

The reception of *Canigó*, by Jacint Verdaguer, in Madrid (1886-1902)

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1. Brief introduction to Jacint Verdaguer

Jacint Verdaguer (Folgueroles, 1845 - Barcelona, 1902) was the most prominent representative of the Catalan literary renaissance during the nineteenth century. His literary production, written throughout 40 years and Romantic in character, was focused, especially, on poetry, with more than thirty titles, including the most outstanding ones, *L'Atlàntida* and *Canigó*, which are the works (more the former than the latter) that brought Verdaguer the greatest fame in his time. In addition, there are translations into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Hungarian, and other languages. He also wrote some works in prose, of notable quality, and he produced, in prose and verse, several translations and versions of works from other languages: for example, his prose version of *Nerto*, originally written in Occitan by Frederic Mistral.

1.1. Jacint Verdaguer and Madrid

Madrid helped the Catalan poet during the hardest moments of his life and, once he died, the tributes of the city to his figure were relevant. It is for this reason and because he made contacts in Madrid, that in this study we focus on the reception of the poem *Canigó* in Madrid. Let us briefly review Verdaguer's personal situation to understand just how Madrid was important in his life (Torrents 2002, 87-121). Summarizing, we can conclude that after his trip to Palestine (1886) Verdaguer started to suffer a personal crisis, foreshadowing a change in his life. He came into contact with an association that practiced exorcisms without ecclesiastic authorization. When the bishop of Barcelona and his patron, the marquis of Comillas found out, they relieved Verdaguer of all his tasks, and the bishop sent him to the church at La Gleba (1893). Verdaguer saw this as a banishment and two years later he abandoned La Gleba without permission. He went to Barcelona, to the home of D. Deseada Duran, who also belonged to the association that practiced exorcisms. In response, an ecclesiastic tribunal from Vic suspended his functions as a priest, and Verdaguer defended himself in a series of articles published in the press. Later, in 1897, he travelled to Madrid with the Duran family and it was there that he recovered his *exeat*, thanks to the Augustinian friars at El Escorial.

2. *Canigó* and *L'Altàntida*¹

Comparing the two outstanding long poems by Verdaguer is a difficult task. They are distinct from each other in theme and scope, and despite the huge success of the *L'Atlàntida*, some criticised its classicism and Verdaguer, unsatisfied, sought to emend it by writing a work which blended his love for his Catalan homeland with his passion for walking the mountains. At first glance, *Canigó* would seem to be a work of universal appeal: a young knight's transgressive love for a shepherdess. Still, there can be no mistake that the historical moment and places evoked in the poem are of special importance in Catalan history. Verdaguer sought to break with classical-style molds, to which he had adhered in the earlier poem. In *Canigó* his was an innovative epic concept: freedom of structure and form. This has led critics to examine the question of

¹ For further information about *L'Atlàntida*, see Puppo (31-34) and Torrents (2002, 63-73). For *Canigó* see Puppo (53-58), and notes to "The Two Bell Towers" (322-324), also Torrents (2002: 75-85).

whether the character of the poem is essentially legendary or epic. In any event, it does not seem clear what was understood by "legend," nor whether they grasped the deeper meaning in Verdaguer's use of this term to differentiate it, in particular, from the *epopee*. Joaquim Molas sheds light on this point in his article titled "Els poemes llargs de Verdaguer: ideologia i forma" (Verdaguer's long poems: ideology and form):

In fact, Verdaguer, putting personal experience more than theoretical principle on the table, forged a model for the long poem that, like the classical model, adheres rigorously to the "unity" of structure, but which, to meet modernity's canons, divides into a series of fragments articulating veritable "units" of effect; or of impression. (1987, 23)

Thus, the sense of *legend* that Verdaguer sought to convey was, in fact, similar to that of Victor Hugo in *La Légende des siècles*, which, according to Baudelaire, was "le seul poème épique qui pût être créé par un homme de son temps pour des lecteurs de son temps" (1987, 22) (the only epic poem that could be created by a man of his time for readers of his time). To reinforce this idea, we can also quote Puppo (unpublished translation of *Canigó* into English) where he states "Many are the tales within the tale."

Looking further into this change of paradigm, Josep M. Miquel i Vergés compares the two poems:

L'Atlàntida [...] will always hold the merit of transforming –in that doubtful and still indecisive moment– a reality of great hopes in our literary renaissance. In *Canigó*, [...] Verdaguer reveals a more refined sensibility. [...] *Canigó* has not the flaws of *L'Atlàntida*; the author still makes poetry without the human element, but the poem contains more harmony, and in the lyrical parts, it acquires a tone of more emotive and intense strength.

Following the literary crowning of Verdaguer for his *L'Atlàntida*, it comes as no surprise that critics should be puzzled by this paradigm shift.

3. The reception of *Canigó* in Madrid publications

This study is chronologically divided into two subgroups: from the publication of *Canigó* (although the date of printing reads 1886, the volume came out around Christmas 1885) to 1887, and from this date until the poet's death in 1902). Regarding our selection of material, the first of these periods turns up the most documents, divided under the headings *Critical reviews* and *Informative reviews* (the latter focusing on the appearance of the work).

3.1. Critical reviews (1886-1887)

The first review found in Madrid is signed by the Barcelona critic and writer Ramón D. Perés (Castellanos, 16-21), published in *El Imparcial* over 22 February, and 1 and 8 March 1886. After an introduction about Catalan language and society, the author presents Verdaguer, *L'Atlàntida* and his critical reception in Madrid, quoting, for instance, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo and Manuel de la Revilla. Perés, then focuses on *Canigó*, which he describes as "an ensign of the Catalan people."

As for the controversial question of qualifying the work as a legend or as an epic poem, Perés wrote that it cannot be considered a legend because the lyrical element "smothers the narrative [element]," and insisted that if the author chose this particular term to describe his work it was because he was not sure about the book's importance and concluded: "[W]retched modesty!" since if Verdaguer downplayed the poetics of the work, readers could not judge his book unfairly. Perés portrayed it as midway between old and modern, and when pressed to elaborate, he would use the following adjectives: naturalist, *physique*, legendary and allegoric. He adds that in some places we

find a lack of textual unity, but these instances are secondary and do not constitute an “unforgivable flaw.” According to Perés, what is most relevant are nature and descriptive passages. In this regard, the beginning of the seventh canto means the end of the nature poem, holding that the real subject of *Canigó* is the contest between Christendom and Islam, and after pointing out the priestly condition of the poet, stating that the driving away of the fairies, so pleasing and accommodating, by monks who wore black hoods triggered a counter-productive effect, converting the poem into a “sad legend of disaster.” Finally, he outlined his negative criticisms, which he called “huge defects”: a) the interference of the tale “Eixalada,” in canto nine, which he deems unnecessary, b) the importance given to Oliba in canto eleven and c) the laborious description of the Ripoll monastery’s façade, also in canto eleven. In conclusion, he stated that it was a “less pretentious [work] than *L’Atlàntida*, but also happier, and without a doubt, less cold.” One of its positive features is that this poem could be loved by those who liked both ancient and modern poetry. Finally, wrote Perés, writers from all over the world should learn the lesson of nature given by Verdaguer in *Canigó*.

The second review was published in *El Globo*, without signature, 10 March 1886. It is entitled “Jacinto Verdaguer” and after making reference to *L’Atlàntida* and also to several other poems published by Verdaguer, he focused on *Canigó*, and he stated that there were two different parts in it: the legendary one, which contents the descriptive part of the poem and also the allegoric one, for Verdaguer’s tendency to the Catholic propaganda.

This idea is no far from Perés’. Beyond that, it seems that this anonymous critic took into account some ideas from *El Imparcial*. We can reaffirm this hypothesis by the fact that he also stood out the image of the monks climbing up the mountain and driving away the fairies, who represented the bad and carnal passions. He continued emphasizing the descriptive and fantastic parts of the work and he finished with the comparison between this poem and *L’Atlàntida*. *Canigó* was not superior, but more agreeable, prettier and with more movement. Even though it has less pretensions of being a classic, there are some pieces inside which remind *Iliad*. Finally, he referred to the love for the “common homeland” expressed in “La Maladeta” (a piece belonging to canto four).

The last critic review that we have found is also unnamed and it was published in *El Correo Militar*, 7 May 1886. Under the title “El poema de la montaña (the mountain’s poem), he located *Canigó* geographically and, later, he affirmed that it was a legend for its religious and supernatural features which coexisted with the action of the storyline. Thus, according to the author, we can find the climax of Verdaguer’s inspiration in “La Maladeta.” Among its positive features, we can stand out the story told in canto five, the descriptions and historical references of canto six and the traditions and sweetness of some parts of canto seven (such as “Passatge d’Anníbal” and “Cant de Gentil”). About canto ten he stated: “[it is] the most pathetic and the most human part of all the work.” Also, he made reference to canto twelve, using the image of the monks climbing up *Canigó* and the fairies driving away. In his point of view, it is an “impressive picture, which has a great effect on the receiver.” After analyzing the storyline, he inferred in Verdaguer’s poetry and its common denominators: a) Religion: he stated that in his poem we can find this item by Oliba Bishop; b) Nature: he portrayed nature with a remarkable vividness and precision; and finally c) his homeland. He asserted that Catalan people extend it until where the language arrives.

About its negative features, he deemed that maybe the digressions that we can find in cantos seven and nine can disturb the main storyline of the poem. Also, he added

some extra details of canto eleven, for instance when Oliba described the Ripoll monastery's façade.²

Finally, we conclude stating that the most documented review is the Perés' one, being, moreover, the first one published. Actually, it seems that some other critics based their opinions on Perés' judgements, such as when he criticized the expulsion of the fairies by the monks, in the last canto. About the comparison with *L'Atlàntida*, Perés assured that *Canigó* was less pretentious, but with better results, opinion shared with *El Globo*'s reviewer.

3.2. Informative reviews (1886-1887)

The first informative review was found in *La Época*, 15 January 1886, and it was signed by an unknown L. A. It appeared with the title "Notas literarias (Literary notes)" and he reproduced literally the judgment of Francesc Miquel i Badia published in *Diario de Barcelona* (13 January 1886, 495-496). In this review, the author affirmed that it is a poem which could be understood by people who do not know anything about rhetoric and he assured that it will be more successful than *L'Atlàntida*. In spite of these judgements, he also admitted that the characters do not attract the reader's attention.

El Diario Español, 11 February 1886, published a brief and an anonymous review about *Canigó* in the section "Bibliography." The author remarked its positive features, such as its versification, its edition, its map (it was included at the end of the book) and also he described the book as a "beautiful and dramatic legend."

Later, we focus on *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 27 February 1886, in which there is a very brief review signed V. and included in the section called "Bibliography." The author qualified the work as "new and superb" and after copying all the twelve titles of each canto in Catalan, he informed that it contained some scholar notes and also a valuable map of the Pyrenees. He finally pointed out that it was stapled by book cloth.

El Siglo Futuro, 15 March 1886, reproduced the Verdaguer's biography written by Francesc de Paula Rierola and published in the tenth number of *La Hormiga de Oro* (1st week of March, 1886), without any other extra opinion about *Canigó*. Furthermore, we should stand out a review entitled "Mossen Jacinto Verdaguer y su Leyenda *Canigó*" (Priest Jacint Verdaguer and his legend *Canigó*) and published in *La Unión*, 20 March 1886, in which an anonymous reviewer wrote about "the Spanish dialects," because he considered Verdaguer as "a regional poet." Despite the title, he didn't make any other reference to *Canigó*.

The next-to-last paper appeared in *El Siglo Futuro*, 31 March 1886. This document contained the whole reproduction of canto two translated into Spanish by Jaume Nogués i Taulet, which was published by the first time in *La Hormiga de Oro*, 1886. In this case, it appeared at the first page, without any introduction.

Finally, we mention *La Época*, 26 August 1886, in particular the section "libros nuevos" (new books). Here, we can find an anonymous article about *Canigó*, which, according to the author, it was composed by beautiful verses and, after listing all the canto's titles in Catalan, he stood out its diversity of meters, the beauty of its images and also the descriptions of the nature. He also reminded that Verdaguer's inspiration was always religious.

² We note that this last negative critique was also shared with Perés, because they didn't understand the poem's subtitle.

Although in all cases the epopee had several positive critics, we can also take into account that they conceive *Canigó* as a Spanish national poem, without any reference to its Catalan background. And, finally, we can stand out that a huge number of newspapers took some extracts from the Catalan press to give more quality to their articles.

3.3 Reception of the translation into Spanish of *Canigó* by the Count of Cedillo (1898)

We consider translation as a part of reception. For this reason, we include in our study the reception of the Spanish version of *Canigó*, published in Madrid. To start with, we should underline two important features of the translator, the Count of Cedillo whose real name was Jerónimo López de Ayala-Álvarez de Toledo y del Hierro (Toledo, 1862 - Rome, 1934) and who translated the legend for the first time in a volume, published by Fortanet, in Madrid, in 1898. His translation was written in prose and verse, following the advice given by Verdaguer to the Count (unpublished letter of 6 December 1896). It is known that Cedillo found out a lot of information about the mountain and even he made and described a trip to Canigó. Its review is located in the translation's volume, and it appears as an appendix which takes up 47 pages. It is remarkable the fact that Cedillo included the author's notes; the French translator's ones (Josep Tolrà de Bordas) and his own ones.

This translation was launched on 2 May 1898, and the first review that we find in the press is dated of 25 May, published in *La Época* and signed by an anonymous S. About the translator, the journalist affirmed that he was a "cultured person and with refined taste." And about the edition of the book, he stated: "here where nobody buys books, Cedillo dares to publish a magnificent edition with etchings and illustrations of artistic merit."

Afterwards, in the same newspaper but dated of 3 June 1898, the unknown Zeda affirmed:

Mr. Count of Cedillo has studied with love the work of the Catalan poet; he has analysed it sentence by sentence and word by word; he has known how to be similar to the author's spirit.

Meanwhile, he made some negative critics, such as:

This poem visibly declines in the last cantos. The reason is clear: after the superb hymn to *La Maladeta*, the rest of the poem seems to be pale [...] in the same way that after staring at the Pyrenees, all other tops seem to be short.

And he concluded maintaining that it was a shame that this Castilian writer didn't translate the whole poem in verse.

On 5 June 1898 we find an article signed by F.N.L in *El Globo*. He stated that *Canigó* was a Pyrenean poem and readers need to walk around the zone to understand it. Also, it offers historical and artistic knowledge, qualities shared with the translator. He mentioned, as well, that it was a faithful and nice translation. Furthermore, he explained, to make contrast with Zeda, that using verse and prose was a wise decision, above all for the difficulties of the translation.

The Catholic newspaper *El Siglo Futuro*, 26 July 1898, published a review signed X, comparing the two outstanding poems by Verdaguer: *L'Atlàntida* and *Canigó*. He assured that the latter was more interesting than the former. He also admitted that the translation of *Canigó* is more difficult than some other Verdaguer's versions. This is caused, above all by the rural lexis and natural vocabulary used. Subsequently, he presented a stanza of "La Maladeta" and he exposed that the free verse used by Cedillo sometimes looked a little bit poor, compared with the sovereign rhyme written by

Verdaguer. However, he accepted that Cedillo made his best effort to decode it and the Spanish language used there was “very clean.”

Gómez de Baquero, in *La España Moderna*, 1 September 1898, settled that the Spanish regional literary creations were better known abroad than inside of his country. He illustrated his own words giving some details: *Canigó* was entirely translated into French, half translated into Italian and, in contrast, in Spanish we waited twelve years to have a full version. He found interesting, as FNL, that the translation was in verse and in prose. About the notes added at the end of the version, Gómez de Baquero judged them positively, above all the addition of the French translator’s ones.

Anyway, one of the last reviews found was published in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, October-November 1898, through an unknown journalist who signed X and who warned that the poetic prose was used for making the task easy.

And, last but not least, we mention Víctor Balaguer, who wrote a report for Real Academia Española³ which took up 14 pages. His assessment was positive, quoting Cedillo’s prologue and explaining that *Canigó* had been lucky to have a translator like him, because he was really interested on walking the mountains.

In brief, this translation does not show a huge number of critical reviews. Actually, this point is treated by Verdaguer when he wrote a letter to Cedillo (18 November 1898) in which he affirmed: “La obra de V. mereció otra cosa” (Your work deserved so much more). Despite this judgement, it is clear that the reviews of the Spanish version of *Canigó* mixed several opinions about the form of the translation (verse or prose) and about the literary level of last cantos.

3.5 Critic reviews in the last period (1887-1902)

Firstly, comparing with the launch of the poem, we deem that the reception in this period was minor. However, we have found some information about the book, above all after the poet’s death. Before travelling to 1902, let us stop in 1890, in particular in an article written by Melcior de Palau (see Rocafiguera) published in *Revista Contemporánea*, 15 November 1890, in the section “Acontecimientos literarios. 1890” (literary happenings. 1890). In this article, he explained that in *Canigó* the top of the mountains had feelings and history, as well as the Pyrenees’ wet river beds. Then, he compared it with *L’Atlàntida*, and he concluded that the latter was its *older* sister.

Starting by 1902, we can quote a text by Miquel Costa i Llobera from *Revista Ibero-Americana de Ciencias Eclesiásticas*. The article took up eight pages (113-120) and it added a biography of the poet, and also it mentioned *Canigó*. Actually, after comparing this poem with *L’Atlàntida*, he assured that the legend published in 1886 was “más propiamente épico por su asunto, más humano y ameno por su variedad de tonos” (more epic in its story line, humaner and more enjoyable for its range of tones) and he emphasized that the poet took into account some local legends. Moreover, he compared Verdaguer’s poetry with Thomas Moore’s one, in the Gentil’s description when he was kidnapped by the fairies (canto seven) and with Victor Hugo in the descriptions of “La Maladeta” or “Passatge d’Anníbal.” The author of the article shared the thought of Ramón D. Perés about the end of the poem, because he stated that when in its end some monks climbed up the mountain to drive away the fairies, “the non-pious reader can

³ Cedillo asked a report to Real Academia Española for an assessment of his translation. In that times, the current legislation allowed it, and it permitted to launch his book and also that the State bought some books for public libraries.

experiment some repulsion for the austerity of the cross, which produces an opposite effect from the author's aim."

Now, we can compare some different points of view of several articles about Verdaguer's death. Although they are a little bit short, altogether form a uniform whole. Before starting, we have to stand out that Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo was, between above all critics and writers from Madrid, a very respected and admired person. It is for this reason and because he sent a letter to Verdaguer to congratulate him for the launch of his new poem (25 January 1886) that we can find a relationship between his point of view about the epos and some other author's opinions. For instance, Menéndez Pelayo compared Verdaguer to Victor Hugo. Some days later, we find this comparison in two articles: firstly in an anonymous text entitled "El poeta Verdaguer" (the poet Verdaguer) and published in *El día*, 4 June 1902, and secondly in another newspaper called *El Globo*, 11 June 1902 (Jacinto Verdaguer). In both cases, they copied an extract of the letter written by Menéndez and sent to Verdaguer. About the connection between *Canigó* and *La Légende des siècles*, done firstly by Menéndez, it was Mariano de Cavia⁴ the first writer who addressed this matter, in an article published by *El Imparcial*, 11 June 1902 and entitled "Verdaguer." Also, an anonymous Zeda dealt with this subject in *La Época* of the same day, although adding some other famous names, such as Homer, Dante, Valmiki, etc. Zeda focused more attention on the poem than Mariano de Cavia and he portrayed the volume by some adjectives as magnificent, robust, vigorous, etc. In *El Álbum Ibero-americano*, 22 June 1902, Francisco de P. Flaquer, director of this magazine, in the section "Crónica Europea y Americana" (American and European account) also pointed out that an "eminent critic" had given to *Canigó* the same value as *La Légende des siècles*.

To sum up this section, we should insist on the influence of Menéndez Pelayo on the critics and writers from Madrid. Costa i Llobera, on his behalf, stated that *Canigó* was strictly epic, more than *L'Atlàntida*, opinion which is far from other priests as Fèlix Sardà i Salvany or Francisco Blanco García, who assured that the success and the superiority of the 1877 poem was undeniable. Melcior de Palau, translator of this poem in 1878, also considered *L'Atlàntida* better than *Canigó*. Some authors remarked several interesting sections of the 1886's poem, for instance, "La Maladeta" or "Passatge d'Anníbal."

4. As a conclusion

Publications of all types and political leanings wrote about *Canigó*. We suspect that the overwhelming international success of *L'Atlàntida* contributed to the fact that critics of every literary bent paid some sort of attention to the new poem; the majority of reviews dealing with *Canigó* invariably made mention of the epic prize-winner at the 1877 Jocs Florals in Barcelona.

Some Madrid's critics devoted special attention to the new poem. Inevitably, they all drew comparisons between the two Verdaguerian epic poems and the result was a wide range of opinions. In those who argued the superiority of *Canigó* we find Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo who assured the new poem's greater success, despite its admittedly narrower and more localised subject matter. Still, analysis of Madrid's press reviews during the period studied confirms that critics regarded *L'Atlàntida* as superior to *Canigó*. Perhaps if the new poem had been originally published in a bilingual

⁴ He published the same article entitled "Verdaguer" in *La Revista Blanca: sociología, ciencia y arte* 97 (July 1902): 21-24.

Catalan-Spanish edition, as was *L'Atlàntida*, its echo in both the Catalan and the Madrid-centred press might have been greater. This, of course, remains open to speculation.

It was surely Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo's famous letter to Verdaguer (25 January 1886) in which he praised the poem that prompted many Spanish critics to take interest in *Canigó*. In fact, most reviews either state this expressly or compare the poem with Victor Hugo's *La Légende des siècles*, as Menéndez had done. The other salient point of debate was whether the work ought to be considered a legend or an epic poem, dividing opinions well in all the studied period.

The immediate critical reception of the poem appeared on the scene across a spectrum of publications of diverse character and ideology, sharing in common only one aim: to announce the appearance of a new Verdaguer poem. In the Catholic-leaning press, practically all reviewers noted the superiority of *L'Atlàntida* over *Canigó*, the only exception being Miquel Costa i Llobera, who, in *Revista Ibero-Americana de Ciencias Eclesiàstiques*, stated that it was “más propiamente épico por su asunto, más humano y ameno por su variedad de tonos” (more properly epic in subject matter, more human and accessible in its range of tones). Following its immediate reception and up until 1902, *Canigó* did not generate so much attention in the press, either because of the passing of time, or the poet's period of crisis, or shifting literary trends. However, it is true that the Count of Cedillo's translation (1898) revived interest in the poem once again, though reviews were sparse, except for a few, for instance, in *La España Moderna*, in Madrid. Verdaguer himself remarked in a letter to Cedillo dated 18 November 1898: “La obra de V. mereció otra cosa” (Your work deserved so much more).

Moreover, Verdaguer prepared and published in 1901 his second edition of *Canigó*, in which he included the epilogue ‘Los dos campanars’ (the two tower bells).⁵ This second edition that appeared a year before his death underscores the poet's keen interest in the work. It is worth noting here that *Canigó*, which had drawn so much praise from critics when it first came out, seemed to lose its individual momentum, given that after the poet's death nearly all subsequent appearances of *Canigó* were limited to editions of Verdaguer's complete works –except for that of Llibreria Científich-Literaria Josep Agustí (1912), Ràfols (1921) and Orbis (1931), or else adaptations by Josep Carner (1910) and by Artur Martorell (1929).

⁵ See Puppo (322-324).

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