

A Jesuit Poetic Doctrine: Mambrun's *Dissertatio de epico carmine*

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There are still not many references to Pierre Mambrun, despite his efforts to place the discussion on the theory of Epos in the framework of tradition and contemporary debates.

Pierre Mambrun was born on 5th of December, 1601 in Thiers (Puy de Dôme), and enrolled in the Jesuit order on 20th of August, 1621. He was considered a gifted pupil during his studies of Grammar in Moulins, obtaining various awards for excellence. This schooling formed the basis for his understanding of Latin, which he pursued by studying Rhetoric during five years in Paris.

In 1652, his *Dissertatio peripatetica de poemate epico* was published in Paris (Sebastian Cramoisy and Gabriel Cramoisy). As confirmed through the reading of his epistles, and as indicated by the addition of "*peripatetica*", his intellectual activity focused on the Aristotelian corpus. In fact, the last of his works, that remained unfinished when he died on 31st of October 1661, was a commentary on Aristotle¹. The author of the chapter on Mambrun in Sommervogel's Library mentions that Mambrun published his epic poem on the emperor Constantine six years after the dissertation². Mambrun dedi-

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¹ C. SOMMERVOGEL, A. DE BACKER, *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*, tome cinquième, Bruxelles, Schepens, 1960, 5, col. 451-453. There is a reference to some letters in col. 453. Mambrun's *Eclogae de cultura animi*, Fixae Andecavorum, ex officina Laboe, 1661 is part of his *Vergiliana imitatio*. G. BOSCO, *Il meraviglioso barocco come segno della trasgressione*, Torino, Albert Meynier, 1985, pp. 109-128. Y. HASKELL, "Practicing What They Preach? Vergil and the Jesuits", in J. Farrel, J. C. Putnam (edd.) *A Companion to Vergil's Aeneid and its Tradition*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 203-216. It is worth remembering the intellectual followers in the 18th century, especially Pierre-Daniel Huet, as A. G. SHELFORD demonstrated in *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life 1650-1720*, Rochester, University Press, 2007, pp. 24-34.

² P. MAMBRUN, *Constantinus sive Idololatria Debollata authore Petro Mambruno e Societate Iesu*, Lutetiae Parisiorum, Dion., Bechetet Lud. Billaini, 1658 and *Monachii, sumptibus viduae*

cated *Constantinus sive Idololatria debellata. Poema heroicum recognitum et emendatum* (Amstelodami, Uldericus Balck, 1658) to the lord of Avaux, Jean-Jacques de Mesmes, a magistrate and the owner of a well-stocked library, who became a member of the Académie française in 1676. The publication of the poem *Constantinus* was followed by its theoretical defense. This was the usual poetic couple of works at the time: an epic poem and its theoretical explanation or defense. In the defense, Mambrun discussed the main points he had previously developed in his *Dissertation*³.

On the other hand, the contribution of the Jesuit poet Pierre Le Moyne to French literature has not been neglected⁴. The available version of his *Dissertation du poëme héroïque*, written in French, as well as his *Saint-Louis*⁵, refer to Mambrun's theoretical writing⁶. The contrast between the

*et heredum Hermanni a Gelder, typis Marae Magdalenae Reuchin viduae, 1697. The Italian Jesuit Alexander Donatus had chosen Constantine's biography as the subject of his *Constantinus Romae liberator, poema heroicum*, Romae, Manelfi Manelfii, 1640, from the source of Eusebius' *Vita*.*

³ "Ac primo quidem modum illum atque rationem tractandae Epopeiae satis mihi uideor indicasse; qui demonstrauerim parte 1. illius Dissertationis, quaestione altera, actionem epico carmini subiectam debere esse, unam, totam, illustrem, certae cuiusdam magnitudinis quae narratione dramatica et uersu hexametro exornari debeat ad uiros principes cum admiratione et delectatione ad primarias uirtutes exercitandos". P. MAMBRUN, op. cit., 1658. p. 16: *Praefatio*.

⁴ A. HAMY, *Galerie Illustrée de la Compagnie de Jésus*, Paris, chez l'auteur, 1893, 5, p. 80; C. SOMMERVOGEL, A. DE BACKER, op. cit., col. 1356-1371. The monograph and bibliography by A.-E. SPICA, *Pierre Le Moyne, Œuvres & Critiques*, 35:2, 2010 discusses several studies on his poetic doctrine, which "ont invité à réévaluer l'importance de la théorie poétique et épique de Le Moyne".

⁵ P. Le Moyne composed the work under the title *Saint Louys, ou le Heros Chrestien*, Paris, C. Du Mesnil, 1653 in seven chants and *Saint Louis ou la Sainte Couronne reconquise*, Paris, A. Courbé, 1658 as a complete epic work. The Jesuits had promoted devotion to Saint Louis before Le Moyne. A. MANTERO, "Saint Louis et 'L'art de regner'", *Œuvres & Critiques*, 35:2, 2010, 77-90, on p. 81, n. 16 reminded us of Jacques Vignier's *La pratique de la Paix de l'Ame* (1642), but it is worth remembering also Georges Estiennes Rousselet's *Le Lys sacré* (1631) and Joseph Filere's *La devotion de Saint Louis* (1641).

⁶ P. LE MOYNE, *Les œuvres poétiques du Père Le Moyne*, à Paris, chez Loius Billaine, 1671, p. E, 1v: "Si j'opposais à cela, que nostre Père Mambrun ne m'avoit rien laissé à faire sur cette matière, qu'il avoit ou deviné, ou retrouvé, ce qui s'est perdu de la *Poétique* d'Aristote: qu'il avoit éclairci et débrouillé ce qui s'en est conservé: et que nous avions en esprit et en essence dans son Livre, tout ce que Castelvetro, le Piccolomini, et les autres speculatifs d'Italie, nous ont laissé en confusion et en masse. Ils demeuroient bien d'accord, que le P. Mambrun avoit découvert le secret de l'Art et qu'il ne se pouvoit reduire à une forme dessinée en Grec et en Latin, n'estoit pas pour ceux qui ne connoissent que le François: et que la Poësie Heroïque estant la vraye Philosophie de la Cour, et la partie de la Politique, qui est la plus propre à l'institution des Grands, il ne faloit pas plaindre la peine de leur en faire quelques leçons, purifiées de la teinture du College, et accommodées à la délicatesse de leur goust". However, on the aims of Mambrun's *Dissertatio*, C. SOMMERVOGEL, A. DE BACKER, op. cit., col. 451, n.º 4: "Son but principal es de relever les défauts du poëme de Saint Louis, par la P. Le Moyne. Baillet (*Jugemens des Savans*, tome 3, n.º 1072) fait l'analyse de cette dissertation". M. BERTAUD, "Un jésuite au désert. Le Père Le Moyne", *XVIIe Siècle*, 109, 1975, 51-66, on page 66 described his poetic character as follows: "Enfin, certains passages révèlent une sensibilité qui se développe sur un fond de mysticisme et qui n'est pas sans affinités avec celle du XVIIIe siècle, et même des générations romantiques". On the building of French political thought see M. ROUSSILLON, "Que voit-on dans les poèmes héroïques des années 1650?", *Littératures classiques*, 82:3, 2013, 247-259.

two interpretations – the vernacular and the neo-Latin – of the main features of the preceptive tradition is not wholly satisfying, although it has been much discussed⁷.

In addition, Pierre Mambrun dealt with the three authors whom humanism considered to be the best masters of the epic genre (Homer, Virgil and Tasso) in his last essay under the title *De tribus poematibus causae dictio* (1661). He submitted these comments to Henri-Louis Habert Montmor (to whom Le Moyne dedicated his moral epistle XII “De la paix du Sage”, because he was the king’s counselor). As was the custom among epic poets of the time, the discussion of these three well-known precedents was accompanied by a defense of his own epic compositions.

In Hainsworth’s opinion, Torquato Tasso’s *Discorsi del poema eroico* is the culmination of Italian literary criticism on the epic poem, after which some other features of the epic genre appeared⁸. The prestige of Italian humanism was still high among French poets, and Tasso’s theory and epic work were the immediate reference for both Mambrun and Le Moyne.

Mambrun’s dissertation on the epic poem was also collected in the publication of his works (1661) with *Constantinus*. Therefore, the last edition of Mambrun’s works included a defense of his poem on the emperor Constantine. Likewise, the contemporary French Jesuits Pierre Le Moyne and Laurent Le Brun (1608-1663) collected their epic poems and the defense in the edition of their complete works⁹. These were highly influential treatises on the topic, as Ludwig Braun’s inventory of French epic poems shows¹⁰. Some words in the *praefatio* to Mambrun’s *Constantinus* depicted the literary

⁷ D. MASKELL, *The Historical Epic in France 1500-1700*, Oxford, 1973; W. CALIN, *Crown, Cross and “fleur de lis”: An Essay on le P. Le Moyne’s Baroque Epic “Saint Louis”*, Saratoga, 1977; H. CHÉROT, *Étude sur la vie et les œuvres du P. Le Moyne*, Paris, A. Picard, 1887, pp. 109-111 and pp. 243-249 on Mambrun’s dissertation; R. G. MABER, *The Poetry of Le Moyne*, Frankfurt, Lang, 1982; G. BOSCO, *Il Saint Louys de Pierre Le Moyne*, Torino, 1985; A. J. STEELE, “Pierre Le Moyne”, in *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, 1995; A. DABEZIES, C. O’NEIL, J. M. DOMÍNGUEZ, *Diccionario histórico de la Compañía de Jesús. Biográfico-temático*, Roma/ Madrid, Institutum Historicum/ Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2001, p. 2306, vol. 3.

⁸ J. B. HAINSWORTH, *The Idea of Epic*, Berkeley, University California Press, 1991, p. 141.

⁹ L. LE BRUN, *Dissertatio de epico carmine*, in *Vergilius Christianus Bucolica sive Eclogae, Psycurgicon, Ignatiados libri, Opuscula selecta*, Parisiis, Apud Simonem Piget, 1661, pp. 137-200, on pp. 159-160 considered the action as the deep structure of the composition: “Actio poetae debet esse unica, non plures, quae ut appareat una, debet nudari suis circumstantiis (...)”. And suggested also other opinions to confirm the rule: “Actio Epici carminis debet esse illustris, ut ait Aristoteles interprete Pacio [sc. The Aristotelian translator Giulio Pace], praecleara interprete Heinsio [sc. Daniel Heinsius], honesta ut alii vertuunt”. Therefore, he suggested some differences of definition depending on the interpretation of Aristotle. P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio peripatetica de epico carmine*, Parisiis apud Sebastianum Cramoysi et Gabrielem Cramoisy, 1652, for instance p. 44 blamed Pace: “Hic quoque indiligens fuit Pacius”. L. GRANT, “Neo-Latin Biblical Pastorals”, *Studies in Philology*, 1, 1961, 25-43, on page 39 mentioned Laurent Le Brun of Nantes as a “prolific Jesuit poet”. Grant judged this author’s religious pastorals “very uneven in quality”. The scholar examined Mambrun’s pastoral *Christus nascens* on pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ L. BRAUN, *Ancilla Calliopeae. Ein Repertorium der Neulateinischen Epik Frankreichs (1500-1700)*, Leiden/ Boston, Brill Academic Publishers, 2007, on *Constantinus*, pp. 513-550.

circle¹¹. In a general overview of epic production of the time, Jean Chapelain's preface to *Pucelle ou La France Délivrée* (1656) summarized the main French writers who took up the challenge of emulating ancient works¹². The German humanist Jesuit, Jacob Masen (Masenius, 1606-1681), who wrote the poem *Sarcotis* (1654), was a very well-known lecturer on Rhetoric and Poetics (*Progymnasmata, Palaestra Styli, Palaestra eloquentiae ligatae*). His didactic concerns were expressed in the essay *Heroica poesis praeceptionibus et exemplis illustrata*¹³.

¹¹ P. MAMBRUN, *Constantinus*, op. cit., 1658, *Praefatio*, pp. 20-21: "Ante uiginti annos aut circiter hoc opus nostrum non inchoatum modo, sed affectum est tum cum eorum nemini, qui postremis istis temporibus Epopeias ediderunt, praeter clarissimum Capellanum [sc. Jean Chapelain, whose *Pucella ou La France délivrée's* epic poem], cuius consilia latebant, in mentem uenerat Epicum poema scribere. (...) Nam me/ Scuderij foecunditas admirabilis et ingenij diuitiae quodammodo infinitae; tum Maresii [sc. Desmarests] in excogitando solertia singularis (...) curiositas et alacritas semper uegeta, nec non Capellani in omni genere doctrinae eruditio summa et accuratum in expendendis rerum atque sententiarum momentis iudicium cum suauitate eximia carminis et aequabili dictionis maiestate de quo neque pro illius meritis atque dignitate, neque pro mea in illum amicitia, atque obseruantia satis multa et magnifica mihi unquam uidebor dixisse. (...) Quamuis de nostris hominibus me loqui par est, non ideo tamen Buisserium [sc. the Jesuit Jean de Bussièrès, whose *Rhea Liberata, Scanderbegus, Clodoveis*, see L. BRAUN, op. cit., pp. 469-512] silere possum, quo spiritus altiores nemo alit, aut plus furoris illius in re poetica laudatissimi habere mihi uidetur. Te uero, mi Petre Lemoni, qui cum mihi tot annos contigit uiuere suauissime, praeterire religio est. Te enim poetam peperit natura, ars instruxit, eruditio multiplex locupletem fecit. Tu ingenio artium omnium arcana peruidisti. Tu animi constantia labores infinitos et suscepisti alacriter et superasti fortiter, arte mirabili ex omni disciplinarum genere, atque imprimis poetices, immortalem tibi coronam texuisti".

¹² J. CHAPELAIN, *La Pucelle ou La France Délivrée. Poème Heroïque par M. Chapelain*, A Paris, chez Augustin Courbe, 1656, a 1v-d 4r; on p. d 2v: "dans la peinture parlante Moysè de M. de S. Amand (sc. M. A. Gérard de Saint-Amant, 1653), dans la hardiesse et dans la vivacité, au Saint Louys du Rd. Père le Moine; dans la pureté, dans la facilité et dans la majesté, au Saint Paul de M. l'Évesque de Vence (sc. Antoine Godeau, 1654); dans l'abondance et dans la pompe à l'Alaric de M. de Scudery, (sc. Georges Scudery, 1656); enfin, dans la diversité et dans les agréments, au Clovis de M. Desmarests. Je ne parle point de la Pharsale de M. de Brebeuf (sc. Georges de Brébeuf, 1654-1655) (...) / d 3r: Que dirois-je encore de l'avantage qu'a, sans doute, la gravité magnifique du Constantin du Rd Père Mambrun et du Martel de M. de Boissat (...). Que ne dirais-je enfin, du Conquisto di Granata du Seigneur Girolamo Graziani (...)". P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, pp. 116-122 discussed the subject of the heroine in the epic poem, and regarding Chapelain's work, disclosed the pattern of the hero's physical and moral virtues on p. 119: "Quae Heroem faciunt, tria putantur esse maxime: corporis habitudo quaedam firma ac laborum patiens, quae atra bile sparsit, tum animus praesens, erectus et robustus quodammodo cui accedat magnitudo ex illa corporis temperie, quam statuimus: demum divina quaedam vis et efficientia, qua qui afflatur, supra hominem et sapere et posse videatur".

¹³ J. MASEN, *Heroica poesis praeceptionibus et exemplis illustrata, apud Sarcotis et Caroli V Imp. Panegyris, Carmina. Adjecta est Lamentationum Jeremiae Paraphrasis, auctore D. Grenan, Londini et veniit Parisiis apud J. Barbou, 1771*, pp. 1-79. The work was not as systematically argued as Mambrun's, but it was more widely read due to the teaching of rhetoric from a poetic perspective. This is evident from the explanation on *ornamenta* on p. 23: "Ornamenta fabulae totius fiat imprimis descriptiones personarum, factorum, locorum, temporum, etc. in quibus ante omnia iuventutis ad eloquentiam exercenda est (...) Vnde in Sarcotide nostra hoc imprimis spectavimus, ut haec silva quaedam esset descriptionum, praecipue moralium (...) Accedunt Orationes variae per hanc poesin opportune spargendae (...)".

It is undeniable that the framework and – apparently – the contents of Jesuit treatises were essentially borrowed from Aristotle's *Poetics*. The debate, in which several writers participated, concerned the best composition of the epic poem. These treatises proposed an interpretation of the classical tradition, but also revealed a certain misunderstanding of the ancient epic ("poetic errors"), which led to a selection of what were considered the best works or the best readings. Vossius, for example, in his first book of *Institutiones* and in *De Imitatione* had censured as a poetic error the fictive presence of divinities in human battles, and criticized the metrical mistakes¹⁴.

While taking these criticisms into account, the Jesuit poets applied the principles of epic composition derived from the classical canon to the writing of epic poems that illustrated the excellence of Jesuit saints and stimulated the imitation of their virtues¹⁵.

We will focus here on the debate and establishment of the critical concepts which define the practice of the poetic examples of the genre. Mambrun was not only a commentator on Aristotle. He went further than his contemporaries, although there are few features that one can describe as breakthroughs.

2. The Jesuit Epic hero: a didactic program.

Mambrun and other Jesuit writers were worried about the concept of action and its influence on behavior. However, they structured their arguments very differently. Laurence Le Brun's *compositio* is part of the general activity of persuasion¹⁶. Le Moyne and Chapelain seemed to have a clear concept of what a poem should be like, which they both expressed with the resource of allegory¹⁷.

¹⁴ G. J. VOSSIUS, *Poeticarum institutiones*, Amstelodami, Elzevir, 1696 [1647], p. 137 and *De imitatione*, ibidem, p. 178. Vossius did not deal primarily with epic, but he explained the nature of the narrative plot, the episodes, and the size of epic in comparison with drama. On the other hand, Vossius (ibidem, p. 24) "eo fuit perspicacior Scaligero, quod Aristoteli se applicuit quam potuit, constantissime. Non tamen Philosophi mentem uidit". See J. BLOEMENDAL, E. RABBIE, *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres*, Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 2010, p. 924, pp. 886-941, pp. 1946-2107. P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, pp. 19-21: "Intercedit enim-vero hic pro imperio vir existimationis maximae Iulius Scaliger". Mambrun expressed his worries about Scaliger's extreme criticism of some of the ancient works, but considered that the synthesis *Poeticorum libri septem* was valuable.

¹⁵ Y. HASKELL, op. cit., pp. 205-206. Explaining Vergil's *Eneide*, Michel de Marolles, abbé de Villeloin (1600-1681) expressed his opinions on the best epic poem. C. SOREL, *La bibliothèque française*, Paris, Compagnie de libraires, 1667, 2.nd ed., pp. 227-230, on page 228. R. A. SAYCE, "A Copy of Marolles *Traité du Poème Epique* annotated by Richelet", *A Modern Language Review*, 1, 1947, 361-363. L. A. BOSSEBOEUF, *Michel de Marolles sa vie et son œuvre*, Genève, Slatkine, 1971.

¹⁶ L. LE BRUN, op. cit., p. 137. "Quis negare audeat Epico carmini convenire haec tria, quae memorantur a Tullio his verbis: erit igitur eloquens is qui ita dicit ut probet, ut delectet, ut flectat".

¹⁷ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., *Praefatio*, p. E, 1v: "Le Poème Heroïque est un Édifice de cette grandeur et de cette forme: il y faut garder les mesmes règles, qui se gardent en la structure des plus grands Palais. Et le Lecteur ignorant de ces règles, qui sans avoir égard au Magnifique et

Unlike Mambrun, Le Moyne and Chapelain wrote about the “poème heroïque”, which was not a true epic, but rather a romance in that the hero was a medieval knight. While three kinds of narrative poem – the heroic poem, the romance, and the new historical epic – all derived from ancient epic, these sub-genres have evolved in different directions since the 17th century¹⁸. Romance means a love story in English nowadays, and bears little relationship to the ancient genre, as epitomized in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. Mambrun’s opinion on the difficulty of composing an epic poem offers an evident contrast to Le Moyne’s allegory of a magnificent building¹⁹.

Masen also addressed the question of the definition of epic, which included the contents as well as the form of the poem²⁰. He suggested that the writings of ancient Christian authors, such as the forgotten epic of Prudentius, should be considered as better examples to imitate than Claudian’s epic²¹.

au Sublime, au Merveilleux que demande l’Heroique, y chercheroit le Joli du Madrigal, ou le Mignard de l’Elegie, feroit à peu près, comme si dans les Sales et dans les Galeries du Louvre, il cherchoi la politesse et le lustre d’un Cabinet de la Chine”. J. CHAPELAIN, op. cit., p. c, 2v: “(...) qu’afin de réduire l’Action a l’Universel, suyvnt les Preceptes et de ne la priver pas du sens Allegorique, par lequel la Poësie est faite l’un des principaux Instrumens de l’architectonique, je disposay toute sa matiere de telle sorte, que la France devoit représenter l’Ame de l’Homme, en guerre avec elle-mesme, et travaillée par les plus violentes de tous les Emotions”.

¹⁸ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. 1, 3r: “accepted love stories to a certain extent as part of the epic poem, which came from the medieval romance to French literature: ‘Secondement, les Amours qui entrent dans le Poëme, doivent ester des Amours de Heros et d’Heroïnes et non pas des Amours de Coquets et Coquetes”.

¹⁹ P. MAMBRUN, *Opera poetica. Accessit Dissertatio de epico carmine*, Fixae Andecavorum, ex officina Gervasii Laboe, 1661, p. 2: “Cum Epicum poema scribere viri docti rem esse omnium longe difficillimam putent: tum id magis sentiunt illi, qui ad eiusmodi litterarum genus mentem aliquando atque animum convertere. De variis ac multiplicibus difficultatis illius causis a me quidem disputatum est abunde in Dissertatione, quam de Epico Carmine ante aliquos annos edidi (...)”. His friend, J. CHAPELAIN underlined this opinion op. cit., p. A, 1v: “Te sçay que de toutes celles qui se peuvent faire dans l’empire des Muses, celle-là est la plus hardie et la plus élevée (sc. L’entreprise d’un Poëme heroïque)”.

²⁰ J. MASEN, op. cit., p. 2: “Heroicum, vel unam tantum praecipuam herois actionem prosequitur, et Epopoeia, recepta passim voce, dicitur et est Aeneis Virgilii, vel plures ejusdem virtutes perstringit et Panegyris fere appellatur, ut apud Claudianum in Stiliconis honorem extat”. The German Jesuit pointed out the contemporary choice of ancient works to imitate, on p. 55: “Virgilium plures laudant, quam imitantur (...) Quare plures hac aetate aut Statii aut Claudiani imitatores reperies quam laudatores”. And in *Sarcotis* he confirmed his imitation of Virgil to catch the reader’s attention on p. 81: “Stylum propius ad Vergilianam modestiam candoremque simul inflexi” (*Sarcotis lectori benevolo*).

²¹ The Jesuit poet Laurent Le Brun, explained the focus of the new Christian epic L. LE BRUN, op. cit., on p. 150: “Alterum praeceptum sit: ne longis anfractibus oratio circumducatur, aut translationibus intumescat: id vitio fecit Claudiano”. On Jesuit references to Claudian, from Rainier Carsughi, a little younger than Mambrun, Le Moyne and Le Brun, see Y. HASKELL, op. cit., p. 206. L. BRAUN, op. cit. on L. Le Brun’s *Ignatias*, pp. 551-573. See also T. GÄRTNER, “Die *Ignatias* des Laurentius Le Brun: Ein Jesuitepos über den Ordengründer Ignatius von Loyola”, *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch*, 6, 2004, 17-49. J. MASEN, op. cit., p. 41: “Quamquam, ut Statius Claudiano illustrior, ita etiam obscurior sit habendus”. Masenius did not criticize Claudian’s Latin text, but seemed to give a piece of advice about the differences on p. 52: “Iterum Claudianus dissolute sine conjunctionibus membra, saepius in unam periodum congerit, ac deinde minutis

While Jesuit treatises agreed on the unity of action derived from Aristotle, this was the least important among their literary requirements: the focus on depicting a verisimilar hero was, however, intense. Battles or quarrels were not the essential core of the epic poem, they claimed, because there were other scenes and landscapes, dialogues and monologues. On the other hand, the ancient epic was a true encyclopedia for the audience. This kind of oral literature expressed a diversity of messages to the public, which were essential for the ancient inhabitants of the Mediterranean area. This was the reason for the redirection of the epic to those who supported the cavalry code in the 17th century, the king and his noblemen. It was not a genre for the bourgeois, nor for the lower classes of French people. However, the epic action should express a kind of behavior which is far from people's everyday life. Moreover, Mambrun explicitly distanced the high style and the specific subject matter from other didactic purposes²².

With regard to the creation of a new epic, there were two ways to proceed: the first consisted in depicting the satirical shadow of greatness, an approach supported by those who were exasperated by the madness of war; the other was the approach chosen by Mambrun and other authors, the didactic poem. This proposal was not a revival of the medieval *prodesse* and *delectare*. The aim of literary production was not exclusively moral learning, but the joy or pleasure gained from the communication of true experiences.

In the index of the essay, where he listed the main concepts and the intellectual root of the doctrine, the hero is the most relevant item, because the aim of the Jesuit educational project was human behavior (*character* and *mores*). This was also Masen's starting point (*carmen a praecipua memoria heroum gestis nomen traxit*), but it was not Le Moyne's ("Il faut aller plus loin, pour trouver le Grand, le Magnifique et le Merveilleux qui sont des qualitez essentielles à l'Heroïque")²³. The dispute revolved around which kind of veri-

particularium repetitionibus gaudet (...) denique rotundioribus fere periodis, idque plerumque agit in fine hexametri inclinato ad quietem numero, ita ut saepius vox antepenultima molossus sit, penultima dactylus, et ultima spondaeus". On the use of vocabulary, Claudian's style seemed rather different, on p. 53: "Claudianus minus significanter propriis et translatis audacius utitur".

²² P. MAMBRUN, *Constantinus*, op. cit., *Praefatio*, p. 19: "Quam graviter hallucinari necesse est eos, qui carmine epico virtutes domesticas et privatas celebrari posse autumant. Quam turpiter se dederit qui Catonem, quia familiam suam bene instituit, aut Laelium quia religiose domesticos suos bonis imbuat moribus, sibi in thema Epopoeiae proponit". The debate increased the close attention to style as well. While Boileau is well known as the popularizer of many concepts of literary criticism in France, the reception of his rules was mixed in Great Britain, Spain, Portugal or Germany. As already mentioned, the debate on the epic was not linked at first to the diffusion of Longinus's writings on the sublime. Therefore, Boileau's French translation of *De sublimitate* (1674) and its influence on narrative can be considered a new approach to epic writing. R. DORAN, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longin to Kant*, Cambridge, University Press, 2015, p. 111, distinguished Boileau's contribution to literary theory: "on the one hand, it liberates the sublime and Longinus's treatise from the narrow confines of rhetoric; on the other, it argues for the sublime to be considered as a critical concept, thereby introducing the term into modern thought".

²³ J. MASEN, op. cit., p. 1 and P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. E, 4r; G. BOSCO, op. cit., pp. 13-70; B. RUBIDGE, "Catharsis through admiration: Corneille, Le Moyne and the Social Uses of Emotion", *Modern Philology*, 95:3, 1998, 316-333, on 320.

similitude was acceptable in fictional narrative. The Jesuits selected their heroes to confirm this verisimilitude with historical characters who – despite their extraordinary feats – were human, not divine²⁴. Le Moyne set his epic poem in a didactic framework²⁵.

The social background of readers/ auditors (noblemen, craftsmen from the middle classes...) made them receptive to this new literary production and to the assessment of literary value proposed by Italian critics. The flourishing debate on composition started in the humanist tradition in Italy, but its reception in France was intense after 1650, even in French²⁶. After the debate about Tasso's epic in the times of the Academia Crusca, his literary proposal was accepted as the new icon of the Italian epic after Dante. Jesuit treatises omitted the reference to Ariosto or mentioned him rather disparagingly. Tasso's poem on Justinian's conquest of the Goths was also close both to Constantine and to Saint-Louis.

Paolo Beni, an Italian Jesuit (1552-1627), compared Tasso's work with Homer's and Virgil's. His comments are relevant, because Mambrun, Le Moyne and even Le Brun wrote in accordance with the literary precepts that were commonly accepted by Beni and the most reputed critics of the times. Beni commented on the errors in the epic in order to praise Tasso's achievements²⁷, pointing out in his *Comparatione* (1607 and 1612) several flaws in the ancient heroes²⁸. Beyond the religious topic, there were some other

²⁴ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, p. 45: "De veritate actionis sive argumenti id in quaestionem vocari potest; possitne action fingi in solidum. Parum perite vulgus putat materiam omnis poematis fictam esse debere". J. MASEN, op. cit., p. 21 explained a rhetorical technique to accomplish variation when composing an epic work (*antithesis*): "Varia fiet personarum factorumque ac consiliorum oppositione, quae mutua quadam connexione ita trahitur, ut improvisus unus casus alium nondum terminatum aut abruptum, aut finitum excipiat".

²⁵ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. 1, 2v: "Mais ces représentations doivent estre des leçons, qui enseignent en divertissant: ces Figures doivent estre des Patrons, sur lesquels les Spectateurs se puissent former de nouveau, et se faire plus sages ou plus Braves, plus Patiens ou plus Magnanimes".

²⁶ Jean Desmarests de Saint-Sorlin (*Defense du poeme heroique*, 1674) and René Le Bossu (*Traité du poeme epique*, 1675) René Rapin (*Observations sur le poème d'Homère et de Virgile*, 1669, and *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote et sur les ouvrages des Poètes anciens et modernes*, 1674-1675) and the noteworthy innovator Antoine Houdar de la Motte (*Discours sur Homère*, 1714, and *Reflexions sur la critique*, 1716) contrasted their rule-giving with the classical tradition after Mambrun's, Le Moyne's, J. Masen's and Le Brun's proposals. Although René Le Bossu (*Traité du poème épique*, A Paris, Chez Jean Muster, 1708 [1675], p. 14, Hamburg, Buske, 1981 [1714], p. 11 (V. KAPP [ed.] initially adopted the definition of the former generation on the epic poem, he went further in describing its fictional features: "L'épopée est un discours inventé avec art, pour former les mœurs par des instructions déguisées sous les allégories d'une action importante, qui est racontée en Vers d'une manière vraisemblable, divertissante, et merveilleuse". It was the meaning of verisimilitude which was the turning point in the evolution of the genre.

²⁷ P. BENI, *Comparatione di Homero, Virgilio e Torquato. Et a chi di loro si debba la Palma nell' Heroico Poema, del quale si vanno anco riconoscendo i precetti: con dar largo canto de Poeti Heroici, tanto Greci quanto Latini e Italiani. E in particolare si fa giuditio dell'Ariosto*, in Padova, appresso Lorenzo Pasquati, 1607, pp. 1-5.

²⁸ P. BENI, op. cit., p. 1. In the first lines of his essay, we read the title "Che Torquato Tasso nel suo Goffredo habbia rappresentato molto più noblile e perfetta Idea di valoroso Capitano e Heroe, che Homero e Virgilio". He blamed Achilles' cruelty against Hector, and criticized "le

features which the Jesuits considered useful for their educational program. However, Mambrun did not hold Beni's work as a whole in high esteem, only some passages in it. Le Moyne suggested the example of Tasso to show the inefficiency of the narration²⁹.

However, this is not the whole context of their treatises. The two Neo-Latin dissertations (sc. Mambrun's and Le Brun's) and the French one (Le Moyne "les moeurs sont après la Fable, la partie la plus essentielle du poëme et la plus importante à la fin de la Poësie") expressed the desire to profit from this classical genre to further their didactic purpose of influencing the audience's behavior³⁰. Another aspect which arises in the comparison of the two proposals, Le Moyne's and Mambrun's, is the literary language. Le Moyne thought of himself as the writer of a new national epic poem in the vernacular for the French people, such as Dante's or Tasso's, whose heroes were very remote from the contemporary concerns of 17th-century

tante lagrime con quali deplora la perdita Briseida, e il lasciar la nobile e bellicose impresa per una feminella non par cosa degna di forte Cavaliero e Heroe", *ibidem*, p. 10. His opinion of Odysseus, whom he considered as a beggar sailor, was no higher, criticizing his tearful and cowardly attitude. On the other hand, "e se pur volesse alcuno, che Enea fosse in parte degno di scusa per esser' incorso in affetto che tanto può ne' couri humani, e a cui sovente soggiacciono anco huomini di non poca fama e valore come (per lasciar gli Hercoli i Thesei, e, come favoleggiar gli antichi, l'istesso Giove) si riconobbe in Augusto, Traiano e altri" (P. BENI, *ibidem*, op. cit., p. 21). On the debate on Poetics and Tasso see P. B. DIFFLEY, *Paolo Beni. A Biographical and Critical Study*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1988, pp. 65-66, 121-135. P. MAMBRUN *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, tried to provide a correct interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine to set forth the genre's classical form p. 56: "Hallucinatos esse tum eos qui ab unitate temporis Epopoeiam unam esse volunt, ab Aristotele accepimus. Decepti quoque videntur, qui ab utroque et Heroe et tempore unitatem illam derivari crediderunt". And he criticized Beni's opinion on the poem's unity p. 59: "Deceptus est quoque Benius qui existimavit actionem Epopoeiae minus esse unam, quam Tragoediae et opinionem illam Aristoteli affinxit. Nam Philosophus (...) non instituit comparationem actionum inter se sed fabularum". And at the end of the chapter he asserted *de materia epopoeiaie* in the first section p. 78: "Cetera, quae de unitate disputari possunt, ad fabulam magis quam ad actionem pertinent".

²⁹ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. 1, 2r: "Si le Heros principal est seul et sans concurrent (...) Car de luy donner des Associez et des Cooperateurs, qui luy soient égaux, qui mettent la main à l'œuvre avec luy et fassent la moitié de la besogne; c'est donner plusieurs testes à un corps (...) De recourir l'Allegorie, pour justifier cette faute, comme fait le Tasse, c'est faire venir de bien loin et à de grandes frais, une Chimere, pour défendre une autre Chimere". These comments were a major reference in the Spanish reception of the debate on Neo Classical Poetics made by IGNACIO DE LUZÁN (1737-1789), *La poética o Reglas de la poesía en general y de sus principales especies: ediciones de 1737 y 1789*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1974, pp. 426-427: "Pero el citado Benio, de los mismos principios de Aristóteles, saca otra definición que explica más clara y difusamente la naturaleza de la epopeya. La epopeya, dice, es imitación de una acción ilustre, perfecta y de justa grandeza, hecha en verso heroico, por vía de narración dramática, de modo que cause grande admiración y placer, y al mismo tiempo instruya a los que mandan u gobiernan en lo que conduce para las buenas costumbres y para vivir una vida feliz, y los anime y estimule a las más excelentes virtudes y esclarecidas hazañas".

³⁰ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit. p. 1, 3v and in p. 1, 4v "Se n'ay proposé aucun Modele qui ne fuse parfait, ou reformé sur l'Idée du parfait". Antonio Figueira Duraño's *Ignatias (Opera omnia, 1635)*, Bartholomaeus Pereira's *Paciecis* (1640), Jacob Masen's *Sarcotis* (1654), Nicolo Gianettasio *Saberis* (1715), are the best examples of the new Jesuit epic. Even if such a conception could not be taught, there was a constant striving to teach how fruitful this literature was as a didactic tool.

society. He advocated that the writer should try to make an optimal selection of the literary language and resources of his time, while nevertheless taking part in the debate on the defining features of the epic. Mambrun, in contrast, remained within the Latin tradition. In this, he was not the first nor the last of the writers of epic poems to explore the structure and style of Virgil's work. His concern, as a Jesuit teacher, for educational matters led him to the greater genre of epic, in which the didactic value of virtues was the most important aim.

From the perspective of intellectual history, the decisive role of war, which was the plot of most traditional epic poems, represented a problem for the depiction of a Jesuit hero: how could the martial framework of the epic be adapted to their didactic, and pacific, purposes? Eusebius' *Constantine* was Mambrun's hero too. Perhaps more importantly, Constantine could be an example for the European aristocracy thanks to his position as a Roman Emperor, which was not the case of Saint Louis, Le Moyne's hero. He was a medieval king, remote from the French people's way of life, though he was not a figure of the *honnête homme*. Known for his depiction of heroic characters, Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, in the second dialogue of his *Défense* (1674, p. 16), recommended the religious epic in preference to the monstrous fables of Antiquity³¹. Pierre Mambrun's concept of an epic hero was the main criterion for the *compositio*. All the Jesuit writers of this period mentioned verisimilitude as the main condition either for the action or for the fable. The same condition was applied to the fictional characters³².

In other words, the principle of verisimilitude required a definition of the specific features of the Christian hero. *Le merveilleux chrétien* is not easy to define in the Jesuit epic. Le Moyne³³ and Le Brun³⁴ did not recommend the Biblical epic, although they considered that Biblical stories were the exact truth. Paul M. Martin expressed no respect for French epic works written in the 18th century, but declared the success of religious poems³⁵.

³¹ J. DESMARETS DE SAINT-SORLIN, *La Défense du poème héroïque*, Paris, Jacques le Gras, 1674, p. 16: "C'est là ce Dieu vivant, de qui l'éternité/ Le pouvoir la sagesse, et l'estre, et la bonté,/ Nous furent enseignez par récit véritable,/ Qui seul peut à nos chants donner le vraisemblable/ Et non les spectres vains des ridicules Dieux,/ Que seulement on feint comme habitans des Cieux,/ Et dont l'Antiquité, chimérique, et bonteuse,/ A fait les fondamens de sa fable menteuse".

³² L. LE BRUN, op. cit., p. 167: "Non debent heroes celebrari longo a nobis tempore ita distantes, ut memoria vel penitus exciderit, vel inter fabulas recenseatur. (...) Heroes tamen non debent esse aut recentes aut praesentes, quid enim fingas quid mille testes non arguant? Quam in legem peccant qui de Henrico Quarto, De Gustavo de Sueviae Rege, de classe Hispaniae Philippi secundi contra Angliam poema scripserint".

³³ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. 1, 3r: "Ils vont chercher dans les Saintes Écritures des Heros et des Actions heroïques à mettre en Poeme (...) Ce qu'il y a de vray, ne se peut mettre en Fable, sans quelque sorte de blaspheme (...) L'Action est vraye: mais elle est bien au delà du Vraisemblable. (...) Cette vaillance trouvera gueres plus d'imitateurs que celle du Roland de l'Arioste, qui donne des batailles, et défait des armées dans le ventre d'une baleine".

³⁴ L. LE BRUN, op. cit., p. 170: "Hinc colliges actionem Sampsonis non esse propriam Epopoeiae; nam etsi vera sit, non est verisimilis". P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, p. 195: "Qui tandem erit illa vero similis si homini tribuitur, quae vires eius superare creditur?".

³⁵ P. M. MARTIN, "Homère, Virgile et les autres. Les épopées classiques comme 'étalons' dans la critique au XVIII^e siècle", in R. Chevalier (ed.), *Colloque L'épopée greco-latine et ses*

Martin enables us to grasp the importance of the Jesuits' way of considering the advantage of the ancient genre: they focused on a human hero who was very close to the public, whose virtues were worth imitating, and they developed the topic of a long life of happiness on earth and in the afterlife. The hero of the Ancients, however, was too large for our comprehension, too excessive to be a true image of a human being. Clearly, the Jesuit writers did not promote a renewal of the ancient epic, nor a new narrative, but rather a kind of educational program through the design of a renewed epic genre. The medieval romance was still an example of narrative technique and topics, and it also inspired a subgenre. It was not the mythological hero, but the increasing importance of the hero's behavior, which was focused on in their treatises, beyond the story itself.

On the other hand, while the historians of literature often disregard the Latin tradition, it is worth mentioning the importance of the use of a traditional language, such as Latin, in conjunction with the choice of a hero. A consideration of the key virtues of each cultural epoch reveals that the exploit is often made out to be a feature of the hero, but it mostly reflects several virtues of his character. The difficulty of depicting the true character of a fictive or medieval hero is greater than that of describing a true man, which is directly concerned with issues of literary representation. However, a possible solution to this difficulty was to dress the ancient warrior in a new name³⁶.

3. On the definition of a new narrative literature: Did Mambrun make any particular contribution?

The definition of the Aristotelian terms for narrative commented on by humanist scholars (such as *materia*, *forma*, action, fable, hero, *verisimilitude*, epic style, machine, time, place) was also Le Moyne's and Masen's aim³⁷.

prolongements europeens. Calliope II, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1981, pp. 285-295, on p. 286: "Au XVIII^e siècle même, outre la *Méssiad* de Klopstock, six auteurs français produisirent des épopées catholiques; leur médiocrité générale n'en atteste pas moins la fécondité et la vitalité du genre. En outre, alors que disparaît la vogue des épopées romanesques, qui avait tant fait admirer l'Arioste au XVII^e siècle, et des épopées nationales ou conquérantes, comme *Les Lusitades* de Camões, l'*Araucana* d'Ercilla, la *Franciade* de Ronsard, au XVI^e siècle, voire la *France délivrée* de Chapelain, au XVII^e siècle, ne connaissaient plus guère de succès, la retraduction, en 1724, de la *Jérusalem délivrée* de Tasse et les nombreuses traductions et adaptations du *Paradis perdu* de Milton, que Voltaire fit connaître aux Français, montrent que le lecteur français avait plus la tête épique qu'on a dit, et que les épopées à sujet religieux rencontraient un indéniable succès, y compris chez les philosophes".

³⁶ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. E, 1v: "L'on dira toujours que le Poëme Epique est une Fable, c'est-à-dire, non le récit de l'action de quelque Heros pour former les moeurs sur son exemple, mais au contraire, un discours inventé pour former les moeurs par le récit d'une action feinte, et décrite à plaisir, sous le nom emprunté d'une personne illustre, dont on fait choix, après avoir dressé le plan de l'action qu'on lui attribue".

³⁷ P. LE MOYNE, op. cit., p. E, 4r: "Le Temps a ses Perspectives, comme le Lieu a les siennes; mais il y a cette différence, que l'éloignement qui détruit l'apparence des choses, et les réduit a

Combined with distrust of the mythological hero, and the requirements of true verisimilitude, the epic hero, it was claimed, should be both fully human and at the same time an extra-ordinary person in order to comply with the epic constraints of arousing pity, fear and – in particular – emulation.

Mambrun's dissertation started with a descriptive account of the concepts of the epic genre, but it later became a detailed commentary on the sources of Aristotelian and Horatian doctrine. Unlike Masen, he took a different perspective on the *materia epopoeiae*, arguing that it is the action and not the *fabula*, which depended on the action as its elementary form³⁸.

Providing a framework to guide the writer, Mambrun expressed the rhetorical concern for the development of the essential contents of the epic poem that differentiated it from history and poetic fiction: the rhetorical series consisting of nexus, solutio, invocatio and propositio provided an easier way to avoid a fragmented plot structure³⁹.

Along with other Jesuit participants in the debate, Mambrun shared the hope of excluding the concept of *machina* from literature, even in epic, though the heroic epic inculcated an aristocratic ethic of noble virtues: "Quae per machinam fit action, Dei est, non Herois"⁴⁰. However, Virgil adopted this resource by emulating the ancient Greek epic. Mambrun answered this objection⁴¹.

While Mambrun's readings in classical texts are the main references in the dissertation, the chapter *De dictione* is an interesting review of Neo-Latin knowledge on the topic. It started from Aristotle's *hermeneias* and went on to explain the Grammar concept of *proprietas* and of course, the Rhetorical notion of *actio* (Demosthenes, Cicero)⁴². Here the five rhetorical virtues of *perspicuitas*, *maiestas*, *aequabilitas*, *numerus et concinnitas* should arouse admiration and pleasure. These precepts were only cursorily dealt with in the commentary *De tribus poematibus*⁴³.

petit pied, dans les perspectives du Lieu, les amplifie et les augmente au double et au triple, dans les Perspectives du Temps". J. MASEN, op. cit., pp. 3-10.

³⁸ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, p. 41: "Actio est materia Epopoeiae; fabula vero est actionis prima informatio, ac proinde forma". J. MASEN, op. cit., p. 19.

³⁹ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, pp. 180-183: "Partes itaque Epopoeiae sunt duae Nexus et Solutio, neque locus erit tertiae parti Benianae, quae praecedat nexum (...). Hac de re qui dubitant doctrinae Peripateticae non sunt assueti, in qua praesens tempus quod committit praeteritum et futurum, non est tertia quadam pars motus ab illis distincta (...)".

⁴⁰ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, pp. 194-195: "Qui poema scripserit, cuius actio primarium exitum non habeat, nisi per machinam, is vitiose scripserit". On the depiction of hero's behavior, his piece of advice was clear on p. 200: "At si mores aliquando pravos imitari necesse sit, neque ij splendide accurari debent, neque in principe viro, omnium vero minime in Heroe. (...) Nam descriptio pravorum morum, si raro, si breviter, si quo fine par est, fiat; non officit moribus, sed etiam eos instituit sapientissime".

⁴¹ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, p. 196: "Cavit prudenter et scopulum declinavit consultissimus Maro. Machina is quidem adhibuit IV. Aeneidos, ubi Carthagine Aeneam Iovis imperio et Mercurii legatione eripuit. At ea machina in Episodiis censetur, non in actione prima".

⁴² P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, pp. 226-232.

⁴³ P. MAMBRUN, op. cit., 1661, chapter *Qua de re in poemate criticus quaestionem habere debeat*.

Mambrun sharpened his concise and lucid criticism by making moderate use of *sententiae* in this age of *arguti sermonis*. The judicious comment on Aristotle never overshadowed the didactic purpose, which was the aim of his Epic writing⁴⁴. No other Jesuit expressed so complete a doctrine as he did.

4. Yet it would be rash to draw conclusions.

Mambrun developed a useful synthesis of most of the literary opinions he had read in the humanistic commentaries and the rival French writers of his circle.

Nevertheless, he promoted the Jesuit educational program by adapting the classical tradition of Epic to new didactic purposes (the roots of humanism), and to the explanation of Virgil's works. The debate on verisimilitude suggested a new definition of the epic hero, and a new way of describing aristocratic behavior. This was also the purpose declared by Le Moyne.

ABSTRACT: In 1652, a time when several ancient sources and comments on Poetics were disputed, Pierre Mambrun wrote an essay, *Dissertatio de epico carmine*, expounding literary criteria by which to judge the flourishing genre of the French epic. This paper provides an overview of the Jesuit (Mambrun, Masen, Le Moyne, Le Brun) literary doctrine on the epic between 1650 and 1670. Mambrun discussed the definitions proposed in the main commentaries published before the impact of Boileau-Despréaux's translation of *De sublimitate* in 1674. After having explored the range of different definitions of the epic genre and imitation, Mambrun's contribution to a methodical analysis of Virgil's achievements is highlighted.

KEYWORDS: Literary Theory; Epic Genre; Classical Tradition; 17th Century Literature.

⁴⁴ P. MAMBRUN, *Dissertatio*, op. cit., 1652, p. 279: the justification for writing a poem was not the pleasure of poetry, but (...) "omnes animi impetus reprimere, tum multo magis ad genus omne virtutis principes viros atque Reges exemplo herois acuere".