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Jesús Moncada



The man and his letters

Jesús Moncada (Mequinensa, 1941 - Barcelona, 2005) is the author of an extensive body of work that has been rewarded with numerous prizes and widespread critical

acclaim. Moncada was a master of both the genres of the short story and the novel. His work has been translated into over fifteen different languages.

I met Jesús Moncada when he had only just arrived from his native Mequinensa and we began working in the same company together. Moncada was still reeling from the change in geography and presented himself as a young barbarian, a fierce type, as though his aim was to reinforce the hairiness of his face through words: a bushy black beard with moustache to match. With people, it was as though Moncada wanted to clinch the first impression he made with a direct way of approaching subjects and an apparent brusqueness that fled from circumlocutions. However, it did not take me long to discover that this young man from the Catalan-speaking fringes of Aragon would never be able to present an image of barbarism, quite the opposite in fact. In his everyday life, he bore more of a resemblance to the stereotypical Briton. He smoked a pipe at strictly established times (never before the set time!) and he chose his blends of tobacco with the utmost care; he does not just smoke the first type he comes across. He is a tea enthusiast, not just any kind of tea though, but from specific regions and brands, which he sometimes travels far from home to buy. And he plans his time without leaving even one hour to chance, he is a man who accepts commitments and fulfils them accordingly, in the style of someone who in times gone-by would have been called a gentleman, the like of which is now disappearing. But, if we ever thought that with these details we had completed the picture, then we would be wrong, because Jesús Moncada has an overwhelming enthusiasm, he is a passionate man. He does not miss a thing and is hugely interested in everything. He paints, he draws and he writes, without taking any of them lightly, immersing his five senses. He is concerned for his country and the course of civilisation, he actively participates in the causes in which he believes and he suffers for everything that is worth suffering for, without forgetting to ponder solutions.

These confidences of one friend talking about another may appear gratuitous for opening words, a presentation perhaps. But I believe that they are not, because everything that I have said is reflected in his narrative and, up to a certain point, provide some clue to it.

There are other facts, certainly equally or more important, that determine the personality of this writer. Jesús Moncada has gone from experiencing watching the world of his childhood disappear beneath the water (and swept aside by profound socio-economic changes). It was a multi-coloured world, bursting with character: the Mequinensa of the lignite mines and river traffic, with its vegetable gardens, small centres of cattle-raising and abundant game. Miners, the catboat men and peasants dedicated their spare time to hunting rabbits, partridges, wild boar (and the occasional deer), which led to highly animated café discussions during the course of some very memorable games of cards. Two rivers, the Ebro and the Segre, connect Mequinensa with the centres of its commercial activity, and at this confluence, standing on the two riverbanks, the old town had seen the centuries unfold with an immutability broken only by wars and political change. Our traditions and language prevail

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despite mutations imposed far from here. In an administrative sense, Mequinensa looks to Zaragoza, but it faces Lleida. A division of lives and interests that will always mark the character of men, but all of which Mequinensa bore preserving its essential features.

Suddenly, progress, with the air that it sometimes adopts of steamrolling everything before it, resulted in the destruction of houses and streets that have survived the wars between the Moors and the Christians, against the French, the Carlist wars and the Spanish Civil War. Old Mequinensa had to be sacrificed to build the Riba-roja reservoir and was flooded beneath the waters of the two rivers, becoming a ghost town, with the stones watched over by underwater reverberations. Jesús Moncada suffered this process as though he were being robbed of his childhood memories, experiencing it as a personal drama. He was living in Barcelona but deeply loved his homeland and his family and made frequent journeys back and forth, and each time he returned, he felt hurt and saddened by an irreparable sentimental loss. If I mention it now, while opening the doors on to the reading of his work, it is because I am convinced that this was one of the reasons, perhaps the most powerful, that drove Moncada to write. Through words, he wanted to rescue something very dear to him that had been wrenched from him and leave a written record of it so that not everything would be lost. The first narrations that I came across reflected this state of spirit and interested me very deeply. They were a highly personal, highly significant contribution to our literature.

But - I repeat - the reasons given were just the start because Moncada does not set himself up as a writer about local customs and manners, anchored in a language protected by enriching dialectal forms. His concerns go way beyond this and he also feels attracted by other challenges. He is fully concerned for his country, the language, the end of an era and, of course, man maltreated by all the elements that often overwhelm him. And he tackles these concerns with a desire to understand through tenderness and a spark of humour, with touches of stark reality (shrewdly distributed), which form the counterpoint to the defencelessness of his characters. The result is extremely gratifying: there are stories that could hold their head proud in any anthology of the genre while others, all of the others, acutely retain the reader's attention.

Pere Calders, prologue to Jesús Moncada, *Històries de la mà esquerra* (Stories of the Left Hand) (Barcelona, La Magrana, 1981)

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A selection of texts

Text



WEB: Fragment de Camí de Sirga

Un fragment dins de la pàgina d'Andreu Sotorra.

<http://www.andreusotorra.com/vinyetaliteraria/docus/moncadaj.html>



WEB: Extract from Camí de Sirga (The Towpath)

An extract on the website of Andreu Sotorra.

<http://www.andreusotorra.com/vinyetaliteraria/docus/moncadaj.html>



WEB: Jesús Moncada

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Prose fragment in Catalan, English and German.

http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/moncadaj/pagina.php?id_sec=1941



AUDIO: Jordina Sala Branchadell llegeix 'Paraules des d'un oliver', de Jesús Moncada
<http://soundcloud.com/jordinasb85/paraules-des-dun-oliver>



AUDIO: Caputxeta d'Artesa llegeix 'Nigra sum', de Jesús Moncada
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Bio-bibliography

Biography



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WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"
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WEB: A la Viquipèdia
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WEB: In Wikipedia
Biographical note, works and links on the author in the free encyclopaedia.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesús_Moncada

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WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya
http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Moncada+Jes%C3%BAs&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)

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http://ccuc.cbuc.es/search*cat/a?SEARCH=Moncada%2C+Jesus&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



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WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/moncada-i-estruga-jesus>



WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Moncada%20Jes%C3%BAs&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

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WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Moncada+Jes%C3%BAs&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: The author in The European Library

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22moncada+jes%C3%BAs%22%29.query>



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Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: Jesús Moncada a l'AELC

Biografia, informacions, publicacions.

<http://www.escriptors.com/autors/moncadaj/index.php>



PDF: Jesús Moncada a *Els Marges*

Article de Simona Skrabec sobre les tècniques narratives emprades a la novel·la *Camí de sirga*, publicat a *Els Marges*, núm. 76 (primavera 2005).

<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Marges/article/view/142014/193543>

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WEB: Jesús Moncada on the Lletra website in Catalan

Including more resources and reading suggestions.
<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/jmoncada/index.html>



WEB: Website of the AELC

Biography, information, works.
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Comments



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