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## ***St. Patrick's Purgatory. The Waning of a Legend*** **Arseni P Acheco**

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# ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY THE WANING OF A LEGEND

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*Legenda*, legends — things to be read — was the name given to stories about the lives of saints, that were read aloud at meals or from the pulpit for monks' education. Today we call legends those stories about people or events, true or fictitious, in which deliberately or unintentionally, the narrator blurs the frontier between myth, fiction and history.<sup>1</sup> True to its semantic field, even today legend tends to infuse a narrative with an exemplary or propagandistic purpose, conceived for the benefit of a cause or to increase the fame of an individual. Generally speaking, the legendary narrative portrays an ideal or idealized object masked by an empirical reality; it lies in an intermediate and unstable state between a mythical and a rational explanation of the facts, between mere fiction and true history. That instability explains why legendary narratives, caught between the tension that is their *raison d'être*, tend to perish as legends and become either inspiring myth or pure fiction.

Legends are often framed in a subsidiary narrative that suggests their purpose, favors their diffusion and reflects the culture and ideologies of the society in which they thrive. Narrative frames change and evolve in tune with that society's evolution, and in so doing they contribute to the transformation of legends themselves and their meaning. Because of its very nature, this process reflects the interplay between literature and society's mores and beliefs. The narrative frame of the legend about St. Patrick's Purgatory provides a good example that cuts across different literatures and different countries. The legend's overall structure is quite simple: a mortal sinner wishing to do penance visits the cave of St. Patrick's Purgatory and leaves written testimony of his experience. The weight given to each element of the tale, however, is not constant; different versions focus the attention on different aspects of the narrative. The early versions tend to stress the importance given to the supernatural experience, while later on, a shift towards the more mundane and earthly aspects of the story is noticeable.

<sup>1</sup> In this study 'myth' is given a positive value in the sense proposed by Karl Rahner, for whom myths are "phantasmas or images, created by the mind but rooted in sense experience, that make possible transcendental knowledge." I would also accept the sense proposed by Durkheim who, from an agnostic point of view, conceives myth as a central regulative institution regulating the moral progress of society. (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v.)

The original version is introduced by a short doctrinal preamble claiming, on the authority of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great, that recording visions of the world beyond death is good for the spiritual benefit of the living. How and why St. Patrick was shown the entrance to Purgatory is then explained, together with the rules established by the Saint for those who wished to visit it. Nothing is said in that introduction about the protagonist's life or the nature of the sins, for which he wishes to do penance. The reader is told only that he was a soldier named Owein who, happening to have had confession with the bishop in whose diocese the cave was located, begged from him and obtained permission to enter there. The four lines devoted to describing who Owein was, grew in later versions to become full blown stories that could be read as independent narratives.

From the many texts from which to choose, three, conceived in three different centuries and cultural contexts, will suffice to show the turning points in the legend's life: the original *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, by Henry of Saltrey (circa 1146-1147),<sup>2</sup> the *Viatge del vescomte Ramon de Perellós i de Roda fet al Purgatori nomenat de Sant Patrici* (1398-1399),<sup>3</sup> and the *Vida y Purgatorio de San Patricio*, by Juan Pérez de Montalbán (1627).<sup>4</sup>

The legend's core is the description of a miraculous visit to Purgatory and a vision of Heaven, without the visitor ever departing from this earthly life. It was most likely promoted by the Cistercian and Augustinian monks, who at different times occupied the state where St. Patrick's Purgatory is to be found. One of the legend's main purposes must have been to attract pilgrims to the site (Le Goff 20, 267-69).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For modern editions of the *Tractatus* see Easting's *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Two Versions*, or Warnke *Das Buch von Espurgatoire*. The initial sentence and dedication of the *Tractatus* reads "Patri suo in Christo preoptato, domino .H. abbati de Sartis, frater .H. monachorum de Salteris minimus, cum continis salute, patri [filius], obedientie munus." The first .H. refers to Hugh abbot of Old Warden in Bedfordshire; the second to the *Tractatus*'s author, a monk of Sawtry or Saltrey in Huntingdonshire, whose real name we don't know. 'Henricus' / 'Henry' is an unfounded reading, but has been generally accepted by tradition (See Easting's *St. Patrick's Purgatory* 236, note to lines 3-4, and Le Goff 260).

<sup>3</sup> Two Provençal manuscripts and a 1486 Catalan incunabulum of the *Viatge* have survived. For a modern edition of the Provençal text see *Voyage au Purgatoire*. For the Catalan version see R. Miquel i Planas *Històries* and A. Pacheco *Viatges*. About the polemic question of the text's original language see C. Brunel "Sur la version" and Germà Colon, "Sobre els textos" and "Filiación des textes."

<sup>4</sup> The first editions of the work are lost (1627). Maria Grazia Profeti's edition is based on the 1628 "quinta impresión", which seems to have been corrected and approved by the author.

<sup>5</sup> For the early history of St. Patrick's Purgatory in Station Island, the Augustinian monastery in Saints Island and the promotion of it as a pilgrimage centre, see S. Leslie; G. P. Krapp; *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* 193; M. Haren and Y. Pontfarcy; and the brief summary given in Ruano de la Haza 15-16.

Art and Literature treating eschatological topics within the context of Christian tradition are usually faithful to the Church's doctrine on the matter; however, artists are not theologians and sometimes take liberties that contradict the official dogma. This is particularly true in the case of their contribution towards a practical interpretation of Purgatory.

The Church defines Purgatory as a transitory state of spiritual purification of the soul, from the moment of death and personal judgement up until the time when it will be allowed to enjoy eternal glory. Personal conversion or forgiveness of sins are not possible in Purgatory, they can take place only in earthly life; the sinner's repentance and good deeds in this life, however, may help him in shortening the length of his purification (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. *Catecisme* 1020-1041; Le Goff 283-296). Art and literature have often dissented from the church's official view. The rich imagery with which they have endowed Purgatory requires a physical and temporal context, far removed from the transcendent and spiritual world predicated by the doctrine. The artistic interpretation of Purgatory, therefore, has often become a very earthly place.<sup>6</sup>

The Church could not accept a physical and temporal Purgatory, but saw the metaphorical value of an empirical imagery and accepted it for didactic purposes. Its indiscriminate use helped to blur the borderline between doctrine and metaphor, and thus, Purgatory has often been conceived as a physical and temporal reality, perceptible perhaps before death and a potential instrument for the conversion and forgiveness of the repentant sinner. Popular superstition has favored the attribution to Purgatory of this kind of instrumentality, which has significantly influenced its artistic conception and representation.

Placing St. Patrick's Purgatory in the physical and temporal world paved the way for the legend's progressive secularization. The process is reflected, above all, in the gradual displacement of the focal point of interest towards the personality and social environment of the Purgatory's visitor, and away from the legend's original purpose. By setting itself apart from the didactic and exemplary tale, the preeminently literary narrative frame pays more attention to the character's characterization and to the plot's action than to the description and interpretation of the Other World vision. Any texts so conceived are necessarily on their way to becoming plays or novels; tales, in any case, in which the transcendent materials of the original tableau are now

<sup>6</sup> On the origins and history of Purgatory see Le Goff's *La Naissance*. For the treatment of the Other World in literature see Patch's *The Other World*. For its representation in the plastic arts see Hughes' *Heaven and Hell*.

dislodged imagery ready to be picked up by the allegory or the emblem.<sup>7</sup>

The church did not officially admit the existence of Purgatory until the Council of Lyon in 1274, almost a century after the term "purgatory" had been used for the first time as a noun to design a specific place, and a century after the writing of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*.<sup>8</sup> Ramon de Perellós writes his *Viatge* in the religious and intellectual climate leading to the Council of Florence (1438-1445), when Rome asserted her position vis a vis the denial of the Purgatory's existence by the Orthodox Church. Montalban's work is a product of, and reflects the conflict between the Protestant Churches and Rome that resulted in the dogmatic proclamation of the Purgatory's doctrine in the Council of Trent (1545-1563).<sup>9</sup>

Literature, art and doctrine follow parallel paths and seem to support each other, but the different premises adopted by each one of them made impossible an eventual encounter. Where the Church sees a brilliant metaphor to suggest a transcendent Purgatory, the writer and the artist — certainly not without reason in the particular case of St. Patrick's Purgatory — see a physical and objective reality, set in this world and whose existence is confirmed by experience. St. Patrick's Purgatory is not a metaphysical concept or an imaginary place. Its entrance is a small cave on Station Island in Lough Derg — Red Lake — in Northwestern Ireland. Station Island, the neighboring and larger Saints Island and a small hill close to the lake and known as Cruachan Aigle or "purgatory" were sanctuaries associated to Celtic mythology. The two islands were said to be home for the *sidh* or

<sup>7</sup> In the ethical and literary treatment of man's reward or punishment for his actions in this life, Western tradition has tended to displace the focal point of attention even further away from a transcendent Heaven, Purgatory or Hell, and center it instead in man's own sense of responsibility and/or psychological and intellectual intimacy. I am suggesting the kind of timeless but earthly Purgatory or Hell implicit in comments like Sartre's "l'enfer son les autres," (*Huis clos*, 1945) or in the version of the world beyond death proposed in Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* (1955). Bringing down the topic of life after death to the realm of the individual's subjectivity reflects the ethical and intellectual revolution that has steadily transformed the medieval theocentric world, first into a fully anthropocentric one, and then, in our own times, into a definitely egocentric society, void of any transcendent sense of life. I believe Le Goff's linking of the rise of Purgatory to the rise of the concept of personal responsibility and the sense of justice would corroborates my hypothesis from a different point of view (See Le Goff 284-316).

<sup>8</sup> Recorded in a theological text c. 1150 and in *purgatorium Sancti Patricii* c. 1188 (Latham, s.v. 'Purgamen'. See also "'Purgatorium': Histoire d'un mot" Le Goff 489-93).

<sup>9</sup> The Councils of Lyon and Florence were looking for agreement on doctrinal matters between the Orthodox Church and Rome; the main issue discussed was not Purgatory but the doctrine of the double procession of the Holy Spirit. The Council of Trent linked the discussion on Purgatory to the affirmation that the Mass was a propitiatory sacrifice that may be offered to help the living and the dead in their way to the eternal glory. (Le Goff 376-386; *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* s.v. "Purgatory," "Lyons," "Florence," "Filiouque," and "Trent").



underground gods, while Cruachan Aigle, along with most of the surrounding hills, was considered an appropriate place in which to spend the night for those who, for any reason, wished or had to make penance (Wright 42-44).

An early christianization of the pagan beliefs and practices is reflected by Jocelin of Furness in his *Vita Sancti Patricii* (c. 1183), where he says that Saint Patrick spent a whole night in Cruachan Aigle exorcising the evil spirits that disguised as blackbirds molested him. Blending elements from the prechristian tradition and following in the steps of Jocelyn of Furness, Giraldus Cambrensis says in his *Topographia Hibernica* (c. 1185) that some sinners used to make penance inside the cave on Station Island, and that their penance freed them from punishments they would have suffered in the other life (Le Goff 259-273).<sup>10</sup> Although the connection between Celtic tradition and St. Patrick's Purgatory is obvious, nevertheless the legend's character and literary sources are essentially Christian. The author of the *Tractatus* seems to borrow from the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, St. Gregory's *Dialogs* and the Irish accounts of *Tundal's* and *Drihtelm's* visions.<sup>11</sup>

It must be remarked that neither Jocelin nor Giraldus identify Station Island or Cruachan Aigle with the Christian Purgatory associated with the doctrine of last things. The metamorphosis that transformed Station Island into the threshold of Purgatory took place in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* of Henry of Saltrey, a Cistercian monk who describes the experience of Purgatory and Paradise that a knight named Owein had inside the cave, not as a dream or a vision but *in corpore*.<sup>12</sup> The account of Owein's experience given in the *Tractatus* was faithfully followed by all other re-tellings and adaptations of the narrative. In the framework of some early versions, however, the personality of Owein acquired light but quite distinctive characteristics and a more relevant role, being treated more

<sup>10</sup> Jocelin's *Vita* and Giraldus' *Topographia* are included in Messingham's *Florilegium*.

<sup>11</sup> *Drihtelm's* vision reflects the traditional beliefs leading to the Church's definition of the doctrine on Purgatory: "La val que la primera que trobets, de flames cremants e de frets tan frets espaordible, aquel es lo loch lo qual has hoit foch de purgatori; en lo qual loch son meses, per Deu examinar e castigar, les animes daquels qui alonguen lurs peccats de confessar e de smenar, los quals an feyts, mas en aquell article de mort a la per fi a penitencia venen, e axi dels cors ixen; los quals, empero, car al menys en lo terme de la mort confessio e penitencia hagueren, tots al dia del juhi al regne dels cels vindran; e molts, per cert, per prechs daquels qui viuen, e per almoynes, e per dejunis, e, mes que mes, per celebracio de misses, es ajudat e acorregut; axi que, anans del dia del juhi son desliurades daqueles penes." (Miquel i Planas *Històries* 91).

<sup>12</sup> Cui Gilebertus, 'Sunt quidam', inquit, 'qui dicunt quod aulam intrantes primo fiunt in extasi et hec omnia in spiritu videre. Quod omnino sibi miles ita contigisse contradicit, sed corporeis oculis se uidisset et corporaliter hec pertulisse constantissime 'testatur'...' (*Tractatus* 150, lines 1097-1104).

as an individual than as a mere reporter.<sup>13</sup> It may be said that the future displacement of the focal point of interest starts in those early re-readings of Henry of Saltrey's text, some of which have been better known and more accessible to readers and researchers than the original. It is not surprising therefore that, even if it was assumed to be so, the *Tractatus* itself has not always been the departing point of modern research.

Critics and historians acquainted with the legend through the early versions, have been very often as intrigued by the protagonist's personality as by the legend's eschatological material. Trying to find for him a precise historical or literary identity, some have suggested that Owein is just a fictional character, inspired perhaps by heroes of the Arthurian tradition, by characters of Celtic mythology, or by the soldier who tells his other world vision in St. Gregory's *Dialogs*.<sup>14</sup>

Recent research has shown that there is no reason to doubt the historicity of the knight and soldier Owein.<sup>15</sup> From the data available it seems fully justified to assert that Owein was an Irish knight who very likely served on the retinue of the Irish king Dermot Mac Murrough (Diarmait Mac Murchada, better known by historians as Diarmait na n-Gall, king of Leinster). Furthermore, it is probable that he did indeed visit the cave and Purgatory in Lough Derg, most likely the year 1146 or 1147 and not the year 1153 as has been generally accepted, shortly after which he went as a pilgrim to Jerusalem, during the years of the Second Crusade (1147-1149). On returning from the Holy Land, following orders from his king, he served as a Gaelic interpreter for two and a half years to Gilbert, an English monk from the Cistercian Abbey of Louth Park, Lincolnshire, who had been sent by his Abbot Gervase to Ireland to found a monastery.<sup>16</sup> Owein

<sup>13</sup> The original version of the *Tractatus* says very little about the protagonist. The 1264 lines in Easting's edition may be divided in the following sections, of which only four lines in section b) and section d) give personal information about Owein: a) doctrinal preamble (1-204); b) the protagonist's name and date when the events took place (205-208) and Owein's begging for permission to visit Purgatory and the description of the ceremonies preparing him to enter the cave (209-255); c) narrative of the experience inside the cave and description of Purgatory, Hell and Heaven (256-1065); d) events in Owein's life after his visit to Purgatory — mention of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land (1065-1067), his king's advice for him to enter into religion and how he appointed him as an interpreter for Gilbert (1067-1092), and his years of service with him describing the circumstances in which he explained his experience in the cave to Gilbert (1092-1106); e) exempla intended to corroborate the truth of what has been recorded (1107-1264).

<sup>14</sup> B de Roquefort suggests that Owein may be Ivain, the hero in *Le chevalier au Lion* (Roquefort II, 405; Wright 21). For Owein's possible origins in Celtic mythology see D. Laing *Owain Miles* 7 (quoted by Easting, "Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory" 161).

<sup>15</sup> I accept and summarize here the conclusions suggested and information given by R. Easting in "Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory."

<sup>16</sup> Probably, according to Easting, the monastery of Baltinglass also known as Vallis Salutis ("Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory" 165).

described his visit to the Purgatory to Gilbert who, on his return to England, retold the story to Henry of Saltrey, who in turn was the first to put it into writing around 1180. Saltrey introduces the account of Owein's visit to Purgatory by mentioning very succinctly the relationship between Owein and Gilbert that made possible the oral transmission of the story, but as far as Owein's personality he gives no other details except that he was a soldier and that he went as a pilgrim to the Holy Land.

All descriptions of Purgatory and Heaven derived from the *Tractatus* repeat Owein's narrative without any substantial change. A few and light textual variants are useful to trace the legend's stegma through the centuries, but they do not affect Henry of Saltrey's account. No substantial changes are implied either by the brief interpolations found in the rendering of the supernatural experience by other visitors to the cave, but sometimes these do provide information about particular events or people that link the protagonist's supernatural experience to his own personal life and social milieu. Perellós' *Viatge* is perhaps the best example of this practice.<sup>17</sup> Those small interpolations also contribute, from a structural point of view, to the displacement of the focal point of interest in favor of the protagonist's characterization and add to the verisimilitude of the narrative.

The first deviation from Henry of Saltrey's original and early "fictionalization" of the protagonist was the result of an erroneous interpretation of the *Tractatus*. Henry of Saltrey, who was an Englishman, says "contingit autem his temporibus nostris, diebus scilicet Regis Stephani, militem quemdam nomine Owein, de quo presens est narratio..." (*Tractatus* 126 lines 206-8) meaning that Owein's visit to Purgatory took place during the reign of the English king Stephen' (1135-1154). Wishing to enhance the protagonist's role and fix the date in a more precise manner, Roger of Wendover in his own rendering of the text transformed Owein into a knight and soldier in the retinue of the king Stephen, adding that around the year 1153, when the king gave him leave to go to visit his parents in his native Ireland, Owein took advantage of his free time to go to do penance in St. Patrick's Purgatory.

Concordia itaque inter regem Stephanu, et ducem Henricum, ut dictum est, confirmata, miles quidam, Hoenus nomine, qui multis annis sub rege Stephano militaverat, licentia a rege impetrata, profectus est in Hiberniam ad natale solum, ut parentes visitaret... (Quoted in Easting "Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory" 163)

17 Besides Perellós' *Viatge* the record of visitors to the cave include: Sire de Beaujeu, George Krissaphan, Malatesta Ungarus de Arimino, Nicholas de Beccariis, Louis de Sur, Louis de France, Guillaume de Lille, Antonio Mannini, Laurent de Pászthó and Conrad Scharnachtal (Easting "Owein at St. Patrick's Purgatory" 169).



Roger of Wendover's version enjoyed greater diffusion than the *Tractatus*. He incorporated it into his *Flores Historiarum*, which was the source on this matter for the widely disseminated *Chronica Majora* written by Matthew of Paris. It was from this source that Messingham borrowed Roger of Wendover's version of the legend, which was eventually included in Migne's *Patrology*, not necessarily the most reliable, but a standard source of reference for any research on the topic.

The text that played the greatest role in developing the narrative frame and displacing the focal point of interest was, perhaps, the *Viatge del vescomte Ramon de Perellós i de Roda fet al Purgatori nomenat de Sant Patrici*. Ramon de Perellós, a historical and well documented character, writes compelled by very personal reasons and pays as much attention to the autobiographical material included in the narrative as to the visit to Purgatory, even if the eschatological material is still supposed to be the focal point of interest.

The *Viatge* was the product of a very specific event. When the king Joan I of Aragon died suddenly the year 1396, several noblemen were suspected of having poisoned him; the great humanist Bernat Metge and Ramon de Perellós were amongst them, even if the latter was at the time on a diplomatic mission to the Pope's court at Avignon. The most serious charge made against the supposed culprits was that, by having killed the King without giving him time for confession, they might be responsible not only of his death but also of his eternal damnation. All those who had been suspected of the regicide were eventually exonerated of any guilt, but Bernat Metge and Ramon de Perellós, wishing to leave no doubt about their innocence, wrote two very different books to prove that the king was not in Hell. Metge, a modern man in his own times and somewhat skeptical on transcendental matters, took full advantage of his literary skills to tell in *Lo Somni* how the King, accompanied by Orpheus and Tyresias, appeared to him in a dream and, while discussing on many different topics, told him that he was in Purgatory because of his inordinate passion for music and hunting.<sup>18</sup>

In sharp contrast with Metge's literary exercise, Ramon de Perellós, who knew about Owein's story, decided to prove that the King was in Purgatory and not in Hell by personally looking for him in St. Patrick's Purgatory. Written in a less elegant style than Metge but in an entertaining and terse prose, the *Viatge* is the chronicle of his adventurous trip. After presenting himself and explaining the reason for the enterprise, Perellós frames the narrative of his visit to

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account of the events and an analysis of *Lo Somni* see Riquer *Obras* 87-126 and 130-167.

Purgatory by providing a detailed account of his journey to Station Island and his return. He mentions all the people that he met in his journey, all the places he visited and what he saw there and comments on the Irishmen's food and strange mores. He explains why St. Patrick asked God to let him organize the penitents' visits to Purgatory and enumerates and justifies all the conditions to be fulfilled by all those wishing to enter the cave. He describes quite accurately the landscape surrounding Lough Derg, the lake itself and the island on which the entrance to the Purgatory's cave is found. He pays particular attention to details, regardless of their pertinence to the text's main purpose, taking full advantage of their anecdotic value to enhance the narrative's interest. When he describes the ceremonies that he and his French companion, Guillaume de Coucy, had to perform before entering the cave, he strikes a personal and emotive note by explaining how at that time he entrusted his last will and testament to his nephew Bernat Centelles, and knighted his two sons, Ramon and Lluís, and the two noblemen Tomàs Agut and Pere Maça, from the kingdom of Valencia.<sup>19</sup>

With three or four brief interpolations and minimal textual variants, the description of his experience inside the cave practically reproduces Henry of Saltrey's text as canonized by tradition.<sup>20</sup> He adds that he did meet King Joan, who refused to tell him why he was in Purgatory:

En apres parli molt ab lo Rey mon senyhor lo qual, per la gracia de Deu, era en via de saluacio. La raho per que suffria las penas no la volgue dir, he dic que los reis e prínceps que són en lo món se deven sobre totes coses guardar de fer injusticia per fer plaer ni favor a negú ni a neguna ni a d'altres pus prop del linatge, sien hòmens o fempnes, d'ont són ixtis ni venguts.

(Miquel i Planas *Viatge d'En Perellós* 28)

He also mentions two other people that he met in the same section of Purgatory where the king was. One is Fra Francesc del Pueg (or Despuig), "de l'ordre de Girona, dels frares menors del dit convent," who was suffering a great punishment because of his abduction of a nun, and who would have been sent to Hell had it not been for his sincere repentance and the penance he did while still alive. The other is his niece Aldonça de Queralt, who Perellós says was still alive when he departed from Avignon, and who was there because of "les

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of Perellós' life and *Viatge*, see Riquer, *Història* II, 309-334. On Perellós' knowledge of Giraldus and use he made of his work, see Ribera, "Una altra lectura".

<sup>20</sup> On the textual variants and interpolations showing the relationship between Perellós, O'Sullivan and Pérez de Montalán and their differences vis a vis the *Tractatus*, see V. F. Dixon, "Saint Patrick of Ireland" 145.

pictures e emblanquiments que havia feits en sa cara quant vivia" (Miquel i Planas *Històries* 27-28)

The *Viatge* is no longer a straightforward eschatological and cautionary tale. It combines the unquestionable historical background, the added verisimilitude provided by the autobiographical form, the wealth of objective data and anecdotic material, the attention paid to detail and the intriguing presence in Purgatory of real people, to place the text half way between a mundane and a religious account, between history and fiction. Because of its tone, content and structure the *Viatge* had great potential to be developed as a novel.

Two centuries of religious strife and new recasting of the material gave rise to the intellectual and cultural climate that would allow Juan Pérez de Montalbán to take full advantage of that potential.<sup>21</sup> The complexity and careful structure of his *Vida y Purgatorio de San Patricio* make of it a text very difficult to define. In many ways it is a work characteristic of Counter Reformation literature. It has the appropriate tone and all the quotations and references needed to guarantee its orthodoxy and earn the Church's endorsement; on a first reading one would not hesitate in considering it as just one more of the many religious texts that had become the best-sellers of the time.<sup>22</sup> However, the preeminence that the fictional and entertaining elements take in the narrative provides a happy balance between the proverbial *prodesse* and *delectare* and transforms the text, as was clearly the author's wish, into a true "novela a lo divino que provoque y escarmentie, historia prodigiosa que juntamente castigue y lisongee."<sup>23</sup>

Montalbán hides the modest number of his sources behind an apparent wealth of erudition. In fact, all his doctrinal and literary materials come from three basic and well known texts. The first of these was Fray Dimas Serpi's *Tratado del Purgatorio* (Paris 1617), a useful manual on doctrinal issues. Messingham's *Florilegium insulae sanctorum* (Paris 1624), was his main source, where he found the text of the *Tractatus* according to the version of Roger of Wendover, Saint Patrick's life transcribed from the original text of Jocelyn of Furness and some helpful discussion on specific doctrinal points. Finally, in Philip O'Sullivan Beare's *Historia catholicae Ibernica compendium* (Lisbon 1621), he read an abridged adaptation and translation into Latin of Perellós' *Viatge*, of which he took full advantage to create the

<sup>21</sup> For the fortune of the legend in Spain see Solalinde "La primera versión" and MacBride "St. Patrick's Purgatory"

<sup>22</sup> On the topic of the Golden Age best-seller see Cruickshank "Literature and the book trade" and Whinnom, "The Problem of the 'best-seller'."

<sup>23</sup> *Vida y Purgatorio*, p. 100. All quotations have been taken from M.G. Profeti's edition.

character he presents as an exemplary counterpoint to St. Patrick's saintliness (Dixon 143).

As suggested in the title, Montalbán's work has two main and quite distinct parts: St. Patrick's *Vida*, told in the first of the nine chapters into which the whole text is divided, and the *Purgatorio de San Patricio*, which fills the last three. Both for the life and for the events that take place inside the cave, Montalbán follows quite closely Messingham's text, but he amplifies and works with the reference materials to create what he calls "una devota suspensión que divierta y atemorice." (*Vida y Purgatorio* 100). The suspense is achieved through the careful structure and baroque complexity of the plot, particularly in the sections dealing with the lives of Saint Patrick and Ludovico Enio, where the narrative elements have been chosen and the plot developed according to formulae closer to the so called byzantine novel than to the hagiographical tradition to which the text belongs.

Montalbán takes advantage of the logical ending of the *Vida*, the Saint's death, to introduce in the second chapter a brief but adequate discussion on the soul's spiritual nature, the transcendental character of the four places where the soul may go after death — Heaven, Purgatory, Limbo or Hell — and the Church's doctrine on the matter. All were issues that most likely had to be dealt with in a text devoted to such a sensitive topic in such conflictive times. This chapter and the three following ones work as a theoretical and formal bridge between the first and second parts. With no little imagination, in chapter three Montalbán describes very vividly and in great detail the entrance to the cave that leads to St. Patrick's Purgatory and its surroundings. In that context he explains the reasons why St. Patrick asked God and received from him the gift that those who entered that particular cave might witness there, while still alive, the torments of Purgatory and the heavenly joy. Montalbán sees the contradiction between what he says here and what he said in the previous chapter — the ever present contradiction between art and doctrine on the matter of everlasting life, — and wishing to solve it and explain why it may be possible to experience Purgatory in this world, he says:

... para entender con más fundamento esta verdad, es menester distinguir dos purgatorios: uno común que es el que está junto al Infierno, en el cual entra el alma después de estar desasida del cuerpo; y otro particular y dispensado por alguna secreta causa, y assí dice Fray Dimas Serpi, que se han visto muchas almas padecer en algunos lugares particulares. Deste último Purgatorio es del que vamos tratando, y para que todos lo entiendan es menester dividirlo en dos miembros, porque uno se llama de muerto, y otro de vivos. (*Vida y Purgatorio* 131).

The interlude that separates and bridges the two parts of the work closes with a transition chapter describing the ceremonies that should

take place before a penitent enters the cave. Montalbán introduces the second part of the book with the following words: "Lo que dentro sucede veremos en los siguientes capítulos, después de la historia de Ludovico Enio, un soldado irlandés que entre los muchos que han entrado, entró y salió con suma felicidad." (*Vida y Purgatorio* 137).

Ludovico Enio's story has been conceived as a subtle counterpoint to Saint Patrick's life and emphasizes, both from a structural and a formal point of view, the parallelism between parts one and two. Just as the end of Patrick's saintly life was the pretext to introduce the church's doctrine on Purgatory, the life of Ludovico, a thief, a murderer and a nun's seducer, closes with his visit and personal description of Purgatory and Heaven.

Ludovico Enio is a hybrid character begotten from a cross between Messingham's version of the *Tractatus* (i.e. Roger of Wendover's via Matthew of Paris) and O'Sullivan's Latin translation of Perellós' *Viatge*. The former gives him the name, makes him a soldier and suggests, without delving into the matter, that he had a turbulent life and enough reasons to make penance.<sup>24</sup> It is, however, O'Sullivan's Perellós that helps Montalbán to bring his protagonist to life as an individual; Ludovico Enio is not a mirror image of the Catalan knight, but he has many traits that show their literary relationship and some episodes in the story of his life seem to have been inspired by Perellós' interpolations in his own visit to Purgatory. A case in point is Enio's seduction of Teodosia and abduction from the convent, undoubtedly suggested by combining Perellós allusions to his niece N'Aldonça de Queralt and to Fra Francesc Despuig. Like Perellós narrative, Ludovico's account of his experience in Purgatory and Heaven is also a first-person narrative, quite close to that of the model: it presents the same textual variants, offers very specific coincidences in detail, and like Perellós and unlike Owein, Ludovico recognizes some of the people he meets in the Other World.

The few lines that only gave the name and profession of the protagonist in the narrative frame of the original *Tractatus*, have expanded in the *Vida y Purgatorio de San Patricio* to give full account of two lives and a great deal of subsidiary information, to the extent of filling over two thirds of the 116 folios that make up the 1628 Madrid edition. Owein, who in the *Tractatus* was little more than a name, has become Ludovico Enio, whose life and deeds take no less than twenty folios. The implications of that growth are not immediately obvious, but a careful evaluation of the nature and purpose of the texts shows

<sup>24</sup> Coepit ad mentem reducere vitam suam adeo flagitiosam: Quod ab ipsis incunabilis, incendiis semper vacauerit, et rapinis; et quod magis dolebat, se Ecclesiarum fuisse violatorem, et rerum Ecclesiasticarum invasorem; praeter multa enormia, quae intrinsecus latebant peccata. (Messingham 9, apud Dixon 144)



their true meaning for an understanding of what the legend's evolution represents in the intellectual history of the Western World..

The increasing importance that the narrative frame has acquired and, proportionally speaking, the parallel and corresponding devaluation of the eschatological data, led in the texts studied to a inevitable secularization of those myths in which man has placed his metaphysical hopes. The progressive fictionalization of the narrative subtly disguises the growing crisis of the world of faith implicit in the legend, and the slow but unavoidable progress of the worlds of reason and analysis which have lead to the modern world.

It is indeed possible and even likely that Henry of Saltrey was writing to favor the worldly undertakings of his Order, but he writes above all to help and increase the believer's faith. He builds up his legend looking for support in the traditions, beliefs and religious practices of his own times and country, without ever deviating from the religious thought of his own times and without letting filter into the text any material that is not directly related to his main topic. In Perellós *Viatge*, by contrast, the eschatological legend equitably shares the narrative space with the worldly adventure of the protagonist's travels through France, England and Ireland. It is obvious, furthermore, that the religious element has been subordinated to purely personal objectives. Perellós treats his religious sources with respect, but between his time and Henry of Saltrey's a significant and important change in the evaluation of religious issues has taken place. In Montalbán's narrative the dichotomy of the modern world, even if subtly disguised, has become fully apparent. Stimulated by the polemic discussions on religious matters and their impact on his own society, Montalbán takes advantage of the topic's actuality to capture his readers' attention. He writes, it is true, with an apologetic intention and with what seems to be sincere piety; but, perhaps unwittingly, at the same time that he integrates and rhetorically organizes his materials, he intellectually distinguishes and separates quite clearly the world beyond this world from the world of objective experiences, the world of faith and dogma from the world of empirical reality and literary metaphor.

In a paradoxical inversion of the terms of reference, Montalbán reduces the transcendental questions to literary metaphors for the analogical discussion of an empirical reality. In this process, the world of faith ceases to be the logical point of reference for the interpretation of a transcendent vision. St. Patrick's authority needs Enio's support to bring his point across. Without faith's help, the author wishing to suggest the existence of a world beyond the physical boundaries of experience has to create his own terms of reference. He does so with the help of the literary framework that he sets for such a world, a

frame in which the affirmation of the existence of life beyond death is not as obvious as the suggestion of its need to compensate the shortcomings of a world of sin and injustice. The author hopes that the reader will accept the challenge and follow him in the new path of knowledge. By the miracle of literary manipulation, faith, on which all transcendent and metaphysical knowledge finds support, has become an arbitrary but necessary pact between writer and reader.

The new and pragmatic way of looking into so delicate and important matters was well guessed and subtly exposed by Cervantes. After making his hero descend to Purgatory's depth in the Cave of Montesinos, and allowing Sancho to reach and enjoy Heavens glory on Clavileño's back, the omniscient author lets Don Quijote say:

— Sancho, pues vos queréis que se os crea lo que habéis visto en el cielo, yo quiero que vos me creáis a mi lo que vi en la cueva de Montesinos. Y no os digo más.<sup>25</sup>

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