



Payne, John, *Catalans and Others: History, Culture and Politics in Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands* (Five Leaves, 2016), 214pp. ISBN: 9781910170243.

John Payne is already known among aficionados of Catalan culture for his previous book *Catalonia: History and Culture*, first published by Five Leaves in 2004 and revised in 2009. Now, he broadens his horizons to look at the Catalan-speaking lands more generally. Wisely, he does not treat these as a single entity but explores the various weak and strong ties between the different areas, showing how these have waxed and waned over the centuries. In doing so, he defends but does not mythologise the different regions' claims to distinctiveness.

The structure of the book is relatively loose, constantly moving between historical periods and occasionally coming back to elaborate on earlier discussions. It begins with a chapter on the vexed question of whether there is such a thing as a 'Greater Catalonia', a discussion that ranges across the centuries from the establishment of the Aragonese empire in the twelfth century to the 'popular consultation' on independence in Catalonia in 2014. In discussing the factors that suggest unity and those that have promoted divergence, Payne always focuses on the contradictions and complications rather than searching for a coherence that may not exist.

Payne then turns his attention to the Mediterranean as a common factor in the experience of most of the inhabitants of the Catalan-speaking areas. The chronological framework here reaches back to pre-history and the numerous peoples that inhabited the area before the Romans. It then

stretches forward to the advent of mass tourism, with all the social and ecological problems this has brought to the area alongside its economic benefits. Subsequent chapters introduce the themes of population movement across these territories and the numerous rifts and revolts that have complicated their relationship with each other, and with the rest of Spain, since Castile began to consolidate its grip on the Crown of Aragon in the fifteenth century. Half of this chapter is in fact devoted to the growing movement in support of Catalan independence in the twenty-first century, which Payne attributes more to the contemporary pressures of the global economic crisis, widespread corruption scandals, and the cuts to the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy than to the historical divisions analysed previously.

Chapter 5, entitled ‘Silence and Memory’, looks specifically at the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, largely through the prism of cultural responses to the ‘pacto del olvido’ that has still not entirely lifted despite recent interest in recovering a sense of historical memory. To this, Payne adds some little-mentioned examples of the effect of the war in the Balearic Islands, and a discussion of Portbou as ‘one of the byways of the cruel and violent history of the twentieth century’ (129). Chapter 6 concentrates on the Catalan language, discussing its evolution and its current status in each of the territories. He is, by the way, happy to define Catalan as ‘a single language, with dialects, although these dialects have their own names’ (142). There then follows a discussion of ‘culture’ in all its manifestations, Payne making the point that most inhabitants of the Catalan-speaking lands happily mix the high and the popular, the traditional and the global. Nevertheless, most of the chapter concentrates on the popular culture of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and the Valencian Community, discussing for example the origins of the ‘Moors and Christians’ festivals in the latter and their unfortunate connotations in a contemporary multicultural society.

Perhaps the most personal viewpoint comes in the final chapter where Payne returns to contemporary issues such as corruption, the Catalan

independence movement, and the present-day relationship between Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands. He expresses concerns about globalisation which ‘centre as much on the homogenised, less differentiated way in which the world presents itself to us as on the debris of failed economies’ (192), and squarely blames ‘the weakness of the Spanish state’ for ‘driving the push for independence in Catalonia’ (208).

One solution Payne considers for the fragmentation of the Catalan lands is the potential creation of a ‘Catalan Commonwealth’ that would promote economic and cultural relations between its constituent parts without any attempt at homogenisation. He likes the idea because it is both ‘eminently practical’ and also ‘brings into play the essential Mediterranean nature of Catalan history’ (207). The fact that these are very personal reflections means that one may agree or disagree, but what is not in doubt is Payne’s love for a part of the world that he has known intimately since the 1960s.

The book inevitably includes more coverage of those parts of the Catalan-speaking territories that fall within modern-day Spain. Nevertheless, it manages to poke into corners of those territories that do not feature in the average travelogue. This is not an ‘academic’ book and therefore has no references or bibliography. The structure can sometimes be a little meandering, and there are various typographical errors in the text. However, Payne successfully approaches his subject with the gaze of the *flâneur*, strolling through landscapes, epochs and localities that are accessed via literature, art, architecture, music and scholarship as much as through lived experience. *Catalans and Others* will be of interest to anyone who knows – or wants to know – the lands of which he speaks.

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