

Henri Collet, *Victoria* (1914)

It was after returning permanently to Paris, on the eve of the First World War, that Henri Collet (1885–1951) published his *Victoria* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1914, part of the series “Les Maîtres de la musique”), drawing on his extensive doctoral research in the archives and libraries of the Iberian peninsula from 1907 to about 1912 (he had previously visited the country to learn the language at the Marist college in Vitoria in Álava province, in the summers of 1904 and 1905). He had already devoted the whole of the last and longest chapter (Ch. IX, pp. 380–476) of his doctoral thesis *Le mysticisme musical espagnol au xvi^e siècle* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1913) to Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611). Collet indeed refers to that work at the start of the narrative of the composer’s life in his new monograph: “the reader will find a historical introduction to the study of Victoria the musician in my book *Le mysticisme musical espagnol au xvi^e siècle . . .*” (pg. 11, fn. 1). Thus his *Victoria* must be regarded as a sort of extension and development of this chapter. The 1975 edition (Paris: Éditions d’aujourd’hui, series “Les Introuvables”) is merely a facsimile reprint of the original Alcan edition of 1914.

The 213 pages of this book fall into two parts of similar length, respectively covering the life (pp. 11–114) and the works (pp. 115–194). A brief introduction (pp. 1–10), in a lyrical register, establishes the context for the study of “this Spaniard of the sixteenth century who embodied Arab and Celtiberian mysticism, both Muslim and Christian” (pp. 1–2), who “was the friend of Palestrina. But far from being similar to him, our Spanish barbarian differs from the polished Italian as a bitter and harsh accent from a fluid and florid language. Two rivals confront each other with nothing in common besides love of their art and religion.” With much poetry, Collet paints a portrait of Victoria “donning the Castilian mantle” in Rome (pg. 2). He marvels at the indifference of the Spanish towards one of their greatest musicians along with Morales, Guerrero, and Comes: “Why is this book the first one devoted specially to him by a historian, and why is this historian a foreigner?” (pg. 2). At the end of his introduction, Collet thanks the main persons who had helped him during his research and shared documents that he needed for his study: “MM. the professors Martinenche and Mérimée; the librarians of the Conservatoire Tiersot and Expert; the Spanish scholars Pedrell, Otaño, and Mitjana; the curate of Ávila Señor Don Augustín Martín; and, finally, my friends Chavarri of Valencia and Pujol of the Orfeo Catalan [*sic*]” (pg. 10, fn. 2).

The first part, “The Life”, is divided into five chapters: “I. In Ávila” (pp. 11–40), “II. In Rome” (pp. 40–74), “III. Return to Italy” (pp. 74–101), “IV. Death” (pp. 101–5), and “V. Posthumous Tributes” (pp. 105–14). As for the second part, “The Work”, it is organised around five sections: “I. Victoria’s Style” (pp. 115–125), “II. Victoria’s Mystical Character and Musical Evolution” (pp. 126–164), “III. Victoria and Palestrina” (pp. 165–169), “IV. Coordination of Text and Music” (pp. 169–182), and “V. A Study of Victoria’s Forms” (pp. 182–194). Finally, the conclusion (pp. 195–200) ends the book with a meditation on a certain “human force that has God as its object and wears itself out in the effort to reach him” (pg. 195), followed by three short appendices (pp. 201–4), a “Catalogue of the Works of Victoria and the Early Republications” (pp. 205–8), and a bibliography of “Further Reading” (pp. 209–11).

When publishing his work, Collet had a synopsis article entitled “*Victoria. A Great Spanish Musician*” run in the weekly paper *L’Espagne* (vol. 2, no. 47, 16–23 July 1914), while the music critic and man of letters G. Jean-Aubry published an exceedingly laudatory review in the column “Latin America, Spain, and Portugal” in *L’Éclair* on 23 July 1914, concluding: “Henry [*sic*] Collet speaks of Victoria, as is fitting, in an eloquent style, moving and moved: his is a fine book which nobly serves Spain and her music”. By contrast, in Spain the book was much criticised, especially by Felipe Pedrell who accused Collet of having stolen most of his ideas (though one should note that the two men had already been on bad terms for some time) and by

Rafael Mitjana, who found the book poorly prepared, woefully lacking in seriousness, and closer to a novel about Victoria than a scholarly work.

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Trans. Tadhg Sauvey

Further reading

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- Jean-Aubry, Georges, « Le Génie musical de l'Espagne : "Victoria" », *L'Éclair* (« Journal de Paris, Quotidien, Politique, Littéraire, absolument indépendant ») 27^e année, n° 9370, jeudi 23 juillet 1914, [p. 4].
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- Pardo Cayuela, Antonio A., *Rafael Mitjana (1869-1921) : trayectoria de un musicólogo, compositor y diplomático regeneracionista*, thèse de doctorat sous la direction de Emilio Ros-Fábregas, Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, 2013 [et tout particulièrement, vol. 1, p. 374-379 et p. 436-438].
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- Ros-Fábregas, Emilio, « Música y músicos "extranjeros" en la España del siglo XVI », dans Carreras, Juan José et García García, Bernardo (dir.), *La Capilla Real de los Austrias: música y ritual de corte en la Europa moderna*, Madrid, Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2001, p. 103-129.
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