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Roberto González Echevarría. *Celestina's Brood: Continuities of the Baroque in Spanish and Latin American Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.

"Celestina's Brood" is the title of the first essay in this book, the only part of the collection to be reviewed here. The brood that González Echevarría refers to is not, as one might assume, Celestina's younger cohorts, but an ironic reference to her lack of children; as the author later points out, the old woman commences in sexuality, but not with procreation as its purpose. The brood that González Echevarría discusses in the first section of this four-part article are the literary offspring that the work *Celestina* has begot, all recent works that portray Celestina-like figures: Carlos Fuentes's *Aura* and *Terra Nostra*, Gabriel García Márquez' Eréndira story, and Severo Sarduy's *Cobra*. González Echevarría returns to these works in a more specific manner in the last section of his essay. Before doing so, he takes another look at this old woman as a tragic hero and re-examines the symbolism of the skein, girdle, and chain, as well as the importance

of the banquet scene. At the beginning of the article he also laments the fact that *Celestina* has not yet been subjected to deconstructive, Marxist, or Freudian readings, approaches he believes would be more interesting than those often chosen by contemporary critics (genre, intentions, the role of the *converso*, and some existential studies).

It is in the second part of this essay that *Celestina* as a tragic hero is discussed. González Echevarría stresses that it is indeed innovative for such a hero to be neither male nor noble: This is the enduring and indisputable breakthrough of *Celestina*: that tragedy, or as close to tragedy as can be expected in a world no longer meaningful or heroic, is embodied in an old whore and go-between (11). In this same section the author addresses the question of witchcraft -- a topic that has given rise to a number of good critical pieces -- and determines that the argument for the existence of black magic in the work is weak, since it would impede the characters from behaving in an autonomous manner and take much of the meaning from their actions. As he affirms in one example, Calisto did not need Melibea's girdle in his possession in order to carry on madly, as he had behaved in an extravagant manner even before *Celestina* made her appearance at his house.

The most startling part of this article is the third, in which González Echevarría addresses the significance of the skein, the girdle, and the chain; he takes the meaning of these objects very literally. He sees the purpose of a girdle as that of encircling a body, cutting it into two parts so that, for example, Melibea's body is never seen whole by Calisto, but dismembered by the girdle. The language of desire, as rendered by *Celestina*, is one of aggression, leading not to pleasure, but to torn bodies and to death (20). So too the chain, which González Echevarría associates with torture, binding and restraint. He looks upon the skein as the most significant of all, since *Celestina* is said to have used thread to repair virginity, with the aid of needles and pig bladder (dead skin) as the restorative device. Here the supposed act of refiguring the female is determined to be in reality a kind of disfigurement, but one ironically performed in order to restore the woman's value in society. González Echevarría finally relates the pig bladder to the phallus.

The third part of this essay also contains a discussion of the banquet scene, the culminating moment of *Celestina*. González Echevarría recalls Bakhtin's study of the banquet: it is essentially an

act meant to celebrate a bond between people, the triumphant end of work accomplished together which looks forward as well to the future. By its nature, then, a banquet cannot be a sad event. The author recalls *Celestina's* depressing lamentations made during her last meal with her friends and cohorts, and sees this scene as a kind of parody of the classical symposium, with *Celestina* taking the role as a parodic Socrates.

In the final section, González Echevarría reviews the similarities between *Celestina* and the Latin-American works of fiction mentioned above. All of them have as a main character a woman who acts or seems like *Celestina*: in *Aura*, it is Consuelo who serves as the go-between for her young counterpart, relying on medicines and making a pact with the devil; *Terra Nostra* has as its center a young woman named *Celestina* (an anomaly, according to González Echevarría), who is a symbol of continuity rather than fatality, but whose tatoos of snakes around her mouth are reminiscent of *Celestina's* facial scars; *Cobra* centers around a madam and a whorehouse, but in an interesting departure from the tradition, provides its character with a sex-change operation.

This essay presents some original perspectives on *Celestina's* significance in Hispanic literature as well as the meaning of some of its scenes and symbols. The question is whether the human body as portrayed in this work can or should be reduced to the literalness of gravity (due to the many references to falls and the death of some characters in this manner) and to disfigurement or dismemberment (as González Echevarría suggests with his interpretation of the skein, girdle, and chain). While these ideas can contribute to a reading of *Celestina*, the ultimate meaning of the work (if one can be identified) probably does not depend on them.

Nancy F. Marino

Michigan State University