fictions and she retires to a world in which "l'òpera et fa possible el somni" (Roig, *idem*: 160). Just as happens to Duc, constant role-playing to keep reality at a distance ultimately leads her to suffer from delusions.

For Duc and *la senyora* Altafulla, role-playing is a way of escaping from the reality of the past. For Mari Cruz, however, it is not necessary to invent a world for herself because, as she states, she is "l'única que veia el món com era" (Roig, *idem*: 106). She differs from these characters in that she has no past. She states that "no he tingut pare. No sé la cara que tenia, no en conservo cap retrat, cap carta, no sé com es deia" and her mother "és d'un poble que s'ha perdut dins de la geografia d'Espanya", where "ja no hi queda ningú" (Roig, *idem*: 32). Displaced and without a history, it is no surprise that her mother "em va ensenyar a no tenir records" (Roig, *idem*: 32). Instead, Mari Cruz listens disinterestedly to the stories old people tell her (Roig 1991: 23). This changes, however, when she discovers her identity through her body after having had sex: "Ara que tenia un cos era com si hagués nascut de debò, s'hi reconeixia, era ella i tenia un nom. I sabia retenir les paraules per convertir-les en objectes" (Roig, *idem*: 130). With words comes memory and, like Duc and *la senyora* Altafulla, she learns that "els records que no s'inventen fan molt de mal" (Roig, *idem*: 137). As her romantic dreams with Duc dissipate, she begins to take on *la senyora* Altafulla's stories, making them her own by confusing Duc with Colonel Saura (Roig 1991: 170, 175-176). In doing so, she too invents roles based on past stories and projects them onto others, becoming, like Duc and *la senyora* Altafulla, ultimately trapped in fictions which are not entirely of her making.

The destructive nature of the roles these characters perform has led Catherine Davies to suggest that "it would be erroneous to say this is light opera or Spanish 'zarzuela'" (Davies: 65). Rather, the opera we are confronted with seems more like a tragedy in which the four principal characters are either trapped into playing roles which they feel they have been forced to take on, such as Duc, *la senyora* Altafulla and Mari Cruz, or they feel defeated and alone, such as Patrícia Miralpeix. Yet,

despite the far from happy end to the novel, the view is not entirely bleak. For Roig, the function of literature is "la de liberar las voces del mundo, las voces antiguas frente a la VOZ, la que brota en el altar de nuestros hogares, la que coacciona nuestra imaginación, privándonos de la libertad de soñar por cuenta propia" (Roig 1989: 80). And we can read *L'òpera quotidiana* with this aim in mind. For, as Patricia Waugh states, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, "if, as individuals, we now occupy "roles" rather than "selves", then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity outside novels" (Waugh 1995: 3). By deconstructing the myths which shape the roles which, in turn, make up Catalan identity, Roig shows that theatricality is a fundamental part of reality and her readers are left to question their relation to the myths and the roles which they play in the everyday theatre of life. Although the lives of Duc, Patrícia Miralpeix, Mari Cruz and *la senyora* Altafulla end in tragedy, in exposing these myths for what they are –social constructions–, Roig seeks to liberate her readers from unquestioningly accepting rigid definitions of cultural identity.

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