

## RESEÑA

## HISTORY AND THE CRITICAL ENTERPRISE



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P. E. Russell's collection of essays, *Temas de La Celestina y otros estudios, del Cid al Quijote* (Barcelona/Caracas/Mexico: Editorial Ariel, 1978, Pp. 508), is in reality a history book, but a special kind of history book with an underlying didactic slant. The implicit purpose is to show students of Spanish literature, mainly of early Spanish literature, that one ought not interpret literary works or second-guess an author's artistic motivations unless one is well acquainted with the social and historical contexts within which these literary works are written. Further, it is a matter of applying *appropriately* this knowledge to the interpretative enterprise.

Of course, this idea is not new, but Professor Russell has exercised it more clearly and consistently in these essays--the accumulation of years of solid and wise scholarship--than anyone I know about. There is, admittedly, room in this sort of orientation for a good deal of conjecture that can be manipulated to sound like historical fact which can then be further manipulated to apply to a particular critical end. But R. does not deal much in conjecture. The reader comes away from these studies with a sense of, first, admiration for the kind of disciplined mind that has written clearly on a wide spectrum over a relatively long period with such a consistent point-of-view. Second, in spite of the seeming paucity of historical "hard" data, especially for the Middle Ages, there is enough around to turn us all into more thoughtful and better grounded scholars. Russell's introduction tells us that he has selected articles which "han tenido cierta influencia en la crítica posterior . . ." (p. 7), and this, he explains, is why in the majority of cases he does not attempt to update his work. Where material is added, it is material in the main that had originally been eliminated at the time of initial publication, because of publishers' requirements. Nonetheless, R. includes occasional "estudios inéditos" which function as up-dates (for example, the second part of "Alcocer", p. 45).

To help the reader discover the thread that will reveal the critical focus of his studies, R. tells us, ". . . advertirá el lector una preocupación generalizada: la de establecer lo que ocurre cuando acudimos a la historia en busca de aclaraciones de un texto literario." (p. 9).

As I indicated in the beginning, R. is remarkably consistent in this focus--consistent with his criticism of certain formalist aspects of María Rosa Lida's *magnus opus*, *La originalidad artística de La Celestina*, on the one hand, and with his harsh treatment of the historicity of Stephen Gilman's *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, on the other.

The collection is comprised of sixteen studies, ten and a half of which were published first in English, in European and U.S. publications between 1952 and 1976. Four and a half more were previously unpublished (the second part of "Alcocer", cited above, figures into this group), one of which is an amplified version of a paper given in Salamanca (1971) in Spanish ("*La Celestina* y los estudios jurídicos de Fernando de Rojas," p. 323). One article, "La magia, tema integral de *LC*" (p. 241), was originally published in Spanish and is considerably expanded here.

The volume is arranged more or less chronologically: a series of essays on the *Poema de Mio Cid* comes first and those on *LC*, later, etc. The collection ends with essays of a more general nature. With two exceptions, (R.'s reviews of Gilman's, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, pp. 341-375, and his article on "Las armas contra las letras: para una definición del humanismo español del siglo XV" pp. 207-239), I will comment on articles in the same order as they occur in the book.

#### *Studies on the PMC*

The 192 pages dedicated to the *PMC* contain four well-argued studies concerned with aspects of the poem ranging from the interest of the poet in the legalistic details of medieval charters and documents to a re-examination of sources for Jimena's "oración de súplica" and to the exactness of the Cid's route as described in the poem. Although the exhaustive documentation brought to bear is, as well, often exhausting to the reader, practically all of it sheds light on problem areas that have been an important focus of Cidian criticism.

The first study, "Algunos problemas de diplomática en el *Poema de Mio Cid* y su significación" (pp. 13-33), first published in English as "Some Problems of Diplomatic in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and their Implications" (MRL, 47 [1952], 340-349), was truly years ahead of its time. Scholars have only recently given serious attention to defining the individuality of the poet of the *PMC* in terms of his acquaintance with the legalistic world of his day. This article points out that the scholar's understanding of the use of seals and their differences in the documents of the period, coupled with the obvious internal indications that the poet (of the version we now have) was well-acquainted with legal terminology and procedures related to civil and military administration could, as R. says (p. 29), lead to a new "enfoque" on the problems of dating, authorship, and composition. In light of the activity centering precisely on these questions, his claim is a modest one.

Whereas the previous chapter on the diplomatic problem in *PMC* implicitly urges the scholar to seek historical groundings within the poem (i.e. use of seals and legal terminology), the two parts of "Alcocer" (pp. 35-69) warn that the *PMC* is not a consistently reliable historical document. In fact, both parts--Part I was previously published in English in 1957 ("Where was Alcocer? *Cantar de Mio Cid*, 11. 553-861", en *Homenaje a J. A. Van Praag*, Amsterdam, 1957, pp. 101-107) and Part II ("Nuevas

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reflexiones sobre el Alcocer del *Poema de Mio Cid*"), unpublished until its appearance here--are R.'s rejection, using as his example the historically doubtful Alcocer episode, of the strict adherence to the "historicidad" of Menéndez Pidal. The fact that there is no Alcocer situated where the poem indicates it should be (in the valley of the upper Jalón), nor is there any evidence of such a town in that geographical area in the historical documents of the period, probably indicates that it is a fictive element of the poem.

The study titled, "San Pedro de Cardeña y la historia heroica del Cid" (originally "San Pedro de Cardeña and the History of the Cid", *MAe*, 27 [1958], 57-79) foreshadows the resurgence of interest in the theories of Bédier concerning epic legends and their relation to tomb cults. In tracing the documented evidence of the Cid legend connected to the monastery of Cardeña, first detected in a version of the *Liber Regum* (1220), R. is very convincing about the possibility that the poet was a man of some erudition (an argument that harks back to his study on Cidian diplomatics) who also knew well the technical aspects of oral epic poetry. It was this poet who doubtless shaped the Cardeña elements of the Cid legend circulating at the end of the 12th century into the version of the poem now extant. Well known is the work of later scholars such as A. D. Deyermund and Colin Smith, to name but two, who have helped to substantiate R.'s claims.

R.'s previously unpublished five-part study, "La oración de Doña Jimena" (pp. 113-158), is a detailed examination of Jimena's prayer (vv. 325-367 of *PMC*). The object of this piece, beyond its survey of critical opinion, is to suggest that the prayer's traditional attribution to French epic sources is not clear, as the evidence R. puts before us demonstrates. Among many differences cited is a context very different from French models in which this kind of "oración de súplica" is enunciated by the hero in moments of mortal danger, especially on the battlefield. The discussion comes down to whether the immediate source of Jimena's prayer devolves directly from a religious *topos* used in the French epic or whether it is based on an older, Latin-Christian tradition common to both the French and the Spanish epic.

R.'s perceptive and, so far as I know, unique conclusion is that the French and the Spanish epic "oración de súplica", with all their differences, derive from a tradition of *innovation* of liturgical forms and are not based directly on liturgical prayer forms in the Latin-Christian tradition. As R. puts it, this prayer ". . . basándose en reminiscencias de la liturgia . . . intenta transmitir la impresión de que es lo que no es: una auténtica oración" (p. 153).

The last of R.'s studies on the *PMC* (also unpublished previously) is a fascinating exploration of "El 'Poema de Mio Cid' como documento de información caminera" (pp. 159-205). Like the work on toponymy ("Alcocer"), R. first focuses on the lack of precision in the *PMC* as one examines closely the topographical (and historical) details of the poem. One discussion, as would be expected, centers around the Medinaceli and San Estéban de Gormaz question.

R.'s view is that one must consider the "Pidalian" concepts of historicity in the Spanish epic with a good deal of tolerance. His opinion is that the poet of the *PMC* used the itinerary *topos* of the French epic model with certain thematic ends in mind which caused innovation in much the same way as the poet adapted the "oración de súplica" to his needs. There ensues a fascinating discussion of the possibility that the poet of the *PMC* may have used written sources in the form of regional maps or travel routes ("itinerarios camineros") which supplied the kinds of details included in the poem, rather than first hand observations, or those supplied from oral sources.

The problem here, of course,--and R. admits it--is that few data are available about the use of maps and travel routes in medieval Spain. Still, in spite of such reservations, it is one of the most fascinating pieces in the collection.

#### Studies on *La Celestina*

The central interest to readers of *Celestinesca* is surely the five studies that the author devotes to *LC*. These are pieces that shed light on practically all aspects of *LC* studies from authorship to *conversos*. The focus is consistent with Russell's stated intention to provide, when possible, data on how works were conceived and understood in their day.

"La magia, tema integral de *LC*" (pp. 241-276), represents the most augmented of the previously published articles in this volume (published with the same title in *Homenaje a Damaso Alonso*, III, [Madrid, 1963], pp. 337-354). It is an example of R.'s socio-historical orientation applied to textual criticism, with fine results. Supported by some fifty-two notes, R.'s text convinces us that, although few studies "han tomado en serio la magia en la *Tragicomedia*" (p. 244), magic (and the workings of the Devil through *Celestina*) is a constant and integral part of the work, and responsible for the chain of events which leads to its climax.

The value of this article (and others printed here) is to establish that the importance of magic in *LC* must be examined through the attitudes of Rojas's contemporaries. This R. does by reminding us that general recognition of sorcerers ("magos") with real magical powers was the orthodox, not the exceptional view, and that Satan and his demons could and did intervene in the lives of humans, even in the opinion of the most skeptical churchman. One source of information, more or less contemporary with Rojas, is Pedro Ciruelo's *Reprobación de las supersticiones y hechicerías* (1530 or earlier). R. adds to this a wealth of information which confirms the relevancy of magic for Rojas' contemporaries.

Having prepared this incontrovertible historical ground in parts one and two, R. proceeds in parts three and four to explicate the supernatural situation (*philocaptio*), its medium (*hechicería*), and the roles they play in *LC*.

Part three portrays Celestina as *hechicera*, and accounts for divergent opinion, such as Pármeno's (who seems to express doubt as to her condition as *hechicera*). R. suggests that it is the skepticism of the original author of Act I which is reflected in Pármeno and, citing another contemporary of Rojas (Fray Martín de Castañega), that this attitude is typical of those "presumiendo de letrados [que] niegan las maneras de las supersticiones y hechicerías."

One of the longest additions to the original study, and a remarkably evocative reading of the work at this point (pp. 260-261), treats the chain of images associated with the snake oil (*serpentine*) poured over the skein of yarn which will figure decisively in the *philocaptio* of Melibea. What this article, written a good many years before most *LC* critics were taking magic as thematically important, convincingly demonstrates is the connection between sexual obsession and the workings of the Devil through *hechiceras* current in the beliefs of the contemporary reader of *LC*.

Two of the articles on *LC* are reviews written originally in English, obviously included because they deal with three important *LC* studies of the 1960's and early 70's. "Tradición literaria y realidad social en "La Celestina" (pp. 277-291) (published in English as "Literary Tradition and Social Reality in *LC*", *BHS*, 41 [1964], 230-237) is R.'s joint review of María Rosa Lida de Malkiel's *Two Spanish Masterpieces: "The Book of Good Love" and "The Celestina"* (Urbana, 1961) and her *La originalidad artística de La Celestina* (Buenos Aires, 1962), but which really is a review of the latter work in all but the first page or so.

R. gives a balanced review of *La originalidad*, which, understandably because of the book's length and complexity, is too schematic to provide the reader a clear sense of the directions of Lida de Malkiel's monumental work. The reviewer's main reservation, although not the only one, revolves around his objection that "la señora de Malkiel estudia la originalidad artística de *LC* con referencia a un mundo cerrado, puramente literario . . ." (p. 288). He goes on to object that Mrs. Malkiel does not (even though she points out the importance of *LC*'s transmission of a sense of reality), relate the book to social and historical realities of the period.

It is true that her focus is not socio-historical--and perhaps it should have been more so--but to assert that she felt "*ningún deseo de relacionar el libro con las realidades sociales del mundo en que fue escrito, de su época*" (p. 288, emphasis is mine), is not, in my opinion, accurate. There are numerous relatings of just such a nature, among which, as an example, is a description of the socio-historical situation of the marriage alliance in the Spain of the Middle Ages related to the problem of Calisto and Melibea (*La originalidad*, 210-211). Mrs. Malkiel's attempts to relate the socio-historical picture to *LC* may well be inadequate and unconvincing to R., but they *are* there.

The general critical opinion on Stepehn Gilman's, the *Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of "La Celestina"* (Princeton, 1972), has varied from glowing to condemnatory. R.'s comments

in "Un crítico en busca de un autor; reflexiones en torno a un reciente libro sobre Fernando de Rojas" (pp. 341-375) (first published in English as an untitled review in *CLit*, 27 [1975], 59-74) belong to the latter category. His condemnation, while not up to the astonishing intensity of Keith Whinnom's (*BHS*, 52 [1975], 158-161), is not less complete.

R. points out the difficulties in the transformation of literary critic into biographer. In terms of *LC*, he questions the validity of Gilman's entire endeavor since he believes that Rojas' contemporaries would have had little understanding of the concept of author-within-his work; that it, indeed, was not a functioning concept of the period. R. seems to be saying that since Rojas would have been less likely to reveal his real self through his work, therefore, *LC* would reflect very little of the historical Rojas' portrayed in Gilman's book. If this is what R. is getting at--and he says it very cautiously--I must cautiously disagree because Gilman's book is more than just a biography. Rightly or wrongly interpreted, Gilman attempts to describe *LC* in terms of its socio-historical context, not just in terms of biographical data about Rojas. An author who writes as vividly as Rojas does about the society he knows thereby reveals important aspects of himself, lack of consciousness of author-presence on the part of the reader notwithstanding. The point, however, need not be expanded here. I cite it because it signals the direction of R.'s final objections to Gilman's book: its lack of precision and rigorous historical method and its ultimate failure as historical criticism.

While it may be difficult to agree in the end with R. in finding so little that is praiseworthy in Gilman's book, one can offer that the grounds on which he argues his objections are in great part irreproachable and a tribute to his consistency as a critic of literature with a highly developed sense for the historical method, its *limitations* and pitfalls, when applied to literature. In the particular case of Gilman, one cannot help but feel, especially after re-reading R.'s critique of Gilman's important earlier work, *The Art of "La Celestina"* (Madison, 1956) (R.'s review of it is in *BHS*, 34 [1957], 160-167), that the kind of intuitive, often brilliant insightful criticism that Gilman is capable of, even in the *Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, is out of phase with R.'s critical focus on most literary things in general, and on *LC* in particular.

"El primer comentario de *LC*: cómo un legista del siglo XVI interpretaba la *Tragicomedia*" (pp. 293-321) (originally, "*The Celestina comentada*" in *Medieval Hispanic Studies Presented to Rita Hamilton*, ed. A. D. Deyermond [London; 1976], pp. 175-193), is a significant study. While much useful description and detail is provided about this book--its dates, the method of its gloss (the commentator glossed it in two phases)--the ultimate value of this piece is its demonstration that *CC* is a critical document on *LC* written by a commentator uniquely near the social milieu of Rojas (*CC* was written some time after 1550). R.'s central thesis is that the anonymous author-commentator was a man of legal expertise ("legista"), especially trained in civil law ("derecho civil"). A great deal of useful detail validates this theory: the form for bibliographical references in his gloss is typical of that used by authors and commentators of legal

texts in the 16th century; the glosses confirm the author's interest in law in his commentaries on the principles of law underlying the text of *LC*. We are shown that the commentator is not a man interested or necessarily versed in the literary form of the *Tragicomedia*, since his commentary primarily treats the appropriateness of the *LC* text to ethical concerns of his times. A corollary concern is the sources of *LC*. There is, nonetheless, some sense of literary concern discernible in the glosses of *CC*: there are comments on the presence (or absence) of realism at a particular moment and on the problem of locale (both of which, continue to intrigue some critics today). Finally, R. makes the point that the author of *CC*, although his work remained unpublished in his lifetime, very likely hoped for its publication in order to combat the growing sentiment for censorship of Rojas' work in the 16th century. R.'s view is that the commentator of *CC* knew *LC* as a moral, strictly doctrinal work.

There is another dimension to this study that ties the work of the author of *CC* to contemporary *LC* criticism. R. directs a good deal of justifiable criticism at Castro Guisasola's book, *Observaciones sobre las fuentes literarias de "La Celestina"* (Madrid, 1924, rpt. 1974), for not having specifically dealt with the author of *CC*. In fact, he shows that, although Castro Guisasola does recognize the importance of *CC* in a general way in his introduction, *CC* is a *direct* source of much of his book.

One principal conclusion at which Russell arrives is that the internal evidence in the text of *LC* demonstrates that Rojas did not lay aside his professional, legal interests upon writing *LC*, but, indeed, incorporated them into *LC*. This conclusion, supported by the unimpeachable documentation of a source so near to Rojas, testifying to yet another kind of unity within *LC*, forces the critical reader with interest in the authorship problem to consider the probability that Rojas not only was, as he stated, the author of all but the first act of *LC*, but that he was, again as he claimed, a man of some legal expertise.

The previously unpublished study which follows, "*LC y los estudios jurídicos de Fernando de Rojas*" (pp. 323-340), continues to assert with the same historical and textual rigor of the foregoing piece on the *CC*, but with a different focus, the presence of indicators in the text of *LC* that the author was, indeed, a student of law. This study adds to and reinforces R.'s commentary on *CC* by means of a review of original discoveries within the text of *LC*.

The next two studies represent material that is somewhat more restricted in scope, although they continue to display the same rigorous sense of the historical and social context of literature that is the hallmark of R.'s critical work as seen, at least, in this volume. In "La 'poesía negra' de Rodrigo de Reinosa" (pp. 377-406), first published in English in 1973 ("Towards an Interpretation of Rodrigo de Reinosa's *poesía negra*", in *Studies in Spanish Literature of the Golden Age, Presented to Edward M. Wilson*, ed. R. O. Jones [London, 1973], pp. 225-245), R. sustains a lively discussion of "poesía negra" within which tradition Rodrigo de Reinosa wrote two and possibly three poems. Through a

description of these poems some of the salient attitudes of the 16th century Spaniard toward the imported African slaves are revealed.

The Negro emerges in this period as a comic figure, principally because of his use of pidgin Spanish and Portuguese. The Negro is represented as a dancing, singing slave of exaggerated sexual prowess (comically represented), desired by woman and, at least in one poem that R. generally attributes to Reinosa, by a white woman of the upper classes. Possible sources are discussed and the piece ends with the provocative and quite plausible suggestion that some themes from 15th century Spanish "poesía negra" are found continued in the writings of the "Afrocubano" writers of the 1920s and '30s.

In a different sort of study, "*Don Quijote y la risa a carcajadas*" (pp. 407-440) (first published as "*Don Quixote as a Funny Book*", *MLR*, 64 [1969], 312-326), R. effectively combats the Romantic and post-Romantic interpretation of the saintly Don Quixote. In fact, the main themes of *DQ* may well have been recognized by Cervantes' reading public as laughter and madness, as R. makes abundantly clear by employing his usual criterion of establishing, as clearly as possible, the way the work was read and accepted in its time, not only in Spain, but in England and France as well.

The two pieces that end R.'s collection are devoted to two seemingly different subjects. In reality, there is a vital connection between the two which is fundamental to the "theme" present in most all the studies: history, wrongly interpreted and imprecisely applied to whatever enterprise, be it literature, philosophy, history of ideas or contemporary history itself, is counterproductive.

In the previously unpublished, "*El Concilio de Trento y la literatura profana; reconsideración de una teoría*" (pp. 441-478), R. explores the fundamental question (a question that has led many a theorist astray) of the origin of the insistence that all literature have a didactic purpose--an insistence that became increasingly more shrill in Spain as the 16th century progressed.

R. perceives that the Council of Trent intervened much less in decisions about the content of entertainment books published in the vernacular in the 16th century in Spain than Américo Castro (in *Pensamiento de Cervantes*, Madrid, 1925), as well as other scholars, claimed. When the Council did intervene, such intervention was provoked by anticlericalism or heresy. Sometimes it was a matter of the rollicking parodies of doctrinal concerns so common at the time. The moral question was not an issue for those who controlled the *Indexes* until the 17th century (specifically, the *Index* of Sandoval of 1612) and even then it was a matter of limited expurgation, not the banning of entire works.

R. concludes that the growing sentiment for proof of redeeming Christian-moral values in this literature came *not* directly from post-Tridentine influence, but from Jesuit influence. Part V of this finely-argued piece is dedicated to tracing Jesuit objections to vernacular literature in the late 1500's and early 1600's. The dominant attitude of



this religious order, so influential in this period, was that literature was *not* meant to entertain, but to instruct.

"La historia de España, túnica de Neso" (pp. 479-491) (previously published as "The Nessus Shirt of Spanish History", *BHS*, 36 [1959], 219-226), is what it chooses to be, mainly, a concise, lucid criticism of Claudio Sánchez Albornoz' book, *España, un enigma histórico* (Buenos Aires, 1956). But it offers more. R. uncovers the fallacy in the thinking of Spaniards who continue to view their past history, their present and their future, in Generation-of-1898 terms; that there is something in the Spanish character that makes them incapable of change. R. makes us see this unscientific attitude for what it is: a generalization unworthy of a brave and intelligent people.

My concluding commentary is not on the article that ends the volume. I have deliberately left for last "Las armas contra las letras: para una definición del humanismo español del siglo XV" (pp. 207-239). It is a substantially expanded version of an earlier piece in English, "Arms versus Letters: Towards a Definition of Spanish Humanism" (in *Aspects of the Renaissance: A Symposium*, ed. Archibald R. Lewis [Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1967] pp. 45-58). The reason, which will be obvious to the student of 15th and 16th Spanish Letters who has, no doubt, returned many times to this article in its shorter version, is that there is no other work which puts into perspective so succinctly yet so lucidly one of the pivotal questions of Spain's intellectual history: Arms *versus* Letters.

R.'s thesis need not be explicated in detail here, since it basically argues that Spain continued to resist the idea of the compatibility of the pen and the sword well after the Italian nobility had integrated the concept of Arms *and* Letters into their cultural fabric. Spain's resistance in this matter made a profound difference in the artistic and intellectual climate of the Spain of the 15th century and, consequently, is in part responsible for a departure from the concept of Humanism developed in Italy. A lack of competence in Latin and Greek and an emphasis on translation of classics into the vernacular produced differences that would not be reconciled until much later. The blame is placed on the prevailing conservative viewpoint in Spain, which pitted arms against letters by clinging tenaciously to a rigidly categorized society, divinely determined. In this way the man of letters was distinguished from the man of arms, preventing any great amalgamation of the two into one. The Marqués de Santillana and others who did manage to combine the two were not typical of the general situation.

This schematic summary in no way does justice to the importance of R.'s essay on Spanish Humanism and the controversy of Arms and Letters; nor do these pages do justice to the large number of perceptive conclusions which R. brings to the reader in this collection as a whole. It might be better said, perhaps, that he leads his reader step by sure step to conclusions that are grounded in his unerring sense of the historical significance of literary achievements. It is a pleasure to have these essays in one place, under one cover and within easy reach.

The translations are, in my opinion, exceptionally good. There are remarkably few typographical errors (*MRL* for *MLR*, a quaint tendency in some places to print *prohíbe* for *prohibe*). The note on page 480, describing the previous location of publication is interchanged with the note on page 342. The notes to the various studies (placed at the end of each one) are extensive, but not over-burdening. On the contrary, they are a mine of related information and sources.



Celestina, estando Pármeno fuera, seduce a Areúsa en el Aucto VII. De la traducción alemana de C. Wirsung (1520).