

Christianisation of the epic in the *Lives of the Holy Virgins (Parthenicae)* by Baptista Mantuan

One of the most influential and significant cultural and literary movements of the Renaissance was the Christian humanism. Philosophers, thinkers, preachers and writers tried to combine the revival of antiquity with the world of Christian values. One of the manifestations of this tendency was the literary practice of Christianisation of ancient genres, including the epic. The epic, being a story about gods and heroes, seemed particularly attractive to writers who put the Christian God in place of the pagan gods and made Mary, Christ and the saints the heroes. The first Renaissance attempt of this kind was made by Maffeo Vegio, who composed an epic poem on the life of St Anthony. However, the greatest collection of Renaissance religious poems was created by the Italian Carmelite Baptista Mantuan (1447-1516). He wrote a collection of seven poems about the lives of holy virgins: Mary, St Catherine, St Margaret, St Agatha, St Lucia, St Apollonia and St Cecilia.

The aim of the project is to carry out the research on this collection of poems, known as *Parthenicae*, or *Lives of the Holy Virgins*, with regard to the mechanisms of Christianisation and the motives and aims of their use. By the term “Christianisation” I mean the imparting of a new Christian dimension to the individual determinants of the epic. In the project I will investigate (1) the literary sources and poetics of *Parthenicae*, (2) the place of *Parthenicae* in Mantuan’s poetic programme, (3) the place of *Parthenicae* and other Mantuan religious works in the literary heritage of Christian humanism.

In this part of the study, which will concern literary sources, I will look for an answer to the question of which earlier epics and other literary genres (e.g. idylls) the poet drew on when composing *Parthenicae*. In examining the poems’ poetics, I will focus on the ways in which certain determinants of the epic (e.g. epic motifs) were subjected to the process of Christianisation. Among the determinants examined, one can distinguish, for example, the motifs of the descent into the underworld or the storm at sea. I will also discuss the ways of Christianising motifs not related exclusively to the epic genre, but often appearing in it. The project also involves a reconstruction of Baptista Mantuan’s poetic programme. This reconstruction will include the poet’s poems containing metaliterary reflections as well as those touching upon moral and religious issues. Mantuan’s poetic programme will be juxtaposed with *Parthenicae* in order to examine the extent to which the mechanisms of Christianisation of the epic observed at earlier stages of the research find their theoretical justification therein. The project will also examine other Mantuan hagiographic poems and works of a didactic and moral character. These works will be analysed in terms of the Christianisation of the determinants of the epic, and the results obtained will be juxtaposed with the results of the study of *Parthenicae*, in order to find similarities and differences in the construction of the poet’s various Christian epics.

Parthenicae represent an extremely important and as yet unexplored stage in the development of the Christian epic. The scarcity of the state of research on the poems is particularly acute, as the author of the poems was one of the main figures of the Italian quattrocento and one of the most prominent representatives of Christian humanism. The proposed research will fill this gap and allow to reconstruct a detailed image of the fifteenth-century hagiographic epic. It will also provide knowledge on the issue of adaptation of the pagan genre form to the new Christian content, which is an extremely important problem in the research on Christian humanism and the reception of antiquity in the Renaissance.

The research will also make use of new, computer-assisted methods of analysing literary sources, which have so far rarely been applied in the studies on Neo-Latin literature.