

Henri Collet, *L'Île de Barataria* (1929)

Dedicated “To Maurice Barrès in memoriam”—recall that Barrès had written impressions of his travels in Spain, in *Du sang, de la volupté, de la mort* (1894), and *Greco ou le Secret de Tolède* (1911)—*L'Île de Barataria* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1929), the sole novel by the composer, musicographer, and hispanist Henri Collet (1885–1951), alludes to Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and more specifically to Chapter XLV of the Second Part (1614), entitled “De cómo el gran Sancho Panza tomó posesión de su insula y del modo que comenzó a gobernar” (“How the Great Sancho Panza Took Possession of His Island, and the Manner in which He Set about To Govern It”).

The first chapter of Collet’s novel begins in the manner of autofiction: it introduces a young French doctoral student (the author) and describes in highly realistic fashion his activities as a researcher in the archives of the Escorial, not far from Madrid, in the company of the monk-musicologist Fr Luis Villalva Muñoz (1872–1921). Under the influence of Villalva, who at the time was preoccupied with the musical instruments described in *Don Quixote*, the protagonist begins to take a greater interest in Cervantes’s novel. After examining the Aragonese Cervantes Album (*Album cervantino aragonés de los trabajos literarios y artísticos con que se ha celebrado en Zaragoza y Pedrola el III centenario de la edición principe del Quijote*), published in Madrid by the Duchess of Villahermosa with the date 1905, and reading a report by one of the best Aragonese scholars, Collet suddenly is struck by the possibility that Don Quixote really existed: “And now I no longer know where truth ends and error begins”, the narrator avers (pg. 24). At this point, the novel turns into a mystery in which Collet feels compelled to reinvent himself as a veritable detective on the hunt for Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Dulcinea, in a universe that skilfully interweaves reality and fiction, historical truth and phantasmagoria. We follow the protagonist on the Spanish roads trod by the “ingenioso hidalgo”, visiting Argamasilla de Alba (Quixote’s presumed village), Saragossa and Pedrola (Aragonese towns that Cervantes places on his fictional island of Barataria), Toboso (where Dulcinea’s descendants live), and the monastery of San Juan de la Peña which “Richard Wagner evokes so faithfully in his *Monsalvat* in *Parsifal*” (pg. 161) and whose ancient grotto is said to have served as a haunt for necromancers.

All these adventures and wanderings are embellished with numerous learned references to Spanish literature (e.g., specific citations of *Don Quixote*, *La ruta de Don Quijote* and *Castilla* by Azorín [José Martínez Ruiz], the comedy *The Son of the Lions* by Lope de Vega, works by the great Spanish mystics, Manuel Ugarte’s *Visiones de España*, “Un viaje al Pirineo” by the geographer Rafael Torres Campos), French literature (Huysmans’s *Là-bas* and *L’Oblat*), and music (Victoria, Guerrero, Morales, Comes... and Wagner), but also numerous and highly appetising allusions to the gastronomy of the *tertulias* of the Iberian peninsula.

After the table of contents and foreword (pg. 1), the work is structured around seven chapters, none of which bears a precise title: "A Dinner at the Escorial" (Ch. 1, pg. 3), "In the Land of Don Quixote" (Ch. 2, pg. 28), "In Barataria" (Ch. 3, pg. 58), "Towards the Cave of Montesinos" (Ch. 4, pg. 95), "In Merlin's Palace" (Ch. 5, pg. 125), "At Montsalvat" (Ch. 6, p. 159), "Don Quixote and Dulcinea" (Ch. 7, pg. 215).

On Wednesday, 8 May 1929, the commission of the national award for travel literature granted by the French Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts convened in full session, presided over by Auguste Dorchain, to elect a laureate of the prize for prose for 1929. Thirteen members were present: Dorchain, Charles Couyha, André Dumas, Maurice Donnay, Léon Hennique, Pol Neveux, Henri de Régner, Gustave Rivet, André Rivoire, Victor-Émile Michelet, Gabriel Faure (the writer, a friend of Malraux's), Alcanter de Brahm, and André Foulon de Vaulx. In competition with three other candidates (Suzanne Martinon, Pierre Fervacque, and Alice Poulleau) Collet won a majority of votes in the fourth round and thus found himself declared laureate for his novel *L'Île de Barataria*. The specialist periodicals (the *Bulletin de la Société d'études des professeurs de langues méridionales*, the *Revue de l'Amérique latine*, *Le Quotidien*), announced the composer-novelist's success.

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Further reading

- *Bulletin de la Société d'Études des Professeurs de Langues Méridionales*, 25^e année, n^o 66, octobre-décembre 1929, p. 16.
- Cervantes, Miguel de, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, edición del IV Centenario, Madrid, Real Academia Española, Asociación de Academias de la lengua española, 2004.
- Collet, Henri, « Rapport à Monsieur le Ministre du Boursier National de Voyage Littéraire de 1929 », *Rapport manuscrit*, exemplaire en copie-carbone, Paris, Archives privées Clostre-Collet, non daté [1930 ?], 12 p. en recto simple.
- Etcharry, Stéphan, « *Cervantes y el Quijote en la obra pedagógica, literaria y musical de Henri Collet* », dans Lolo, Begoña (dir.), *Cervantes y el Quijote en la música. Estudios sobre la recepción de un mito*, Madrid, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2007, p. 473-489.
- Etcharry, Stéphan, *Henri Collet (1885-1951), compositeur : un itinéraire singulier dans l'hispanisme musical français* (dir. Louis Jambou), Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004, p. 297-303 (exemplaire microfiché, Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, Université de Lille III, code : 1054.42528/04).

- Gallois, Jean, *Henri Collet ou l'Espagne impérieuse*, Drize, Papillon, coll. « Mélophiles », n° 9, 2001.
- *Journal Officiel de la République française*, 61^e année, n° 112, mardi 14 mai 1929, p. 5448.
- *Le Quotidien*, 7^e année, n° 2492, Paris, mardi 10 décembre 1929, p. 4.
- *Revue de l'Amérique latine*, 9^e année, tome XIX, n° 98, Paris, 1^{er} février 1930, p. 182.

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