

## ■ review

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arles Rahola, *Breviari de Ciutadania. La pena de mort a Girona* [Edition and prologue by Josep-Maria Terricabras], Girona: CCG Edicions i Fundació Valvi 2009

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When preparing a history of intellectual activity in a specific linguistic area or territory, one must be sensitive to a full range of cultural activities that shape the environment in which the individual contributions are made. In a sense, we have to fill out the relief in the landscape of the past. Although this is a straightforward undertaking in all cultural traditions, in ours it has so often been broken off, falsified and avoided that it has become difficult to discuss the past without resorting to the misleading model where “exceptional figures” emerge from “barren wastelands”. For the observer who is even mildly motivated by vivid curiosity, and not driven by the urge to assert or be creative, the deserts were never really that barren, nor the figures so exceptional.

And there was no shortage of these exceptions. As soon as we look more closely at each and every participant in this history of ideas in Catalonia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we come across some truly remarkable figures of every class, kind and condition, both honourable and dishonourable. Carlos Rahola (1881-1939) is one of the honourable figures, both for his sincere commitment to the truth, and for his desire to serve his people. The highest honour he can be given today is to assess his work and trace our impossible connection to his writings. Impossible because we can no longer read his works (especially the work we are discussing, *The Citizen's Breviary*) in the way he intended us to: there will never again be a youthful generation like that of Catalonia a hundred years ago. Even so, it is a book we ought to read if we want to grasp the author's intentions, and those of the jury who saw fit to give the book an award in 1933. To do so is to enter into the history of popular education, cultural promotion and the republican government's efforts to prepare the young for civic life.

The tone of *The Death Penalty in Girona*, published the following year, was very different. This is not a text like the *Citizen's Breviary*, which was a collection of exemplary lives, reassuring stories and anecdotes for youths and adolescents destined to "forge a new nation" which would make Catalonia "a force for peace, progress and civilization" among "the Iberian nations" and "the federation of European peoples". *The Death Penalty* (1934) is a text for an audience that needed to have the tools to make decisions on a moral and legal matter. The book is a historical study, based on archive research, of executions in Girona, which has the moral purpose of opposing the death penalty: "Whatever our opinion of the death penalty may be, after so much discussion, and with the understanding that our impartial devotion to history teaches us about the need for rigour in so many cases and circumstances, we must wish, for the sake of humanity and Christian spirit [...] that the scaffold is never again erected within the august walls of our noble beloved Girona" (page 237). In the year the book was published, there had been no executions in Girona for twenty years. The fact that shortly afterwards, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1939, the author of this work, an exemplary public figure, was executed by a Spanish firing squad after a shameful trial, obliges us to keep his memory alive, and to do so out of respect.

Rahola's style of writing is that of a journalist. We can get an idea of this by reading the recently published selection of his articles (Carles Rahola, *Against the Invader. A Collection of Articles from "L'Autonomista"*, Valls: Cossetània, 2007). His style is simple and emotional, with a colouring that may seem affected by today's standards, aimed at effectiveness above all other considerations. The books are made up of fragments pieced together, in many cases from earlier versions in the press. This gives his work continuity between his divulgatory journalism to the socialization of culture.

The lengthy introductory study by Josep M. Terricabras ("Carles Rahola: an intellectual portrait") makes a valid contribution to studies on Rahola through a text that draws on a detailed knowledge of his works and correspondence, as well as the cultural, economic and political environment of Girona and Catalonia at the time. The progress of his thought from the philosophical drive of his early writings, with their young and rather incoherent Nietzschean influence, subsequently corrected by his reading of Guyau, to his work as a journalist, historian and ideologue in the political tradition of Pi i Maragall, and the literary mould of Anatole France. Josep M. Terricabras clearly sets out the affinities and divergences, taking advantage of his sources in public correspondence and private archives, along with the most recent studies of Rahola's life and work, to make this study a magnificent introduction to his thought. A book that is worth getting to know, for many reasons.