

Miralles, Eulàlia & Pep Valsalobre (ed.), Joan Pujol, *Els poemes de Lepant*, Barcelona, Barcino («Biblioteca Barcino»), 2019, 192 p. ISBN: 978-84-7226-841-8.

While Ramon Llull and Ausiàs March are well known figures to the general public, especially in Catalan cultural history, Renaissance poet Joan Pujol will probably not immediately ring a bell to that same audience. Nevertheless, Eulàlia Miralles and Pep Valsalobre's critical edition of Pujol's epic *Lepant* has been published in the series *Biblioteca Barcino*, the aim of which is to make classic works of the Catalan literary tradition available to the broader public. Miralles and Valsalobre not only succeed in rendering a flawless and readable edition of the text, based on careful philological research of the poem's two transmissions (the 1573 print of Barcelona and a manuscript held at the Mazarine Library in Paris), but also make the poem substantially more comprehensible for the reader through an illuminative introduction, in which they offer a synthesis of the research they have been conducting over the past two decades, and a helpful number of footnotes that accompany the edited text.

First, Miralles and Valsalobre focus on the figure Joan Pujol, a priest from Mataró, and situate him within a literary circle in Barcelona linked to Lluís Joan Vileta, a famous philosopher and theologian of his time. This biographical sketch and a historical background of the poet's time are important because it leads to a better understanding of the literary characteristics of Pujol's *Lepant*. Miralles and Valsalobre's recovery of historical details gives us a more vivid image of a figure about whom relatively little was known, except for the information one could deduce from the 1573 edition of his poetry. Their reconstruction of Pujol's life shows us a person who not only seems to have been in close contact with prominent figures of his time, such as Pere Alberch and Jeroni de Pinós (the dedicatee of the 1573 book), but also very active in cultural events of his time, participating in, for example, poetry competitions of local festivities. In other words, Pujol's epic *Lepant* is clearly a product of its time and not the lonesome creation of a priest who was detached from real life.

Second, Miralles and Valsalobre contextualize Pujol's poetry and explain how his epic *Lepant* forms part of a cycle of poems related to the battle of Lepanto, all of which are included in this edition. Their choice of rendering these poems together is justified and offers the reader the opportunity to appreciate a Catalan poet's response to a contemporary military event in the second half of the sixteenth century. The inclusion of these paratextual poems is important for two reasons in particular. One reason is that it underlines the multilingualism of the period. We encounter poems in Latin, Spanish, and Catalan: the three are valuable options for a writer at the time, even though the Castilian tongue, especially for the production of a Renaissance epic, was probably the most likely choice. Pujol's decision to compose his epic in Catalan is thus a meaningful one: its unique character is stressed by the poet's emphasis on the newness of his poem. This singularity is due not only to the extraordinary qualities of Lepanto (as «the most exalted occasion seen by ages past, present or to come» in the frequently cited words of Miguel de Cervantes) but also, as Miralles and Valsalobre rightly observe, to the lack of a direct model of epic poetry in Catalan.

The inclusion of these paratextual poems also demonstrates the aesthetic qualities that Pujol considered appropriate for a historical epic of a contemporary naval battle. While Vileta's first of three Latin poems, *De mira et singulari victoria*, and Pujol's translation or rewriting of it, represent an imaginary dialogue between the pagan gods Jupiter and Neptune, in which they comment on the naval battle they witness, no such dialogue or active involvement of classical mythology is used as a literary strategy in Pujol's epic *Lepant*. However, other epic poets of Lepanto, like Jerónimo Corte-Real with his *Felicíssima Victoria* (finished in 1575) or Pedro Manrique with his *La Victoria* (of which the prologue is signed as early as 20 April 1573), did choose for a representation of the battle within an epic universe of classical mythology.

Pujol's narrative strategy is clearly different and is stressed by the poet's elaborate *Introducció* or opening, emphatically separated from the *Narració*, which takes a start at verse 153. In this opening, uncharacteristic of classical epic in many ways, the poet describes his fictive journey to Mount Helicon and the House of Fame. While the *Narració* itself avoids representations of direct intervention by pagan gods, this does not mean that it lacks poetic quality. Pujol inserts a few original elements into the story, which sets it apart from other Lepanto works. One clear example is the use of a different metre on two occasions. In the second canto, Pujol interrupts his decasyllabic stanzas to render account of the letter Pope Pius V supposedly sent to Philip II (vv. 25-64, pp. 96-97). Later, in canto three, he applies the same strategy for the rendering of two prayers by respectively John of Austria and Ali Pasha, the commanders-in-chief of the two opposing fleets (vv. 265-284, p. 127; vv. 293-312,

pp. 128-129). The use of polymetre for an epic poem is not common at the time and is thus an original contribution.

Another example of the uniqueness of Pujol's poem is his description of the decisive moment in the naval battle. In a rare representation of direct action, the narrator singles out the heroic undertaking of a Morisco —a descendant of former Muslims in Spain— who was taken captive during the Second War of the Alpujarras (1568-1570). In two stanzas, he describes how this Morisco captive snatches the banner from the Ottoman flagship and plants the banner of the Spanish people (*de l'espanyola gent*) in its place (vv. 617-632, p. 146-147). This emphasis on the heroic deed of a Morisco in a major battle between Christianity and Islam is significant because it reveals something about Pujol's view on the situation. Miralles and Valsalobre have shown how the tripartite structure of the poem reveals the idea of a victory of Good over Evil. Whether or not Pujol encountered this episode of the Morisco in a historical source, of which many circulated in the wake of the battle, his choice of inserting it at the end of canto three in a marked description of two stanzas is no coincidence. It adds to the Christian message Pujol seeks to convey to the reader.

The naval battle of Lepanto still speaks to the imagination of many people today. The number of historical works on the battle that have been published in the past two decades bear witness to this fascination. Nevertheless, contemporary poems, especially epics, are seldom taken into account in these studies. Miralles and Valsalobre's critical edition of Pujol's *Lepant* shows that such historical testimonies provide not only new perspectives on Lepanto (a uniquely Catalan one, in this case), but also innovative poetic responses to a major historical event. This edition has the potentiality to arouse interest in both a non-expert audience of Catalan native speakers and scholars of Iberian literature and the (early modern) epic tradition. For the latter group of readers especially, the announced critical edition of Joan Pujol's entire oeuvre in the series *Els Nostres Clàssics* by the same editors is something to look forward to.

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