

**Antonio Sánchez-Serrano y María Remedios Prieto de la Iglesia. Fernando de Rojas y 'La Celestina.' Barcelona: Teide, 1991. vi + 170 pp.**

For the past century and more, debate among critics as to authorship of *Celestina* has been keen, often distracting the attention of readers and scholars from more fundamental questions about the meaning and structure of the work. The monograph under review attempts to stir up again the stagnant waters of the question of authorship by reframing the issues on the basis of a meticulously close textual reading in a determined effort to unearth previously unnoticed clues in the received text. As an innovative effort, founded on new approaches and fresh assumptions, the authors' industry deserves considerable credit. The usable results, however, are fewer than this reader — and, I suspect, other readers as well — would have wished for. The debate over authorship, therefore, is far from over.

*Fernando de Rojas and 'La Celestina'* consists of an introduction, three chapters of varying length, plus a selected bibliography of some 150 works confined, in the main, to the specific issues explored between its covers, and a useful 3 1/2-page prologue by Joseph Snow. The central chapters deal successively with 1) authorship, 2) problems with the text of the *Comedia* and 3) changes made by the "author" in the text of the *Tragicomedia*.

The authors believe that the creation we today call *Celestina* existed first as a work in the tradition of the *comedia humanística* of roughly the extension of the first act, and that it had a happy ending. When this embryonic work reached Fernando de Rojas, he saw its inherent possibilities and began to adapt it into the form in which it first circulated in print, the *Comedia*. The most striking change imposed on the *borrador* was that its ending was made tragic. In an effort to account for the transformations of the original, the authors present the results of a close reading of almost unmatched intricacy. They seek and find

whatever scraps of evidence the text might yield after being altered/edited by varied hands over the course of almost five centuries. However, herein lies one of the fundamental problems with their meticulous study.

Sánchez and Prieto base much of their case on elements external to the main fiction, such as the acrostic verses which precede the work and the stanzas added by Alonso de Proaza after the end of it. While these versified statements purport to explain certain aspects of the creative process, having been accepted by them as valid statements of an authorial intention, the use made of them by the authors is fraught with problems. For instance, they hypothesize that stanzas 4-7 of the acrostic verses originally constituted the *fin bajo* to which the preliminary *Carta* ("El autor a un su amigo") makes reference. The acrostic message for these particular stanzas reads: "s'acabó la comedia de calisto y melíbea." The preceding and following stanzas were later additions, made to incorporate the references to Rojas and to Montalbán.

While this line of analysis reveals a great amount of ingenuity, the authors appear to me to be too given to accepting those parts of the evidence which strengthen their case: I do not sense that they then examine this evidence in its totality to see where it might lead. The authors seek to dismiss the authority of the acrostic stanzas other than 4-7 on the grounds of rhyme techniques. Since the poetic merit of all of the stanzas of this acrostic is dubious, such attempts to distinguish among them is, at best, questionable. In a similar vein, the authors attempt to further distinguish between the lost MS and the early printed versions of the work in terms of these preliminary pieces but, here too, the layers of hypothesis, however clearly presented, impede real conviction. Sánchez and Prieto assert their ability to discriminate between successive stages of textual elaboration and reworking but, in the end, their case rests wholly on conjecture.

They are too disposed, then, to dismiss the remaining acrostic stanzas as unauthentic (36), apparently because thus they support the authors' thesis. Later conjecture focusses on their contention that the Burgos edition must have contained all the content of the lost MS (41): they do not clearly indicate the basis for this belief. They then (56 ss) emphasize the concept of *entretalladuras* to explicate — beginning at stanza 8 of the acrostic — the revisions which, in their thesis, transformed the *borrador* into the *Comedia* and this, later, into the *Tragicomedia*. Indeed, much of the rest of the monograph is devoted to locating textual interventions: most of these are based on verbal resemblances between characters' speeches. That is, new dialogue has

been fashioned out of old. They do not test or consider the possibility that the author has used echoes or restatements of his own previous writing. Sánchez and Prieto seem throughout this work like enthusiastic archaeologists whose zeal leads them to speculate too much on the basis of available evidence. This is both the strength and the weakness of their arguments.

To my mind, the authors appear overly stringent in their expectation that Melibea could not possibly think that Calisto, encouraged by the *cordón*, the promise of the prayer, and afflicted by his toothache, was capable of quickly seeking another love interest (107). Their argument is based on rational thought and strict chronological time. They overlook that this is obsessive courtly love where (as Capellanus reminds us) the lover is "always apprehensive" (rule 20) and suspicion of the beloved requires only a "slight presumption" (rule 28). Elsewhere they forget that the walled garden is not as impenetrable as they surmise (115): like all such gardens, it has doors or gates (mentioned in Act XII), although they would have been locked securely overnight. Another lapse occurs when Sánchez and Prieto fault Sempronio's catty remark about Melibea as being inconsistent with the description of her in the *argumento general* (124). Obviously the description in the *argumento general* is all superlatives, exaggerated to present Melibea as a paragon among women. Sempronio's comments are clearly negative exaggerations, like all misogynistic remarks, designed to insult women for some literary or rhetorical purpose. It makes little or no sense to expect internal consistency in a work built on the contrast between courtly love and misogyny. Owing to Rojas's manipulations and the switch to a tragic ending in the reworking, the authors can claim, albeit hesitantly, that the work is, in terms of genre, essentially dramatic (126).

This meticulous reconstruction of the textual evolution of *Celestina* is presented without a scaffolding of hard facts and must depend on hypothesis for all support of its central thesis. I believe that, unfortunately, it leads to more confusion than clarification. Thus the perennial questions that perplex scholars about the authorship of *Celestina* still require a search for more solid answers. This reconstruction, perhaps, might stimulate that search.

Steven D. Kirby

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*Celestina*  
*Calisto*  
*Melibea*  
*Pármeno*  
*Sempronio*  
*Pleberio*  
*Alisa*  
*Elicia*  
*Areusa*  
*Lucrecia*  
*Sosia*

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ANGÉLICA REVERT  
MARTA ULLOD  
GERMAN MADRID

# La *Celestina*

de Fernando de Rojas, versión José Ruibal,  
dirección Hermann Bonnin

CON

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