

BIEL MESQUIDA'S *L'ADOLESCENT DE SAL*:

A QUEER STYLISTIC APPROACH

‘Peca, quizá, de un marcado experimentalismo
(de ese que estaba tan en boga por los años sesenta),
pero si uno despeja sus malabarismos en los saltos temporales,
la inútil complejidad de la sintaxis, la casi total ausencia de puntuación
y la excesiva obsesión por las alusiones literarias, el libro se salva’
(Abad–Faciolince, 2000, p. 21)

1. Introduction¹

Heteronormativity as a default interpretation for sexuality and desire based on binarisms and compulsory heterosexuality has been challenged by queer theory in the last decades. Most queer literary studies discuss the content of fiction from a critical standpoint but for the most part neglect specific linguistic analysis (cf. Jódar–Sánchez, 2019 for an overview). The aim of this article is twofold. The first aim is to describe in broad brushstrokes the approach of queer stylistics. My instrumentalization of the notion of queer as multiple and fluid responds to the need to expand queer praxis to domains relatively unexplored. Among these, we find linguistics (in new fields like queer linguistics) and, in this study, stylistics. My preliminary proposal for an approach termed ‘queer stylistics’ emerges from this preoccupation. The second aim is to apply this approach to an experimental novel, Mesquida’s *L’adolescent de sal*, to gauge its alleged radical subversiveness. In line with Pons (2013), I argue that formal subversiveness, a cornerstone of Catalan textualism, lies in a continuum with works of fiction ranging from more to less radical. Crucially, queer stylistics is understood throughout the article as subversive in its challenge to normative patterns of genre, form, texture, narrative voice, and intersectionality. The queer analysis of *L’adolescent de sal* based on some of these patterns sheds light on the (non–)conforming nature of the novel.

The article is structured as follows. In Section 2, I introduce the writing of Biel Mesquida, with attention to *L’adolescent de sal*, and textualism, one of the literary trends prevalent at the time of its publication. In Section 3, I provide details on the data and framework of the study. Most importantly, I lay out the basis for a queer stylistic approach. In Section 4, I present my analysis, fixated on genre, language subversion, and texture and affect. Although the analysis is contingent, it establishes the basis for future queer stylistic analyses. To end, in Section 5 I conclude summarizing the main proposals of the article and opening the floor for future research.

2. The writing of Biel Mesquida and literary textualism

Biel Mesquida is a contemporary author from the Balearic islands. His production, entirely written in Catalan, stretches for over four decades. He is best known for his novels and collection of short stories, though he has also written poetry.² Mesquida is a notorious figure in the social and cultural Catalan sphere. He has been involved in journalism (e.g. the publication of his articles and opinion columns in outlets like the newspapers *Diari de Mallorca* and *Ara* as well as the news website *Vilaweb*) and cultural criticism (e.g. his publications in the magazines *Ajoblanco*, *Serra d’Or*, and *Lluc*). He has been associated with various groups of intellectuals, including *Trencavel* and *Ignasi Ubach* (Picornell–Belenguer, 2007b). His works defy classification on several grounds. Mesquida’s queer manifesto is embodied in the following quote from the author: ‘[s]empre he tengut clar que l’única regla del llenguatge és que no hi ha regles’.³ Mesquida escapes generational attribution. He is generally considered, though, a politically committed member of the generation of the authors of the Spanish

¹ I am grateful to the comments on this manuscript provided by Mercè Picornell–Belenguer. All errors in documentation and argumentation remain my own.

² Notorious among his production are the novels *L’adolescent de sal*, *Vertígens*, and *Llefre de tu*, the collections of short stories *Self-service* published with Quim Monzó, *Els detalls del món*, and *Trèmolo*, and the poetry collection *El bell país on els homes desitgen els homes*.

³ https://www.ara.cat/cultura/Biel-Mesquida-Lunica-llenguatge-regles_0_934706699.html.

democratic transition. Broch (1980) considers him an iconoclast, transgressive author, as discussed below. In his narrative, he fights social injustices through individual stories. In the words of Picornell–Belenguier, the author ‘ens desplaça en centèsimes de segon des de la vivència íntima cap al compromís col·lectiu’ (2012, p. 235).⁴ *L’adolescent de sal* (1975), awarded the Prudenci Bertrana prize in 1973 and originally censored, was his first ever published work.⁵ It tells the story of the narrator, a boy from a town in Mallorca who is raised in a family of strict moral and religious beliefs. As a teenager (possibly the ‘youth made of salt’), he migrates to Barcelona to attend college. The authoritarianism of his family circle clashes with the freedom of his relation(ship)s of his new life. A reproaching tone is constantly present through his parents’ letters and diaries. *Novel·les de la fugida* ‘desertion novels’ like *L’adolescent de sal* revolve around two themes, namely the protagonist’s ties to the community and family as a cause of the desertion and the disillusion (s)he feels with an idealized haven (Broch, 1980; Sullà, 1975). The novel is considered a formally heterodox instance of avantguard literature, more specifically, of textualism. This characterization relies on the rupture that the text means for temporal linearity, typographic coherence, and thematic unity.

Since its publication, *L’adolescent de sal* has received plethoric positive criticism. Literary experts have qualified it as avant–garde and experimental (Terés, 1998), non–organic (Terés, 1998), revolutionary (Picornell–Belenguier and Pons, 2008; Pont, 1976), and as an *antinovel·la* (Carreras, 2005). To a large extent, its praise comes from the novel’s dissasociation with previous literary and aesthetic models in the Catalan cultural scene. At the time, some critics underscored its revolutionary and provocative character, ‘un texto revolucionario, un libro para la acción’ (Pont, 1976, p. 5),⁶ ‘una obra *collage* com aquesta, tan experimental, irregular i heterogènia i amb una càrrega subversiva important’ (Terés, 1998, p. 58).⁷ Other critics were more circumspect in their appraisals. Munné talks about changing but not subverting paradigms: ‘[C]reiem arribat el moment de confegir un discurs crític que modifiqui (per no dir, encara, que subverteixi) els bastiments monolítics damunt els quals la tradició cultural catalana ha muntat el seu aparell teòric’ (1975, p. 47).⁸ All agree, though, in the formal radicalism of *L’adolescent de sal*, which Terés qualifies as ‘vistosa i cridanera’ (1998, p. 53).⁹ For Picornell–Belenguier, it is ‘l’exuberància lingüística i una creativitat fruit d’una voluntat de dur a l’extrem les capacitats de suggeriment del llenguatge, que és marca de l’estil d’aquest autor des dels seus inicis literaris amb *L’adolescent de sal*’ (2012, p. 230).¹⁰

However, all that glitters is not gold for *L’adolescent de sal*. Munné notes that the alleged transformation of preceding literary paradigms and narrative is deficient and incomplete. This novelist furthermore maintains that the sense of accumulation of scenes lauded by others in the Mesquidean text shapes as a technique ‘en absolut transformadora de la pràctica’ (1975, p. 47).¹¹ Even in its themes, the novel sometimes tilts toward conservatism. Although women are overwhelmingly depicted as passive objects of desire and exploitation, we would expect to find a more alienated woman in Cheska, the protagonist’s partner. Contrary to expectations, Crameri (2000) shows that Cheska also enters into the ‘colonizer–colonized’ dynamics, as she is presented as a sycophant toward the

⁴ He takes us from an intimate experience to a broader social commitment in miliseconds.

⁵ Bets as to the meaning of the novel’s title, referring to a youth made of salt, abound. It may seem mysterious at first and open to interpretations toward the end. Crameri (2000) and Terés (1998) hint at the sharp nature of salt as a condition for lyricism. Crameri expands on this by acknowledging the bitterness of youth in this substance and the formal similarity between the noun *sal* ‘salt’ and *salat*, the name of the Catalan dialect spoken in the Balearic islands. The title is doubtlessly an intertextual reference to Blai Bonet’s poem *Mar adolescent*. I would add that the adolescent is made of salt because he lives in coastal areas, both Mallorca and Barcelona, surrounded by the (salty) Mediterranean sea. Salt is an element that can adhere to a surface (be it food, someone’s skin, or a rock) but it can be easily removed. Symbolically, this conjures the insurgence of the narrator as he closes a chapter, his life in his native town, and opens a new one, his life in Barcelona.

⁶ An enactive, revolutionary text.

⁷ A work of *collage*, so experimental, irregular, and heterogeneous, and with such a vital subversive tone.

⁸ We believe the moment has arrived when we formulate a critical discourse to modify (not to yet say subvert) the monolithic foundations which are the base of Catalan traditional lore and culture.

⁹ Garish and flamboyant.

¹⁰ Linguistic prodigality and creativity, product of the will to take language suggestive capacities to an extreme, what is a hallmark of this author from the inception of his career with *L’adolescent de sal*.

¹¹ Having no practical impact at all.

protagonist's work and opinions. Seguí i Trobat (2007), in his discussion of the topic of religion in *L'adolescent de sal*, unveils the criticism against the Catholic establishment while pointing out that Mesquida may approve of other religious issues that go unnoticed. These execrable aspects of the Church are thus subtly interwoven in the story. In hindsight, Picornell–Belenguier and Pons (2008) say that textualism and works like Mesquida's novel are only a transitional stage in the deconstruction of the text as a coherent element. Pons (2013) adds, furthermore, that literary subversion should be relativized as all texts are subversive to varying degrees and in different aspects and no text escapes conventionalization. Further steps in the radicalization of literary conventions are materialized, *inter alia*, in hypertextualism and visual literature.

L'adolescent de sal can be said to be at an interstitial location between postmodern literature and queer literature. Postmodernism pioneered a response to previous social, cultural, artistic, and philosophical movements based on fixed ontologies and identity categories. Skepticism and deconstruction are two of the main tools postmodernists make use of to denaturalize paradigms and unveil the constructedness of universal concepts. Queer literature is similarly a response to procrustean analyses on the themes of sexuality, gender, desire, and affect, with a focus on deconstructing heteronormativity. Modernism can be considered sexist insofar as it situates the male figure as the producer in a capitalist economy, the observer in an audiovisual society, and the dominant in the sexual sphere (Fischer, 2015). The normative masculinity of the modern period, an example of which is the ideal of virility during Franco's ruling, is questioned in the postmodern and queer paradigms through techniques of deconstruction and denaturalization. In a postmodern move, the narrator in *L'adolescent de sal* uses colonization as one of the vertebrating axis to unveil Spain's domination of Catalonia, men's domination of women, the tourists' domination of the Balearic land, and the domination of purism and prescriptivism over language (Cramer, 2000).

Textualism was one of the existing attitudes toward doing literature in the Catalan-speaking sphere in the 1970s. Although we can list textualist writers like Biel Mesquida, Quim Monzó, Ester Xargai, Vicenç Altaió, Víctor Sunyol, and Carles Hac Mor, it was not a prevailing trend. Textualism is associated with the groups of intellectuals named "Ignasi Ubach", to which some of these authors subscribe. (Picornell–Belenguier, 2007b). It was a reaction to socially committed literature of nationalist and nostalgic tinges. . In his "Perversetpolimorfblöq" (1976), Mesquida critically evaluates the attitudes of Catalan nationalist leftist movements and their similarities with conservative movements. The catalyst for this is the lack of transgression in both the corporeal and linguistic mediums of contemporary authors of the 1960s and 70s. Broch (1994) defines textualism as the subversion of form, one of the features I list as part of a queer stylistic approach. Specifically, textualists saw form as having content, and since content is ideological, their purpose was to disrupt form in order to destroy formal ideology and meaning. Pons (2013) embraces this conception of form as self-standing in her description of some literary texts as intelligible, not in the traditional, thematic sense, but in the formal or socio-political sense. This is one of the reasons why the approach in this article focuses primarily on form, not content. One of the well-known Brochian dichotomies is that between transformative and transgressive authors. In Broch's own words:

'Una, la de la transformació del sistema, la reforma, el canvi, la intensificació dels recursos literaris, la transgressió parcial de certs valors, —literaris i socials— que no hipotequin, però, l'estabilitat total del sistema. L'altra, la destrucció, la ruptura, la transgressió de tots els valors del sistema [...] el camí sobre el buit per a construir un nou sistema i una nova significació'

(1980, p. 93)

'One, that of the transformation of the system, reform, change, the intensification of literary resources, the partial transgression of certain values, —literary and social ones— that do not however endanger the overall stability of the system. The other one, destruction, rupture, the transgression of all values in the system [...] the path in an abyss from which to build a new structure and a signification'.

Broch classifies Biel Mesquida as a transgressive author based on its textualist literature, including *L'adolescent de sal*, *Putà marès (ahi)*, and *Self-service*, written together with Quim Monzó. Whereas these earlier works of both Mesquida and Monzó have been venerated as icons of transgression, researchers have noted that their production can be seen as a cline with more or less transgressive works. Pons (2013) attempts to resolve the tug-of-war confrontation between traditional and transgressive literature on the basis of the concept of (il)legibility. The focus is on how legible or decipherable experimental texts are. In other words, the question is how much effort readers should put into decoding the text and achieving some meaning. This move entails an abandonment of the Brochian dichotomy for an array of unfettered, fine grained possibilities in the scale of subversiveness. Pons argues that subversive texts incorporate the literary *status quo* differently from more traditional texts. The former do so more consciously in an effort, not to achieve the impossibility of setting themselves beyond epistemological and ontological frameworks, but to distance and alienate themselves from them. This stance precludes, in practical terms, the possibility of turning the tables of the literary establishment completely. Lunati (2008) discusses the writing of Quim Monzó and the early experimentalism of some of his works, including *Self-service*, as a continuous imbibition in his work. Her article is focused on metaliterary techniques, especially the Baudelairean figure of the *flâneur* as a narrator. Lunati therefore stresses the continuity of the subversiveness of

Monzonian production. Through her approach, she queers the understanding of literature as categorical between experimental and traditional, subversive and conservative, endorsing the futility to draw boundaries between conservative and subversive literature. With the above ideas in mind, let us now turn to the analysis of Mesquida's *L'adolescent de sal*.

3. Data and methodology

The data used is the text of the novel *L'adolescent de sal* (2013) by Biel Mesquida in its 1st edition in Editorial Empúries, although it was originally published in 1975. For the analysis, I make use of an exegetic and stylistic approach. In other words, I do an interpretation of the text based primarily on linguistic features, with an occasional discussion of thematic and socio-historical issues. The analysis departs from the framework of stylistics (Leech and Short, 1981; Sotirova, 2016; Stockwell, 2009), more specifically the proposed subfield of queer stylistics (see below). Extensive quantification and statistics are unheeded here, except for small calculations (see Table 1), because they would not contribute to the analysis of the novel or the formulation of queer stylistics in any clear way. The words of Stockwell are germane with regards to stylistics when he discusses the 'tendency to fetishise statistics as imparting a patina of scientism where this is unnecessary' (2009, p. 13).

Since works like Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the closet* (1990), the issue of sexuality in literature has turned more from 'what to read' to 'how to read'. To take male-to-male relations as an example, the homosocial framing of characters in fiction is neither new nor novel. Sedgwick makes this clear in her discussion of stories by Henry James and Herman Melville, where men hold close relations to each other which can be viewed in a eroticized fashion. What is novel is the way we read and analyze these stories to uncover possible "deviations" from the heteronormative, traditional interpretation of many of these texts. In this article, I would like to question the way in which we read fiction, focusing in Mesquida's *L'adolescent de sal*. The focus is on form in relation to content, and not on content alone, as most studies that use queer theory are. What diagnostic tools should be used to evaluate the subversion of a text? Can the linguistic subversion of a text be measured in spite of the general aversion of queer theory to measurement? Should they be grounded in a specific theory or field? If so, which one? This work departs from the ideas of linguistic (hetero)normativity and queer linguistics on which much of its argumentation relies.¹² My contention is that queer stylistics or the linguistic assessment of a literary text from a critical standpoint can give us clues about its (il)legibility, in Pons' (2013) conceptualization, its queerness, and its future potentiality. Such a queer paradigm, however, forestalls determining how transgressive the text is and allows only an approximation. To this end, I theorize about a possible understanding of queer stylistics and illustrate this framework through an analysis of a Mesquidean novel considered by critics of utmost experimentalism.

Stylistics as a field finds its roots in the work of Russian formalists (Sotirova, 2016). The first half of the 20th century, with scholars like Leo Spitzer and Roman Jakobson, and academic circles like those in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, witnessed the beginnings of a preoccupation for the distinction between language in conversation and in literature. A run-of-the-mill definition of stylistics circumscribes its domain to the study of literary language, most notably that of poems and novels. For the formalists, the crucial distinguishing factor was familiarity. On the one hand, everyday language is familiar to speakers insofar as they (re-)use virtually the same structures in their speech again and again. Literary language, on the other hand, sometimes alerts the reader with language different from the one (s)he uses daily. In fact, Leech and Short already consider narrative language as illustrating 'deviations from the linguistic code' (1981, p. 78). There have been notable advances in stylistics since its inception. One of them has been the progressive move from an analysis of the text in isolation to an analysis of, first, text and context (social and historical factors) and then text, context, and cotext (other literatures, genres, and authors). A second advance in stylistics has been the consideration of stylistics as the study of, not only the reading process as a coherent plot reconstruction, but also the emotional responses of the reading subject. Stockwell (2009) places special emphasis on affect through the effects of what he dubs textual "texture". A third advance in stylistics has been a move toward critical approaches to literary language, including the fields of feminist and critical stylistics (Jódar-Sánchez, forthcoming), and, as proposed in this article, queer stylistics. Finally, a last advance has been the use of information and communication technologies, particularly computer software and corpora, for the study of literary language (McIntyre and Walker, 2019). Many of the aspects about stylistics heretofore discussed form an integral part of the formulation of a queer stylistic trend. Features that in isolation may seem trivial can become impactful when used in cooperation with other features.

What is queer stylistics then? It can be delineated as a branch of stylistics that opposes categorization and normativity. Although Leech and Short (1981), for instance, leave the door open for the tentative and provisional nature of stylistic analyses, their materialization is not framed within the understanding of queer

¹² The reader is referred to Livia and Hall (1997), Motschenbacher (2011), and Motschenbacher and Stegu (2013) for further discussion of the concepts of queer linguistics and linguistic (hetero)normativity.

theory. Today queer scholarship and activism are grounded on a *modus operandi* of deroutinization of heteronormative, homonormative, and other normative paradigms. It proposes a disavowal of (identity) categories, which in stylistics may include genre types, linear narratives, and heteronormative characters and narrators. This is reminiscent of the defamiliarization techniques of Russian formalists. It goes against simple binarisms (e.g. you are either straight or gay) and categorizations (e.g. if you are a man that has intercourse with men, then you are gay). Instead, it endorses a deconstructive, performative, and dislinear view of subjectivity, spatiality, and temporality (Butler, 1990; Edelman, 2004). Queer analyses are contented with patchy, incomplete findings under the acknowledgement that all knowledge is unstable, ever-changing. Vincent suggests “‘subversion’, ‘destabilization’, ‘resistance’, ‘reappropriation’, and ‘resignification’” (2016, p. 70) as defining terms of the queer approach here adopted. In the next paragraphs, I highlight five aspects of literary analysis that, within a gamut of possibilities and in varying combinations, can contribute to queer stylistic readings of fiction. Although a specific instance of this type of analysis is presented in Section 4, a clarification must ensue that there is no single, correct, or normative way of doing so. Queer entails disruption of prior reifications, what positions my current analysis as subject to future revision. In the words of Esteban-Muñoz, ‘the future is queerness’s domain’ (2009, p. 1) and so is my analysis.

The first aspect in need of queering is the consideration of literary genres. Classical stylistic analyses (e.g. Leech and Short, 1981) have now given way to a concentration on a plethora of new genres and media, including mixed genres and digital media. A queer inquiry of these resists classifying a text as belonging to a particular genre, *in lieu* suggesting that it may be the experiencer’s perspective the trigger of genre consideration (what Genette calls ‘archtextuality’). An example in Medieval Spanish literature is *La celestina*, a novel originally classified as a “dialogued novel” by Menéndez y Pelayo about the involvement of a matchmaker in the challenges of a couple’s love story. *La celestina* is considered neither a drama (it is too long to be staged) nor a novel (it contains too much dialogue and is structured as a theater play), resulting in a hybrid, unclassifiable, queer play. Huerta-Calvo (2000) opts for a middle-ground option that breaks with prior classifications, namely considering *La celestina* an example of neither genre, of something unique. Genres can also be subject to queer temporalities in the sense that they may wane under a new context or may evolve into a new (form of its) genre.

The second aspect is the potentiality that linguistic form has beyond its conventionality as a code for communication. Here I borrow Esteban-Muñoz’s (2009) understanding of potentiality in queer theory as a mode of utopian thinking, as a reparative strategy of hope, and as a present way of projecting the past onto the future. In this regard, linguistic form in fiction can be queer inasmuch as it gives the writer the potential to disrupt previous language by incorporating past traditions in new ways. This allow the reader to shift her ideological background, conceptual apparatus, and reading strategies in the hope of shedding new light on the text. Put plainly, the potentiality of literary language rests on subversion rather than convention. The third aspect constitutive of the approach laid out here is related to a “stylistics of texture”. Texture is understood here as a deracination of literary language from the goals of plot reconstruction and coherence achievement in reader response theories (Stockwell, 2009). Texture is feeling, emotion, perception, aesthetics, affect. In Stockwell’s words, ‘texture is the experienced quality of textuality’ (2009, p. 1). In queer theory, we find a parallel move toward affects and their effects in the proposals of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993, 2003) and Heather Love (2007), among others. Queer stylistics can make use of texture to go against the censoring of negative affects and the extolling of positive ones. What Sedgwick and Love do is recuperate feelings of shame, remorse, stigma, despair, and cynicism as reparative ways of living queer lives. Stylistics can help discern how literary language contributes to this hopeful, future projection of the self through devices like plot structure, event linearity, adjectival modification, and narrative voice.

The fourth aspect queer stylistics is associated with is narrativity and diegetic voice. Traditionally, the gender and/or sexuality of the author were more often than not projected onto those of the narrator. In a revisionist article, Lanser (2018) undoes this correlation. By queering the narrative voice, that is, enlarging instead of constraining its embodied associations, narrators remain playful, defiant, and malleable for readers. The inverse can also be true. The reader may associate the gender and/or sexuality of the narrator to that of the author. In the parts of *L’adolescent de sal* where the narrator is the teenager the reader is tempted to think of him as the foil of Mesquida himself. The queering of narrative voice comes in when this assumption is refuted by the fact that the protagonist is in a relationship structured through some heteronormative patterns (Cramer, 2000). A fifth aspect of a queer literary paradigm is its intersectional nature. Originally proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality is a clarion call for the consideration of all aspects of minoritized subjects. Grown in the field of critical race theory, intersectional analyses aim at uncovering what the interplay of factors such as race, gender, age, sexuality, nationality, and disability tells us about political and social discrimination. Stylistic analyses of queer texts must study the different dimensions constitutive of the narrator(s) speaking and the characters whose language we read. Still, much of today’s stylistic analyses fall short of representing minorities of any kind, let alone sexual minorities (e.g. see those in Stockwell, 2009).

4. Analysis

In this section, I present an analysis of the literary language of *L'adolescent de sal* using the framework of queer stylistics above discussed. The focus will be on three aspects, namely genre, subversion, and texture.

4.1. Genre

One of the positive appraisal of *L'adolescent de sal* is the plethora of genres it makes use of, including the novel, poetry, autobiography, the diary, scripts, and visual art. Mesquida himself, in an interview, confesses that '[h]e intentat jugar amb un màxim de formes conegudes: diari, monòleg interior, escriptura automàtica, poemes adolescents, cartes, enregistraments, peces de teatre, per lligar la crisi del personatge amb la de les formes' (Graells, 1973, p. 33).¹³ When faced with the question of how to categorize Mesquida's text, the answer remains unclear. To pull through, we could argue that it is a novel, as it is published under the label 'contemporary novel' in La Butxaca collection. This idea fits then with the Bakhtinian notion of the novel as the most suitable ground for the cultivation of multiple genres (Bakhtin, 1981). However, there is as much prose as there are notes, drawings, citations, and drama. How are these different texts weaved together? For Crameri (2000) and Munné (1975), the excerpts in the novel do not form a coherent whole, instead simply being a pastiche of disconnected excerpts. However, *L'adolescent de sal* readily hews to the Bakhtinian idea of polyphony as the harmonious concurrence of the voices and worldviews of author, narrator, and characters in the novel. A proposal to this conundrum of genre ascription might lie in the notion of diary, amply discussed by Picornell-Belenguer (2007a) with regards to various Catalan experimental novels of the 70s and 80s, including *L'adolescent de sal*. For this researcher, there is no need to identify the genre(s) of the novel since diaries are, first, collections of more or less (dis)connected excerpts and, second, they are in the making, that is, diaries are not finalized products ready to be ascribed to a genre. It is precisely this unresolved and unresolvable nature that made them so apt for experimentalist and textualist writers to explore themes like politics, gender, and sexuality, and issues like the referentiality of literary language and the coherence of the text. In short, diaries, of which *L'adolescent de sal* is an example, embody queerness in their dismissal to genre ascription.

Mesquida falls short of subversiveness in another aspect of his work, namely metafiction. I am using this term here as referring, not to the *discussion*, but to the *inclusion* of fiction within fiction. The challenge to genre comes when the embedded fiction belongs to a different genre than that of the main fiction. This can create vacillation on the critic and confusion on the reader. *L'adolescent de sal* is a novel (albeit an unorthodox, who-knows-if-queer one) where narratives, comics, transcripts, and theater plays are embedded in a manner that is far from tacit. Though sometimes introduced with a title or an explanation of what comes ahead, the most perceivable pointer of the aforementioned fictions is the mark of a passage end with expressions like 'fi de la primera part' or 'continuarà al número pròxim'. These passages are not blended into other passages, instead being demarcated by traditional transition spaces. Let us focus now on two of these fictions to evaluate if Mesquida's narrator challenges or facilitates the reader's understanding and legibility of the text.

El joc del botxí (2013, pp. 207–221) is a theater play sketched by the youth made of salt and recovered for us by the narrator. The central component is the play itself, organized around stage directions, a list of characters, and their dialogues. This is sandwiched between the most revealing part, namely the narration of the discovery of the youth's notebook and the attempt to uncode it. In Broch's dichotomy, this is neither a transformation nor a transgression of hermeneutic or dramatic norms. Queering, if you wish, is confined to the old technique of metafictionality in that the play is buried in layers of commentary and exegesis of the narrator. The remaining elements are highly normative. Following Aristotelian thinking, the play is structured according to a departure (innocent playing and the organization of the game), an intrigue (the game of the executioner), and a dénouement (the mother is ordered to execute her son by the queen). In other words, the plot of the drama is first complicated and later unravelled. What is more, the illegibility of the original text that the narrator is witness to¹⁴ is transformed into a legible text. Thus, Mesquida's rendering of a morass of cryptic ideas for the drama can be considered (hetero-)normative, a queer. Otherwise stated, Mesquida standardizes the teenager's notes.

¹³ I have tried to play with a wide array of known genres and techniques, namely the diary, the interior monologue, automatic writing, teenage poetry, letters, recordings, and theater plays, to tie the crisis of the protagonist with the crisis of the form.

¹⁴ The narrator is mitigating the teenager's text when he says that 'intentaré de fer una síntesi' (2013, p. 207) and 'he volgut desxifrar el text' (2013, p. 208). He is attempting to undo the 'correccions per totes parts (que, de vegades, no lliguen), que dificulten la comprensió del text' (2013, p. 217) in a move that is inconsistent with, if not inimical to, the queer enterprise.

Other passages that subvert the traditional ascription of genre to a text are those where notes for a piece, and not the piece itself, are reproduced. This is the case for a comic script (pp. 173–181 and 191–201), the notes for a short film (pp. 223–231 and 326–328), and the notes for a legend (pp. 164–165). As in other aspects of the novel, for instance in the typography, these notes and scripts demand the reader's intervention. These excerpts are fracturing the rigidity and normativity of texts where the narrative is available for consumption. The consequence is that readers are left to wander about what the final text would be while they are given the galvanizing role of constructing their own comic strips, short films, and legends.

4.2. Language Subversion: Dialects, language mixing, and intertextuality

The second focus of this analysis is the understanding of language as subversion instead of as convention. In what follows, three aspects are discussed, namely the interplay of language and dialect, the alternation of code switching and code mixing, and the use of intertextuality and citations. The prevailing language in *L'adolescent de sal* and, more generally, Mesquida's production is Catalan. Notwithstanding this, several excerpts are in Spanish, French, and rarely, in English. The use of different languages or varieties in this novel is an example of what Bakhtin (1981) calls dialogism or the dialogic imagination, namely the idea that by using various languages the polyvocality of words is opened up and put into relation with past and present worlds where those languages are spoken. The words in one language are enriched by their relations with words in other languages. Indeed, a growing strand of research is committed to investigating the extent to which multilingualism and sexual diversity go hand in hand (Cashman, forthcoming), with some focusing on how literary language and translation deploy this connection (Jódar-Sánchez, forthcoming; Santaemilia, forthcoming).

Mesquida locates language at the center of his creative universe. He declares in an interview that 'jo sempre dic que els temes sempre són els mateixos, però llavors és aquesta música que es converteix en unes notes personals, singulars' (Muñoz, 2008, p. 24),¹⁵ where by music he is referring to the cadence of (linguistic) form. In the same venue, Mesquida confesses that '[I]a feina d'escriptor està dirigida cap a la creació d'un subjectlecte, d'un idioma propi. L'idioma propi amb el qual t'acostes a les coses i percep el món' (Muñoz, 2008, p. 17).¹⁶ In his case, this subjective language or subjectlect is 'el mesquidià' (Muñoz, 2008, p. 24), otherwise characterized as a language that is 'dialectal, sociolectal, Mesquidalectal' (Muntada, 2016, p. 59). Is Mesquidean a subversive variety? Can this variety be analyzed queerly?

One may argue that the traditional linguistic boundaries in Catalan literature are trespassed by the use of forms typical of Majorcan Catalan. These correspond to a local lexicon as well as aspects of grammar tied to a series of dialects. The narrator uses dialectal forms like *almanco* (instead of *almenys*) and *estojat* (instead of *estotjat*). In grammatical terms, he uses the article typical of the Balearic islands (e.g. *joc des botxi*), the first person plural for the singular in the present tense (e.g. *som el rei* instead of *sóc el rei* and *concebesc* instead of *concebo*), and informal forms like *vàrem fer* (instead of *vam fer*) and *que vengui* (instead of *que vingui*). Other alternating forms are the adverb in the negative phrase *no vull jugar pus* (instead of *no vull jugar més*) and the lexicalization of the 'pronom feble' in verbs like *empenedit*. There are words typical of the lexicon of the Catalan spoken in Majorca, including *plagueta* 'notebook' and *tenir escriptuera* 'feel like writing', with the suffix *-era* indicating the disposition to do something.

On the one hand, the fact that Mesquida uses Majorcan Catalan often in the novel can be interpreted as a queer move. The normativity that queer theory is a response to is embodied here in the standard variety of the language. Writing in a dialect is considered queering in some parts of Mesquida's *L'adolescent de sal* because it is a deliberate and arguably transgressive move not to use the standard variety of Catalan more frequent in literature. Broadly speaking, language varieties prescribed by language academies, used in the cultural sphere, and taught at schools becomes dominant much like heteronormativity has dominated the sexual sphere for centuries. Liddicoat (2009), for instance, shows that language prescription and corrective feedback in foreign language classrooms are sometimes pincer between teachers' heteronormative ideologies. In consequence, using a dialect against the background of a normative standard variety and with the mentality of an "agitator" transgresses the boundaries of linguistic heteronormativity. On the other hand, the forms of Majorcan Catalan that the narrator uses are standard within that dialect. The transgression is deflated when the facts are seen from an emic perspective. In other words, speakers of this dialect will find these forms normative or familiar. This situation can be paralleled to claims of normativity within same-sex couples, that is, homonormativity, where something that breaks with the norm becomes a norm itself. To sum up, the widely claimed linguistic queerness of Mesquidean writing is to some extent downplayed in *L'adolescent de sal* by its use of normative dialectal forms.

¹⁵ I always say that the themes repeat themselves, the personal touch comes from this music though.

¹⁶ The job of the writer is geared toward the creation of a subjectlect or subjective dialect. A language of one's own to access and perceive the world.

Another way of trespassing linguistic (hetero)normativity is the use of different languages and/or varieties. In some passages, the languages used in *L'adolescent de sal* come together in what in sociolinguistic terms falls under the umbrella of 'language switching'. Even dialects are mixed, as when the mother of the teenager makes reference to a 'mallorquí estrany mesclat amb català' (2013, p. 24). In his overview, Muysken (2011) touches upon the sociolinguistic, grammatical, and usage aspects of language switching. My focus here is on the dimension of grammar. Muysken discusses five types of switching, namely the inter-sentential, extra-sentential, intra-sentential, single word, and word-internal ones. They range in a cline from less to more integrated in the grammatical structure of the sentence. For my purposes here, a single word switch includes switches of expressions that behave like a single unit (excluding proper nouns which are for the most part untranslatable). The relatively rare word-internal switching occurs when a morpheme of one language is attached to a word of another language. In that case, the structure of one language is highly integrated in the grammar of the other language.

Cramerí refers to some of the characters in *L'adolescent de sal*, including Antonio de Lebrillo and the Andalusian immigrants, as 'mixing languages indiscriminately' (2000, p. 125). This affirmation is made without differentiating the different types of ways in which linguistic codes (be it languages or varieties) can coexist in a text. Based on the five types above, Table 1 presents a count of the excerpts in the novel where language switch occurs classified according to the type of integration of one language onto the other one. Given the difficulty of delimiting excerpts, chapters, or sections in Mesquida's work, language switch has been assessed at every intersection of two or more languages.

Type of switching	Tally
Inter-sentential switching	85 / 83%
Extra-sentential switching	None
Intra-sentential switching	5 / 5%
Single word switching	12 / 12%
Word-internal switching	None
Total	102 / 100%

Table 1. Language switching in *L'adolescent de sal* according to type

The results show that, contrary to Cramerí's impression, languages are *not* mixed indiscriminately, as a more subversive text would do. The texts predominantly in Spanish do not generally switch to Catalan while those predominantly in Catalan do switch to Spanish or French. This suggests a linguistic heteronormative pattern, since the majority language (Spanish) does not switch, remaining untouched, pure, dominant, whereas the minority language gives way to the majority language through switching. As per Table 1, the narrator of *L'adolescent de sal* switches languages in different sentences, not within the same sentence (83% of cases). Only in 12% of cases is a single word switched, mostly either a Spanish or English one in a Catalan excerpt. Finally, only in 5% of cases part of a sentence is switched to a different language. The function of these seems to be to impact the reader by stressing a clash of cultures or a humorous image. The former function is illustrated in Figure 1, where a handwritten note from the fictional narrator tells us that 'n'he llegit la majoria. Eren els "temas españoles" d'examen' on a list of books on folklore and politics.¹⁷ The clash of the Catalan and Spanish cultures in this context comes from the opposition between republicanism in Catalonia and the facism in the figure of Spain's dictator Franco, of which these Publicaciones Españolas were a means of propaganda.

¹⁷ I have read the majority of them. They were the "Spanish themes" of the exam.

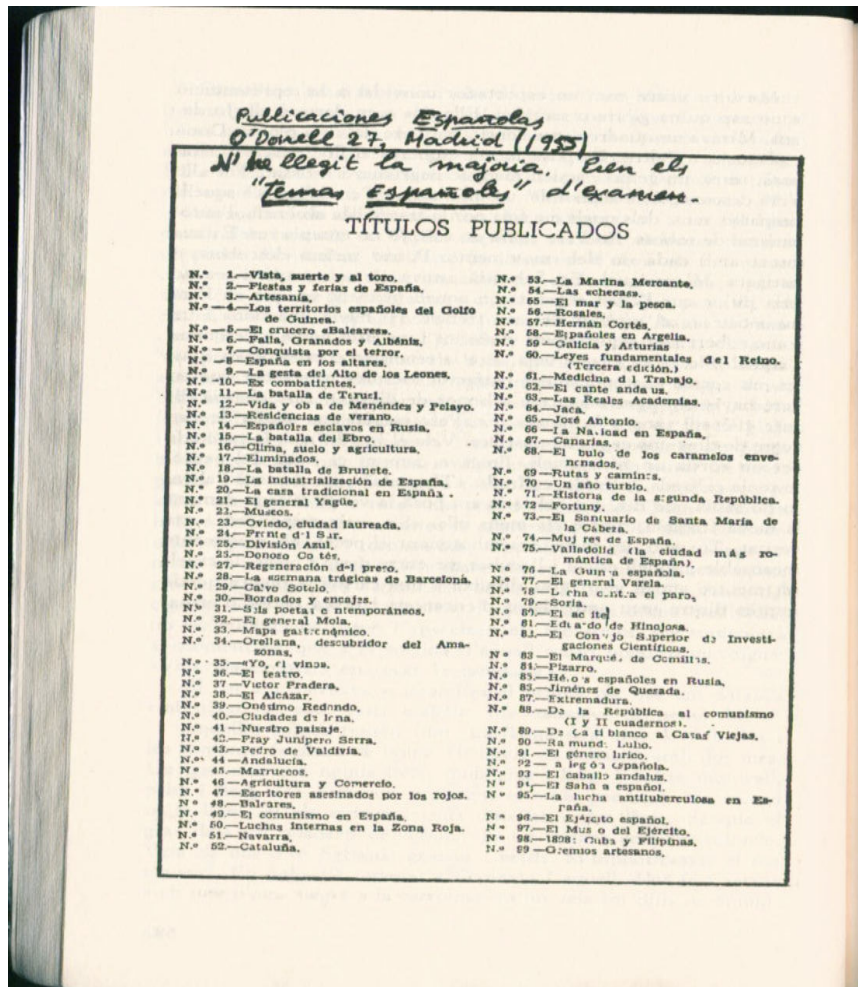


Figure 1. Intra-sentential code-switching (handwritten) showing a cultural clash

Finally, another aspect of language subversion, not unrelated to the physical structure of the book, is intertextuality. Riffaterre (1994) distinguishes between intertextuality as an orderly phenomenon and hypertextuality as a disorderly phenomenon. Although controversial, this distinction will serve my purposes here. On the one hand, for the French scholar intertextuality embodies links to other texts (e.g. citations) whose function is to gear the reader toward the comprehension of the text. Hypertextuality, on the other hand, embodies links to other systems that may not necessarily be texts (e.g. websites or videos) whose function is *not* specifically the reader's comprehension of the text. From the point of view of queer theory, intertextuality is closer to heteronormativity than hypertextuality, as the former takes a specific form of literary relationality as the norm and its purpose is to build a coherent interpretation. *L'adolescent de sal*, at the time of its publication, makes use of intertextuality rather than hypertextuality, since the latter hinge on the advent of new technologies in the latter part of the 20th century. Is intertextuality and profuse citation in this novel an innovation in comparison to previous works? The answer is negative, given previous theorizations since (and before) Julia Kristeva's first mention of 'intertextualité' and the widespread use of intertextuality in world literature (though in different cultural and historical contexts) (Martínez-Alfaro, 1996). More than that, it is the fact that Mesquida's text draws from the more normative form of relationality, namely intertextuality, that makes it less queer than previously claimed. To put it otherwise, although the author makes appropriationist interventions in the text through collage, citations, and other intertextual techniques, these are not perceived as groundbreaking as techniques pertaining to hypertextuality.¹⁸

¹⁸ Three caveats should be noted here. First, there is no way we can be sure that the intentions of Mesquida in using intertextuality are geared toward comprehension of the text, and not the opposite. Second, in 1975 and previous years, the time *L'adolescent de sal* was published and written, hypertextuality was not widespread or even readily available. The use of Riffaterre's dichotomy might therefore be considered inappropriate in this context. Third, the argument can be further problematized by questioning whether a boundary can be drawn between intertextual and hypertextual techniques.

Citations all come with the name of the author, a conventional way of including someone else's words in your work. They are mostly signalled by quotation marks and display full, meaningful sentences. Mesquida sometimes translates quotes of intellectuals like Oscar Wilde, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Herman Hesse, and Antonio Gramsci into Catalan, expediting instead of defying legibility. In one excerpt about how Marxism in Majorca is defeated through the alliance of the military, the regime officials, and the local population of the islands, Mesquida even properly references the work where he copied the excerpt. This is unlike other works, including Sherry Levine's "(un)original" photographs or the *Quijote* by Pierre Menard discussed by Borges, where the copy-and-paste technique is not directly attributed and the text or photograph passes as if original. If queer entails breaking with paradigms of heteronormativity and we consider mainstream authorial attribution heteronormative, then *L'adolescent de sal* offers little challenge to traditional referencing.

Notes in manuscripts contain additional information that is deemed not relevant enough to be included in the body of the text. There are seven pages of notes in *L'adolescent de sal*, indicated by the headings 'notes', 'segueixen les notes' or 'notes (continuació)'. These can be considered either footnotes in Mesquida's novel or notes in the notebook of the youth of salt. At first, they seem to fit the pattern described for citations, where these notes do not blend into other texts but their presence is explicitly signalled. Nonetheless, these notes subvert their regular logic by inserting important information in an setting for unimportant information. This queer move concerns notes of a plan for democratic revolution amid a politically repressive environment and a defense of human rights through the bareness of human bodies, as in Figure 2. Tellingly, the narrator in Mesquida's text mixes these with more trivial information like poetic descriptions of the desire between two bodies. In consequence, thematic heterodoxy features footnotes as part of the floundering structure of the novel.

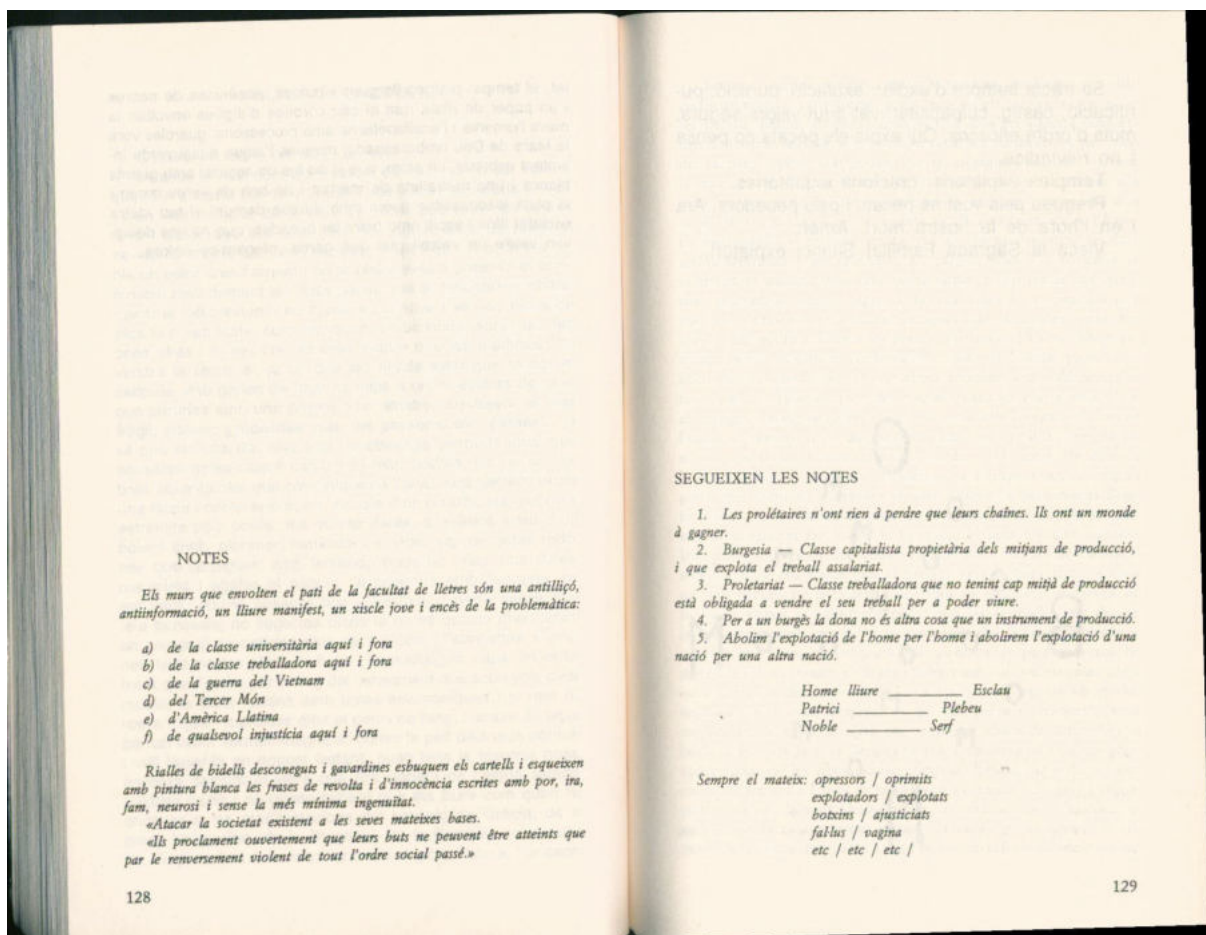


Figure 2. Important information included in notes

In contrast, a more subversive way of intertextuality is that sparsely used in one of the latest Mesquidean texts, *Llefre de tu*. The narrator, after declaring that he sometimes writes authorless quotes in pieces of paper and then scatter them in different places, finds one and declares that "[p]odria ser de Blaise Cendrars i d'aquell text engatador: *Prose du Transsibérien*. No n'estic segur" (2012, p. 174). The uncertainty about the author of the quote, regardless of who the real author is, brings to the forefront the epistemological debate of originality and imitation. Put plainly, the epistemological uncertainty about particular citations mirrors the challenge queer theory poses to

heteronormative and homonormative sexualities. Both entail a questioning of (authorial or sexual) normativity. In the issue of intertextuality and citations, we see again that the division between more and less subversive texts is unclear. A Mesquidean contemporary novel like *Llefre de tu* is therefore queerer, intertextually speaking, than *L'adolescent de sal*, an instance of textualism's highpoint.

4.3. Texture and affect

Finally, I discuss the texture of *L'adolescent de sal*, or how the experience of reading the novel affects the reader(s) emotionally, as a way of illustrating the third feature of a queer stylistic approach (see Section 3). I do this through an analysis of typography, images, and drawings in the novel. The starting point here is that, by prompting action from the reader, the text acquires a corporeality. The reader and the text materialize as the two poles of a relationship in which feelings and sensations, in short texture, are both possible and plausible. By crossing out sentences, paragraphs, and even whole pages, Mesquida is ensconcing illegibility in the text. An illustration from the novel is shown in Figures 3 and 4. Although the reader necessarily finds it easier to process text that is not typographically altered, the profusion of non-normative excerpts, including those crossed out, handwritten, overwritten, repeated, and detachable, emphasizes typographic queerness. Through these 'moltes taxadures, tres fulls de taxadures' (2013, p. 137), the author is spoiling several dichotomies: legibility–illegibility, visibility–occlusion, rationality–impulsion, letter–line. In them (except for the latter), the first member represents heteronormativity while the second member represents a queer move from it. Legibility, visibility, and rationality are 'affects' awakened through regular typography that compel the reader(s) to fit the mainstream pattern, building a coherent plot and ignoring 'real' affects. The latter are permitted by patterns of illegibility, occlusion and impulsion triggered by typographic queerness. The reader is then freed from the heteronormative system and can choose whether to cohere or disperse the threads of the story.

Deliris íntims poden ésser els representants de la catàstrofe, dels meandres de la vida, de la cruesa de les còpules salvatges, de les visions drepusculars d'un joc de bojos, la mescla terrible i sangonosa dels records i la realitat present en la recerca d'aquesta mentida necessària per a un bategar sense taquicàrdies ni declaracions de mort.

I ESCRIURE UNA NOVEL·LA ENTRE DOS COITS POT ÉSSER LA MÉS EXÒTICA DE LES FALSEDATS QUE EM CONTAREM !!!!!!

¿Crees en els miratges i les esquizofrènia per a començar la revolució necessària?

Una flor de luxúria pot representar la promiscuïtat de pètals i sexe a la comuna festa de la màgia dels cossos.

L'encegament d'una claror pot ésser l'allau del misteriós orgasme o la cerimònia de preparar els caps, les olors; els músculs, la mirada i el desig perquè cada moviment sigui l'enfonsar-se dins un gorg de plaer al antroponòs del sacrifici.

Estimar un home que llegeix
Marx i Lenin pot ésser la revelació que hi ha mons mai definitius, illes abandonades amb mesures secretes per als cors solitaris, postes de sol per desobrir.

El misteri du a la poesia de reconèixer amb el més senzill dels esquemes tot un baroque d'esdeveniments que no s'acaben mai, el joc de llums i alegres obrirà el teló

urgent per a una nova visió dels objectes, de la història, la verídica línia de canvi d'un material damunt l'altre, acumularà les tensions més allunyades interferint al pensament lògic per descobrir l'enreixat de comunicacions en aquelles golfes del cos, que creiem perdut des de feia molt de temps; la reencarnació de les al·les encendrà les fogueres d'una terra on les ombres intentaven dissimular el record d'un refilar tendríssim de violins emmascarats dins l'asfíxia; escolta, ¿no sents ja la carícia d'unes ones transparents, l'ombra d'unes randes brodades pels nostres dits? L'obsessió de la dissort, el cacàs, les càrregues del passat, que torna, opaques mínimes condicions d'avanç; no ho creguis, el lumeneret blau no és la matèria de l'esperança, encara

Figure 3. Textual illegibility through typography (I)

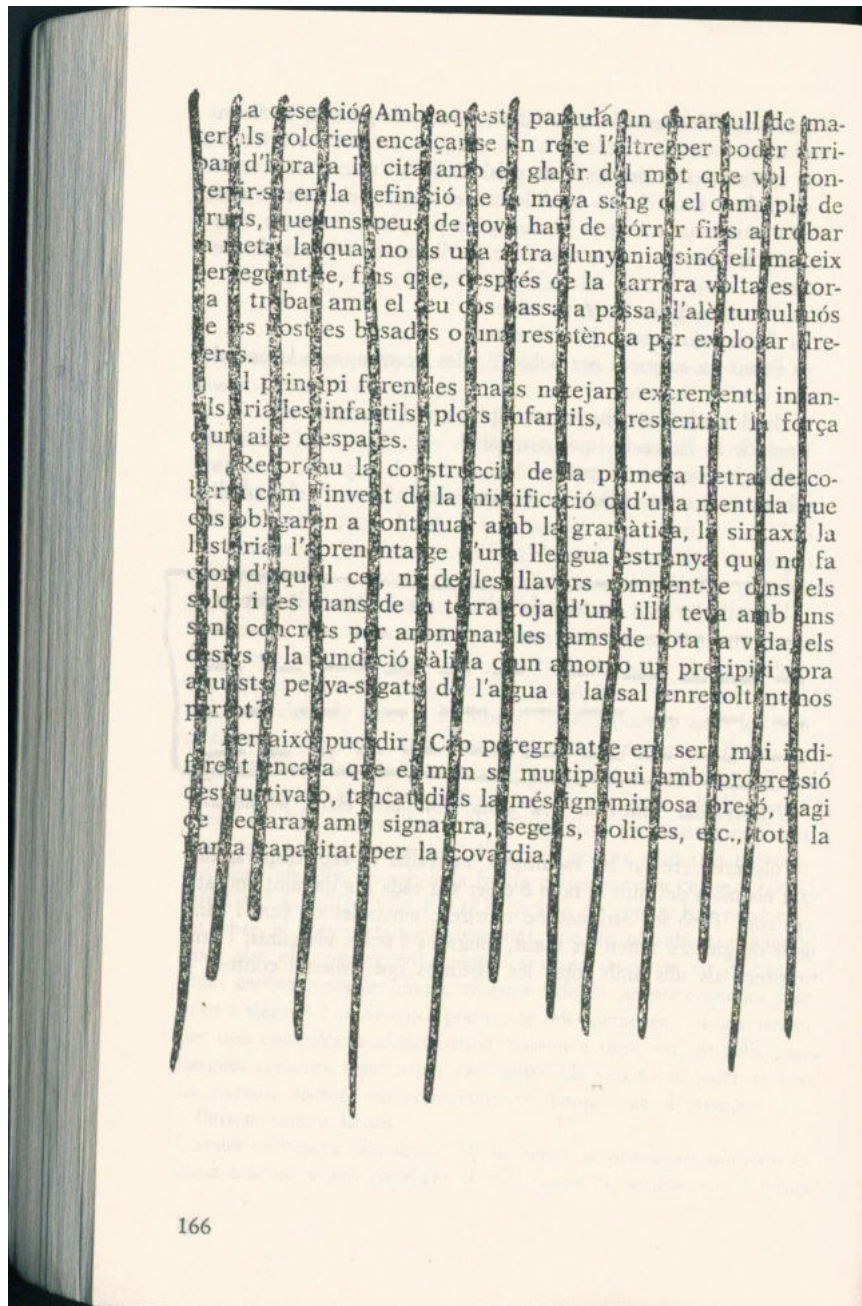


Figure 4. Textual illegibility through typography (II)

L'adolescent de sal has blank spaces and a typographical design organized in a non-normative way, an instance of which is marginalia. These were common practice in some of the publications and authors at the time, including some articles in the magazine "Tectual". *Llefre de tu*, albeit more typographically canonical, subverts the classification of marginalia as such. An excerpt that reads 'Escrit al marge d'un llibre' (2012, p. 196) and then is specified for what should be marginalia is framed following normative indentation and typography. The marginalia in both novels, however, differ crucially. Marginalia in *L'adolescent de sal* can be easily classified as such. Marginalia in *Llefre de tu*, breaks with classificatory criteria, as it is not marginalia in the way it is displayed but it is textually identified as marginalia.

5. Concluding remarks

Heteronormativity can surface in multiple forms and shapes, persisting in a baleful teleology of heterosexuality and gender binarism. Since the delineation of queer theory in the early 1990s, efforts have been devoted to expose the heteronormative patterns underlying works of fiction (Livia and Hall, 1997; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993). The form in which these patterns emerge together with detailed linguistic analyses of them have not been a prominent focus of study. This article is a first attempt to delineate a possible approach, queer stylistics, that is able to evaluate the queerness or subversiveness of literary language toward normative ideas of genre, convention, texture and affect, narrative voice, and intersectionality. The focus of the analysis is specifically on the first three of these aspects. Queer stylistics, though, is only one of the pieces of the puzzle that contributes to the analysis of queer identities in literature. While its concern for language and its effect on the reader are paramount, stylistics intersects with issues of content, publication, and literary history. These can also be (and some have frequently been) approached from a queer perspective. Along the lines of Eng *et al.*'s (2005) and Esteban–Muñoz's (2009) discussions of queer theory more generally, I would like to invoke here their “epistemological humility” and hermeneutics that is “epistemologically and ontologically humble” about queer stylistics. This final caveat points to the need to consider this approach provisional, contingent, a work in progress. My efforts represent only the tip of the iceberg. Even after trying hard to unveil possible heteronormative patterns in the themes and literary language of fiction, we might be missing something on its way toward normativity.

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