

Grup de Recerca Folklorica d'Osona i Salvador Rebés, *Cançons tradicionals catalanes recollides per Jacint Verdaguer*, Barcelona, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2002, 144 pp. +1 CD

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Catalonia has latterly been very fortunate in the number of active researchers into its rich folk song collections which were made from the middle of the 19th century up to the time of the Spanish Civil War but buried in Franco's time. Not a year goes by these days without another gem emerging –often from one or more of these self-same authors– and this book is no exception.

Mgr Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902), whose collected songs are the subject of the book, is better known as the most distinguished poet of the Catalan *Renaixença* and the *Jocs Florals*. He came from Folgueroles, not far from Osona, the base of the Research Group, although he is a sufficiently important figure for such proximity not to matter. His poetry reflects his lifelong interest in the songs of his birthplace, and indeed a number of his poems have been set to music and have passed into the tradition.

Verdaguer was a contemporary of Manuel Milà i Fontanals and Marià Aguiló, and thus also of Francis J. Child. Just as Child relied on others to collect and supply him with songs that eventually went into *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*,¹ so did Milà i Fontanals for songs to go in his slightly earlier *Romancerillo catalán*² of 1882. Verdaguer was one of his most important sources. Aguiló also used some of Verdaguer's material to reconstruct ballads for his *Romancer popular*³ of 1893. In fact, both Milà i Fontanals and Aguiló reworked Verdaguer's material. The importance of this present publication is that for the first time we can see what Verdaguer collected.

Working from the original manuscripts and notes, the authors have attempted to present the original fruits of Verdaguer's work as accurately as possible. The footnotes to each of the 72 songs and 16 *corrandes* (quatrains) diligently point out the editorial corrections that have had to be made. The authors have employed a light touch, just enough to aid intelligibility and to distort the originals as little as possible.

The songs are categorised into ten groups: supernatural events, historical events, breaking the law, family relations, amorous conquests, frustrated love, religion, miscellaneous, children's songs and the *corrandes*. As usual in

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¹ Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols, Cambridge, MA, Houghton, Mifflin, 1884-98, repr. New York: Dover, 1965.

² Manuel Milà i Fontanals, *Romancerillo catalán*, 2nd ed., Barcelona, Verdaguer, 1882, repr. Alta Fulla, 1999.

³ Marià Aguiló i Fuster, *Romancer popular de la terra catalana*, Barcelona, Espasa, 1893.

such collections, love and religion predominate, although it is worth noting that Verdaguer's is one of the first collections to include children's songs, as a commentator in the Catalan folk music journal *Caramella*⁴ points out.

Verdaguer, like the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould in England, collected and wrote down exactly what he heard, however rough, bawdy or apparently illiterate. As a result we hear the people speaking in their own language: a far cry from Aguiló's high-flown reworkings. There are some interesting cross-cultural parallels, too: the version of *El pobre terrisser* bears more than a passing resemblance to the English *Methody Parson* in its theme (not to mention Chaucer), while *El serpent de Manlleu* is clearly the Catalan equivalent of the *Lambton Worm*, thus emphasising the popularity of such themes across Europe. Sadly, as the authors' notes reveal, some of the manuscripts have been attacked by a censor's pencil and scissors at some stage.

As with other collections of the mid-19th century, all we have is the words; there is no record of the music. However, what the authors have done is in my view both sensitive and ingenious. Capitalising on their knowledge of and primary research in the area where the songs came from, they have included variants of 31 of these songs in a CD, and put the words of their own collected versions side-by-side with Verdaguer's originals in the book. Of course, we cannot know whether the recorded versions are the lineal descendants of Verdaguer's (and in some cases they clearly are not), but we can see the possibility of the folk process on the originals, and in any case, hearing these songs performed in whatever version helps to bring Verdaguer's to life.

The source of a good many of the songs on the book CD is clearly the fieldwork that the authors did for the Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana. Indeed, eleven of them are included on the CD entitled *Cançons i tonades tradicionals de la comarca d'Osona*.⁵ Some of the tracks on the book CD are obviously the same as those on the *Osona* CD. However, the rest are not, and in my view the versions given on the book CD (by the same singers, incidentally) are rather better than the ones on the *Osona* CD. They have a slightly rougher edge to them, with the occasional cough, but I think the singing has much more character. As for the remaining twenty songs on the CD, as far as I know they are previously unpublished recordings, which means that even without the book, the CD is an important publication.

There is virtually no commentary on the individual songs, although the book's introduction has a most interesting and illuminating short discourse on Verdaguer's relationship with his fellow folklorists and numerous examples of folksong influences in his poems. I am therefore rather forced to conclude that the target readership is primarily scholarly and literary. I fear

⁴ Review of this same book by Roser Reixach, *Caramella*, IX, 2003, p. 92.

⁵ Fonoteca de música tradicional catalana, sèrie 1 volum 2: *Cançons i tonades tradicionals de la comarca d'Osona*, CD DT-002, Barcelona, Centre de Promoció de la Cultura Popular i Tradicional Catalana, 1994.

—though I hope I am wrong— that some folk enthusiasts may find the book too dry, which is a pity, because there are some real jewels to be found in it.

In spite of this criticism, I recommend this is an essential work for any serious student of Catalan folk song.

María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez, *Romancero y cancionero de Los Navalmorales (Toledo)*, Los Navalmorales, Vientos del Pueblo, 2002, 252 pp.

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Los Navalmorales es una comunidad agrícola de alrededor de 2695 habitantes ubicada en el suroeste de la provincia de Toledo, España, en la comunidad autónoma de Castilla-La Mancha, cerca de los límites con Extremadura. En el volumen aquí reseñado se publica un rico panorama del acervo de romances y cantos cultivados en la localidad, aprovechando la labor previa de algunos recopiladores locales de romances, canciones y coplas, como el trabajo de campo emprendido por María Victoria Navas Sánchez-Élez, la editora de libro, con la colaboración de una docena de recolectores.

La colección está organizada en tres partes: la primera se conforma por los romances (61 textos en total), de los cuales la editora presenta, cuando las hay, distintas versiones, toda vez que, como lo señala,

en un romance tradicional no hay un texto único fijado, sino variantes. Es un proceso que, a lo que sabemos, tiene unos siete siglos de vida; y seguirá vivo mientras continúe siendo dinámico y creativo, y mientras siga teniendo significado para los que lo cantan. De ahí que las frases del tipo “Eso no se canta así”, “Mi madre o decía de otra manera” no tienen sentido, pues cada romance tradicional no es un hecho en sí sino que el conjunto de las variantes es realmente el propio romance (24).

María Victoria Navas se refiere, asimismo, a la importancia del pliego de cordel en la difusión del romance, en virtud del trajín de los ciegos y los copleros a lo largo de los siglos XIX y XX, quienes vendían, y generalmente cantaban también, romances y coplas en pliegos sueltos. Gracias a esta labor comercial y de difusión, “estos textos, a veces, han sido apropiados

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