

Fernando de Rojas and *Celestina*: Approaching the Fifth Century. Proceedings of An International Conference in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Death of Fernando de Rojas. Edited by Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph T. Snow. Madison, WI: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993. xx + 439pp.

Those who were present for the warm collegiality at the Fernando de Rojas conference at Purdue University in November of 1991 will welcome those impressive papers in their definitive form. The hosts of that gathering, and editors of this anthology, proposed with their usual modesty to merely initiate the learned festivities that will undoubtedly surround the 500th anniversary of the first printed edition of *Celestina*. What they have actually done is set a daunting standard for scholars who come after them. While these were not commissioned essays – which means that there are some gaps in the range of *celestinesca* topics that might be covered – they embrace both traditional concerns and announce new frontiers for questions previously thought settled.

The introductory essay by the editors, "*Celestina* and *Celestinas*: Nearing the Fifth Century," sums up in an astute thematic way the status of *Celestina* studies, a service Joseph Snow has performed for us before¹ and which he continues in the pages of this journal. In his 1988 overview, Snow established as his three principal focuses the dating of editions and events, belletristic interpretations and the artistic legacy of *Celestina* in subsequent generations. Here Corfis and Snow devote most of their space to a discussion of the editions and avatars of Rojas' sole known work and also suggest overarching forces of dark desire as a locus of interpretation in both fictional character and historical reader.

Yakov Malkiel offers his own retrospective on *Celestina* studies from an inimitable vantage point. His "Analysis of Early Critical Reactions to María Rosa Lida de Malkiel's *La originalidad artística de*

¹ "Estado actual de los estudios celestinescos." *Ínsula* N°. 497 (abril de 1988): 17-18.

'*La Celestina*'" draws on the personal archives of his late wife to reveal the genesis and public aftermath of her massive study. Malkiel includes an insightful appraisal of Peter Russell's 1964 review of *La originalidad*.²

Two of the most substantive essays in the collection, by Alan Deyermond, "Female Societies in *Celestina*," and María Eugenia Lacarra, "La evolución de la prostitución en la Castilla del siglo XV y la mancebía de Salamanca en tiempos de Fernando de Rojas," are vigorous new contributions to the (at last, mainstream) subject of the experiences of women. Both skirt psycho-literary feminist criticism per se for a more socio-historical or anthropological perspective on the functional roles women played in each other's lives and in their wider communities.

Deyermond's brilliant account of women's familial, economic and fanciful social clusters yields striking results. Within late medieval male macrosociety there existed few relatively autonomous female microsocieties: the convent, the brothel, the widow's household and the (transient) female-led court, estate or household, and these differed widely from each other in stability and permanence. *Celestina*'s private house of assignation (it is not a public brothel) is also a center of commerce and light industry, delineated in the long description of the technical infrastructure of *Celestina*'s workshop. Male clients underwrite its fragile self-sufficiency, but cannot dictate its internal rules and communal memory. Within this microsociety *Celestina* is its historian, Elicia its elegist and Areúsa its ideologue. Melibea, with Lucrecia's assistance, creates a fantasy "convent of courtly love" complete with cloister garden and erotic hymns, but as soon as Lucrecia shows signs of passion for Calisto the sisterhood dies even before Melibea does. Both microsocieties are furtive, required to conceal their existence from the masculine world of public law even as they court the male gaze of selective individuals. By the end of the work patriarchal societies and households are in ruins, and only *Celestina*'s line shows signs of continuance.

² "Literary Tradition and Social Reality in *La Celestina*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 41 (1964): 230-37.

Lacarra brings new documentation to this underworld of prostitution. One clear departure from *Celestina's* literary world is Lacarra's proof of control men held over the market for flesh in fifteenth-century Spain. *Terceros* kept their girls and women in a virtual state of slavery, with these prostitutes officially excluded from the protection of the law: those who committed crimes against them could do so with near impunity. The more manipulative practice of *alcahuetería* (males as well as females plied this trade) was punishable by burning if the sinful union had been successfully consummated. The legal records of the period have even yielded a grant from their Catholic Majesties for licensing a *mancebía* in Salamanca; the full document is photographically reproduced, transcribed and annotated by Lacarra as part of her article.

A further socio-historical study is provided by Jerry R. Rank in "'O cruel juez, y que mal pago me has dado...': Or Calisto's Urban Network." Rank's surprising but persuasive suggestion is that the "good old boy" society of the swain's city showed its own signs of degeneracy. More than the mere swooning male lover he was once thought to represent, Calisto comes equipped with a set of Mafia-style family connections with anticipated kickbacks to energize his pursuit of Melibea as a purchasable commodity.

Rhetoric is a major concern in this volume. "Conséjate con Séneca: *Auctoritas* in *Celestina* and *Celestina comentada*" by Louise Fothergill-Payne expands on some of the insights in her book on *Seneca and 'Celestina'* (Cambridge, 1988). Here she expands her grid to include the (sometimes thick-handed) witness of the *Celestina comentada* and to show how it explicates and betrays the pseudo-learning contained in Sempronio's diatribe against women in Act I. The malapropisms we enjoy in Cervantes' Sancho Panza apparently had their counterpart in Rojas' characters who bungled their quoteshmanship. In "The Four Humors in *Celestina*," Charles F. Fraker analyzes *Celestina's* cast as representatives of humoral descriptors and yet irreducible to those traits alone. He concedes that "Rojas ... [is] never very systematic about these matters" (142) but argues that to ignore the character types familiar to Rojas' readership is to miss deviations from character that Pleberio, say, signals when he departs from his anticipated melancholic temperament. Fraker's observations are highly perceptive, but while he would prefer not to ascribe the psychological complexity of modern fiction to the likes of Pármemo and Sempronio, he admits that humoral typology is a patchwork

affair at best, or as Nicholas Round observes elsewhere in this collection, "Unsuccessful roleplay was one of the grand paradigms of human conduct which Rojas was to take over and develop from the *Antiguo Auctor*" (97).³

"Rhetoric at Work: *Celestina*, *Melibea*, and the Persuasive Arts" by Edward H. Friedman provides a bracing tour of modern theoretical perspectives about language as constructive tool and subversive lever. Drawing on both De Man and Kristeva on the one hand, and Fraker and Gilman on the other, Friedman weaves a rhetorically dense composition of his own to sustain the thesis that Rojas portrays rhetoric as an ultimately doomed enterprise, unstable, and, in the face of death, all too insubstantial. Rhetoric is the self-referential engine that drives life and language to replicate themselves "transgressively" in this work.⁴

Other theoretical studies are on view as well. Nicholas G. Round in his "*Celestina*, *Aucto*, I: A Platonic Echo and Its Resonances" make a cautious sortie into territory we would like to know more about, namely how much Plato (as opposed to neoplatonic derivatives) Rojas could have actually read and absorbed in his Castilian surroundings. Lee Gallo (items 83 and 115 in the *Celestinesca* supplements) has argued that Rojas made his characters negative exemplars of neoplatonic virtues, and Round find parallels in the "double function of dialogue as didactic exposition and fictional action" (99). Pero Díaz' 1460s version of a vernacular *Phaedo* survives in a Salamanca manuscript and may have even been the copy read by the author of the first act, although perhaps only half-remembered or half-understood by him. The strongest structural match is Act IX, a *Symposium*-like dinner party turned into a debate on love, but that

³ For a recent study on the philosophy of love, see the astute work of Charles Heusch, "*La Célestine* et la tradition amoureuse médiévale," *Les Langues Néo-Latines* N° 279 (1992): 5-24.

⁴ On theories of classical rhetoric as manipulation, cf. Chaïm Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

too has to be consigned to mere stylistic convergence along with Celestina's own near-Socratic dominance of every conversation.⁵

"Law of the Father — Law of the Mother in *Celestina*" by James F. Burke, an essay which shares many points of textual reference with Deyermond's, explores the mythic and linguistic poles of paternity and maternity, the tensions between inherited wisdom and power (masculine) and self-creating, sometimes amnesic, authority (feminine). Catastrophe results when the father is either absent (in the case of Calisto) or irresponsible (in the case of Melibea). "Reading and Listening in *Celestina*" by James R. Stamm starts from the premise that Proaza understands "to read" (*leer*) as an oral, communal activity, "extroverted, dramatic," and that Rojas proved himself from his repeated private readings of the first act to be a "more modern, isolated ... a serious and analytical reader, a learner, a loner" (372), a "silent, 'visual' reader" (373). Unlettered Pármeneo and Areúsa rely on oral wisdom, the *evangelio chico* of the *refranero*, to guide their actions, while Sempronio and Melibea quote helter-skelter from dimly remembered books, something new for an erotic heroine in Spanish letters. Calisto for his part displays only rhetorical flashiness, a veneer of courtly patter.

Emilio de Miguel Martínez weighs in with "*Celestina*, teatro." The preoccupation about *Celestina* being either drama or novel was thought to have calmed down some time ago: the fact that it straddles the worlds of parlor theater and formal novel surely pertains to modern fixations on genre theory that troubled no one in the sixteenth (or seventeenth or eighteenth) centuries. Even though Rojas' own *Celestina* was never carried to the stage until the very early 20th century, Miguel Martínez insists that the overpowering balance of evidence has to come down on the side of theater, i.e., life overheard and not just reported. His 25 pages are a tight marshalling of every good argument — many of them quite fresh — for insisting that the only fully actualized reading of the work is a dramatization, at least in the mind of a reader. He does not confront the counter-argument that the characters themselves tend to slip in and out of their purely dramatic identity while they assume the shared experience of "co-

⁵ Cf. Linde Marie Brocato, "Communicating Desire: Self and Discourse in *La Celestina*," diss., Emory Univ., 1991, esp. "Chapter 2. A World of Difference: Gender and Self Through Platonism," 23-45.

reader" of their interlocutor's address. He also overlooks the issue of words as speech acts (Austin, et al.), but his insights into the nature of read theater are subtle and penetrating.

Celestina has, of course, been repeatedly translated, and a number of studies in this collection explore the arching history of its translation into other languages, arts and genres. Whether these transformations are studied as 'readings' of the original or examined as instances of interart criticism, they have been a mainstay of *Celestina* research throughout this century. In the graphics arts, "Mute Commentaries on a Text: The Illustrations of the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*" by Erna Berndt Kelley belongs to the burgeoning field of text and image studies that are often on precarious methodological ground.⁶ The survey by Kelley is instructive and prudently framed and should supplement what Joseph Snow has explored elsewhere.⁷

Among dramatic reworkings of *Celestina* themes and/or characterizations, there are several entries. "Eighteenth-Century *Celestina* Reincarnations" by Kathleen V. Kish concentrates on England, with a side note on Goya as the pre-eminent draftsman of the bawd. Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego's "*Celestina* en escena: el personaje de la vieja alcahueta y hechicera en el teatro renacentista" offers a tour of the permutations of the old crone and her craft in some nine theatrical works of the sixteenth century. "*Celestina*'s Seductive Power in France: An Operatic Debut" by Adrienne Schizzano Mandel analyzes a new French opera (debut in 1988) reported on earlier in *Celestinesca*.

Translation proper is the concern of Dwayne E. Carpenter in "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew." In this case the Hebrew translation has been lost and only a verse introduction remains, but it forms an intriguing witness to the literary depth of the Italian Jewish community for which it was

⁶ Cf. W.J. Thomas Mitchell. "Against Comparison: Teaching Literature and the Visual Arts," in *Teaching Literature and Other Arts*, ed. Jean-Pierre Barricelli, Joseph Gibaldi and Estella Lauter (New York: Modern Language Assn., 1990), pp. 30-37.

⁷ "La iconografía de tres *Celestinas* tempranas (Burgos, 1499; Sevilla, 1518; Valencia, 1514): unas observaciones" in *DICENDA. Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica*. no. 6 (1987 [1990]): 255-77.

composed. "Kaspar von Barth's Neo-Latin Translation of *Celestina* (1624)" by Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr. is a wonderful unraveling of von Barth's philological meanderings as he tried to prepare a Latin translation for a German audience using French reference tools. Finally, "Five Centuries of *Celestina* Readings: An Overview and an Example from the Nineteenth Century" by Joseph T. Snow recognizes the sharp disparity of canonical "value" between *Celestina* and its countless offshoots. Whether the decidedly modest accomplishments of her children reflect the consummation of the genre from the outset or subsequent authors' anxiety of influence, an instructive history of Spanish letters and tastes can be traced from the diverse reappearances of our favorite bawd.

Some of the other critical assessments of the great dialogue novel can only be noted briefly here. Dorothy S. Severin catalogues the uses of humor in "Celestina as a Comic Figure," although her ear is keen to catch dirty smirks and amusing stumbles among all the characters. Joseph V. Ricapito guides his survey of "People, Characters, and Roles: A View of Characterization in *Celestina*" by the twin stars of psychological realism and the characteristic yammering of stock dramatic (Plautine/Terentian/Humanistic) character types. "Celestina's Laboratory: A Translator's Nightmare" by Enrica J. Ardemagni ponders the danger of betraying Rojas' world in order to bring him into our own, while Nicasio Salvador Miguel in "'De una ave llamada rocho': para la historia literaria del ruj" tells us more than we thought possible about this mythical bird.

One should not quibble with an editorial task carried out so well, although reviewers are clearly commissioned to do precisely that. The essays themselves employ somewhat disparate formal conventions that might have been gently finessed in the editorial process. Some pieces include "Notes" and "Works Cited": others have only the former. The bibliographies are, inevitably, repetitive: a master list of works cited throughout the volume would have been more convenient for the reader and more instructive for the relative outsider wishing to identify major contributors to the discussion. Also vexing is the range of editions of *Celestina* employed by the contributing authors. There is no truly critical edition of Rojas masterpiece, but asking everyone to cite from, say, Marciales' or Severin's editions (or make a case why they should not) would have added uniformity. For that matter, the entire issue of editing the text of *Celestina*, given this subject's historically high profile and heated

nature, is absent from this volume⁸, as are such themes as the *converso* (sub)text(ure) of the book, the supposed tensions between Rojas and the (two?) other author(s), the power of magic, existentialism and nihilism, *Celestina's* generic relationship to the sentimental novel, the problematics of Christian tragedy and others.

If the 1984 celebrations surrounding Alfonso X's 700th anniversary are any indication, a torrent of *Celestina* studies will soon be unleashed on the world and the bibliographical pages of this journal will swell to overbrimming. Fernando de Rojas and *Celestina: Approaching the Fifth Century* will be one of the indispensable companions that *celestinistas* will want to accompany them into the next century.

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College of William and Mary

Celestina,



Ende is een Tragicoëdie van Calisto
en Melibea, in die welcke Vyfsten haren gewiech

De la portada de la traducción flamenca
Amberes: Hans de Laet, 1550

⁸ Patricia Botta (Univ. of Rome) was expected at the Purdue Conference to speak on "La edición crítica de *Celestina*" but was prevented from attending.