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**Review: Emili Samper (ed.), *The Myths of the Republic: Literature and Identity*. Col. “Estudis Catalans 8”, Edition Reichenberger, Kassel, 2016, 239 pp.**

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Journalism and history—or historiographical discourse—do not qualify as transparent evidence of facts. To put it in Linda Hutcheon’s words, it has “a tendency towards myth and illusion-making” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, Routledge, London-New York, 1988, p. 16). History is thus semiotically transmitted. Myths, forged and spread across literature and popular culture, play a crucial role in the construction of the past and the popular mind-set. In Barthes’s theory, the ideological function of the myth is to naturalize what culture is, namely, to make dominant cultural and historical values, beliefs, and attitudes seem self-evident, timeless, and akin to common sense (*Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York, 1972, p. 143). In short, myths shape the historical knowledge of the past and the identity of nations, together with a common language and devastating events such as battles.

Patriotic rhetoric usually regards war as a foundational moment that provides the nation with a mythical origin. It is typically a tale of how peace is achieved after chaos: every war often entails a renaissance of a refurbished nation. In Catalan culture, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) is arguably the episode that gives birth to contemporary Catalonia. But not only is warfare a determining factor in the history of what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities”; jointly with historical characters, rituals and language, specific events of the past can function as legitimising elements of a national project. Over recent years, the Catalan pro-independence movement has strived to renew its programmatic principles, and has coined a new term, “sobiranisme”—the “sovereignist movement”—which includes the old concepts of “independentisme” and “catalanisme”. By placing greater emphasis on social matters and peaceful, democratic means, the sovereignist movement claims the right to choose if Catalonia wants to remain part of Spain or not. Therefore, its main goal is not necessarily independence, which means that pro-independence supporters stand alongside those who just want to vote for a referendum on independence. This shift in political strategy or feeling seems to be accompanied by a refreshed interest in the mythology of the Republic. The First (1873-1874) and Second (1931-1939) Spanish Republics are two historical periods that can legitimise what the Catalan Republic pro-independence supporters yearn for nowadays.

Published by Reichenberger, *The Myths of the Republic: Literature and Identity*, collects thirteen essays on the First and Second Spanish Republics, written by the members of the Grup de Recerca Identitats en la Literatura

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Catalana, who explore the promoters, values, and images of the Catalan Republican ideology. Roger Canadell studies the role played by one of the Catalan “cultural saints”, Josep Anselm Clavé (1824-1874), in the building and dissemination of Republican ideals—liberty, equality and fraternity, truth and justice—for a modern, progressive society. He performed this ideological task through his poems and music and in his work in choral societies, which makes him one of the key referents of Catalan Republicanism. The relevance of Clavé is so remarkable that Canadell even talks about a “Claverian culture”, a specific lifestyle and identity grounded in intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic principles that shaped his conception of associations and cultural projects, particularly workers’ groups. Social justice, liberty, laicism, the fight against the monarchy, and other elements of the Republican creed, as shown in Clavé’s music and poetry, finally led him to federalism.

In the next two essays, Magí Sunyer and Gabriel Sansano explore the first theatre produced in Catalan before the Bourbon Restoration in 1874. While Sunyer examines the plays written in Catalonia, Sansano addresses Valencian authors of the same period. Sunyer specifically analyses four comedies with a clear political message: Frederic Soler’s *L’últim rei de Magnòlia* (1868), Joan Alonso del Real’s *La passió política* (2014) and Rossend Arús i Arderius’s *Lo primer any republicà* (1873) and *Mai més monarquia!* (1873). These comedies crave regeneration and condemn absolutism, corruption, capital outflow, politicians’ changing allegiances, hypocrisy, the centralism of Madrid, the clergy, repression, and the death penalty. Conversely, Sansano argues that the jocose and entertaining nature of the Valencian theatre, whose recipients were generally popular classes with a rural background and conservative ideology, prevents a more critical view of social changes promoted by Republicanism. This literary harmlessness may help clarify the different historical trajectories of Catalonia and Valencia to some extent.

The fourth essay shifts from literature to painting. Josep M. Domingo and Anna Llovera look into Apel·les Mestre’s vast compilation of sketches, drawings, and paintings entitled *Llibre verd* (1874-1895). Although it is an interesting piece that broadens the scope of the volume, the main argument is not completely focused on the general topic of the volume. The authors pay special attention to the “shadows of the memory”, the collection of figures and subconscious references provided by the visual arts or the role literature plays in the emerging mass society and leisure industry. Nevertheless, there is barely any explicit allusion to politics except for what they call the politic nature of the public presence of the poet, which is evidenced in Mestres’s cravings for peace, fraternity, and equality, and his complaints about the permanent political crisis in Spain and conservatism.

The next two essays revolve around the poetic work of Rossend Arús (1845-1891), whose play *La passió política* is discussed in a previous chapter. Pere Gabriel centres on some political poems, whereas Margalida Tomàs gives a general overview of Arús’s poetry. Gabriel stresses the importance of political literature to fashion a left-wing culture, as well as the role of commemorations and symbolic celebrations in creating a national culture. This was in fact one of the challenges Catalanism had to confront in the 1880s as a response to the pressure applied by the central administration to the parallel process of Spanish cultural and political nationalisation. Tomàs explores the formal aspects, registers, and themes of Arús’s poems, although she claims that hers is only a seminal approach that should be completed in a much deeper bibliographical study. The following essay, by Emili Samper, also covers political poetry. This scholar discusses the work of Cels Gomis (1841-1915), who follows the aesthetics of two schools: the anarchist and the republican literature schools. His poems deal with several topics ranging from the force of the people to the equality of the various professions, and examine the exaltation of work and freedom, progress, human genius, the harsh conditions of the workers, and scientific and technological advances.

Next chapters move from poetry to narrative. Margarida Aritzeta writes on the myth of Vilaniu, an imaginary medium-sized town depicted in three novels by Narcís Oller: *Vilaniu* (1885), *La febre d’or* (1890-1892), and *La bogeria* (1899). The provincial climate of Vilaniu—whose real referent is Valls, Oller’s home town—is in strikingly contrasted with the cosmopolitan spirit of the capital, Barcelona. The novels show the transformation of rural Catalonia into an industrial country, a change of epoch. The myth of Vilaniu, Aritzeta states, has been traditionally interpreted as an allegory of the meanness, provincialism, and maliciousness typical of small towns; however, the scholar holds that it epitomises “the ideal place for large-scale economic speculation with the coming of the railway line” (p. 135), a topic also explored in English literature such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s realist novel *Cranford* (1853). *Myths of the Republic* also broaches the issue of gender in two essays. On the one

hand, Carme Oriol examines Sara Llorens's correspondence with Rossend Serra i Pagès, her teacher and mentor, between 1904 and 1929. Oriol brings to the fore the contribution Llorens made to spreading Republican educational, social, and cultural values: reading programmes for children, new public libraries, teacher training and pedagogical innovation, art festivals for townspeople, and better school facilities. On the other hand, Montserrat Palau and Montserrat Duch consider the changes undergone by women in terms of female look and social and sexual mores under the Second Spanish Republic, as shown in some contemporary novels such as those published by Rosa M. Arquimbau, Carme Montoriol, and Mercè Rodoreda. These reforms were slow and sporadic because they were at odds with the conventional female script at the time. Despite legal developments, Palau and Duch claim, Republican politics could not modify the everyday reality of gender relations. Montserrat Corretger precisely underlines the difficulties the novels of Odó Hurtado (1902-1965) found under the Francoist regime due to their depiction of the sentimental and moral life of the Catalan bourgeoisie. If women's advances were not fully understood under the democratic Second Republic, moral and sexual freedom were fiercely repressed in post-war Spain. Corretger stresses the peculiarity of Hurtado's narrative in the existing canon of Catalan literature, because it was influenced by inter-war French and English authors who "aimed above all to create ambiances, characters and situations" (p. 181). Therefore, the dictatorial censorship and the modernity and freshness of his novels in a depressed political and literary context affected the reception of his work. Like Corretger's essay, Oriol Teixell's moves forward to exile writing: he analyses the correspondence between Joan Puig i Ferrer and Domènec Guansé (1949-1954). In general, their letters reveal the hardships Catalan authors and the literary industry had to endure during the dictatorship. The last chapter, written by Alfons Gregori, examines fantasy and republican references in Jesús Moncada's short stories (1941-2005). Moncada's fiction contains widespread images and symbols of the Republican ideology; furthermore, the writer makes a political satire of Franco's regime in many stories. They are usually set in Mequinensa, which is not the real town in Aragon, but a legendary spot created by Moncada's nostalgic imagination. Fictional Mequinensa is a Republican, anticlerical and libertarian place, an Arcadian world of the lost memories of the children who had to go into exile after Franco's victory in 1939. Anticlericalism, the need for education, and the denunciation of the hypocritical and even barbarous ruling elites are examples of Republican referents in Moncada's imaginative and ironic prose.

Wholly regarded, although the book title suggests a study on the icons, representations, themes, and images that shaped the Republican ideal over the last 150 years in literature and art, the essays denote a historiographical or textual rather than cultural approach to literature. Hence some texts seem too descriptive at times and others address the subject matter of the volume somewhat obliquely. The compilation actually proves "the role that literature has played in republican projects" as stated in the prologue (p. 1); however, not all the essays discuss "the reflection of the republican ideal in literary texts". Indeed, absolute coherence becomes a difficult goal to achieve when editing a large collection with so many authors. All in all, *The Myths of the Republic* completes previous research such as Santiago Fortuño and Germà Colon's edited volume on the literature of the Second Spanish Republic, *La República de les Lletres* (Universitat Jaume I, Castelló de la Plana, 2008). In general, whilst considerable literary and historiographic bibliography on the Second Spanish Republic and exile has been produced, research on the First Republic is still much needed. Therefore, this book fills an important gap in Catalan studies. Many eminent and other lesser-known authors in myriad literary and artistic genres—political poetry, folk literature, women's writing, painting, theatre, correspondence, and narrative—are thoroughly analysed in the volume. It is a rigorous academic contribution that establishes a Republican literary tradition in Catalan culture, with a history of fight against injustice, oppression, and discrimination in search of a more democratic and egalitarian society.