



RESEÑAS

Jacqueline Ferreras-Savoye. "La Célestine" ou la crise de la société patriarcale. Paris: Ediciones Hispano-Americanas, 1977. 224 pp.

There is room for a full-scale Marxian analysis of *La Celestina* (*LC*). The relationships between social classes, the servants' acute comments on those relationships, Celestina's transformation of sexual love into a marketable commodity of which at times she seems to hold the monopoly, her profitable manufacture of virginities, Pleberio's awareness of himself as a merchant in the midst of his lament, the prevalence of commercial and financial imagery -- all of these suggest that a sociohistorical approach to the work should be fruitful and illuminating. It is, of course, not the only approach, and it is probably not even the most important, but who can doubt the relevance of Marxian tools of analysis to a novel in which a lover's elevated courtly language is a transparent covering for his view of his mistress as a commodity? And not just a commodity, but an opportunity for conspicuous consumption ("Bien me huelgo que estén semejantes testigos de mi gloria").

The longest and most successful study of this kind is José Antonio Maravall's *El mundo social de "La Celestina"* (1964, 3rd ed. 1972; Snow bibl. 63), which applies Thorstein Veblen's theory of the leisure class to late medieval Castilian society as reflected in various theoretical writings, and to *LC*. Objections can be raised, but when due allowance has been made for them, Maravall's book still convinces. However, it makes no claim to completeness, and the possibility of other lines of sociohistorical investigation has since been demonstrated in essays by Julio Rodríguez-Puértolas (Snow S16) and Antony Van Beysterveldt (S95). Both *Celestina* scholarship and Marxian critical techniques have developed greatly since Maravall's book was first published (there is now a journal, *Ideologies & Literature*, devoted explicitly to the sociohistorical and ideological criticism of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian literatures). The time is clearly ripe for a new book of this kind, and Ferreras-Savoye's title and preface make it clear that this is what she is offering, albeit in a tentative way ("les résultats provisoires de nos recherches," p. 6). The preface raises additional hopes:

La société patriarcale subit à la fin du Moyen-Age un profond bouleversement: la trouvaille de Rojas réside peut-être en ce qu'il incarne ce désordre dans les rôles majeurs qu'il confère à deux

femmes, l'une vieille et pauvre, l'autre noble jeune fille, Célestine et Mélibée, et qu'il lie le comportement féminin au nouveau pouvoir de l'argent. (pp. 6-7)

There has never, as far as I am aware, been a serious feminist analysis of *LC*--surprisingly, given the current interest in feminist criticism and the prominent role of women in this book. Indeed, in one respect the case is even stronger than Ferreras-Savoye says: one of the women characters took hold of public imagination to such an extent that the printers, in order to increase their sales, renamed the book after her.

Most of the expectations which are raised remain unfulfilled, although Ferreras-Savoye makes some interesting points. Her basic contention is that there were two major changes in late medieval Castilian society, and that these were causally linked: the growth of a money economy, and the new importance of money as a regulator of social relations, she maintains, weakened the authority of Church and nobility, and with it the father's authority within his family. This is, she argues, reflected in the fictional world of *LC*. The first part of her book (pp. 9-74) is a historical survey, based largely on Vicens Vives and other highly respected modern historians (Suárez Fernández, Maravall, Moxó, Domínguez Ortiz). The second part (pp. 75-144) deals with *LC*; the remainder of the book is occupied by notes, a brief bibliography, and an appendix of texts. The successful presentation of a case such as that made by Ferreras-Savoye depends in large measure on the rigorous establishment of connection between an effect and its supposed cause, and between historical and literary phenomena. Ferreras-Savoye is in no doubt as to the existence of these connections, either in general or in the specific instance of *LC*:

Convaincus pour notre part de la relation fondamentale entre une oeuvre et la société ou elle éclôt, non pas au sens où l'entendait Auguste Comte, mais à travers la parenté de structure qui relie l'oeuvre à son contexte socio-historique, nous tentons une nouvelle approche de l'oeuvre de Rojas. (p. 5)

This is a difficult operation, requiring not only the mastery of a wide range of information, but also familiarity with at least two techniques of research, those of the historian and the literary critic. The difficulty has been emphasized by P. E. Russell on several occasions in his *Temas de "La Celestina"* (1978), and one of the most influential Marxian critics, Terry Eagleton, has warned against the making of facile connections between the socioeconomic base and the literary artifact. I suspect that Ferreras-Savoye does not take sufficient account of the difficulties, and I am convinced that she does not overcome them.

The connection between the growth of a money economy and the disintegration of the feudal system is, rightly, a commonplace of historical studies. Moreover, there is no doubt that these developments brought about drastic changes in the functions and attitudes of the nobility, and that those changes in turn had literary consequences (most recently described by Roger Boase in *The Troubadour Revival*, 1978). It is much less

clear that they diminished the power or the authority of the Church, and I doubt whether many people in Castile in the 1490's felt that the power of the Church had lessened. I am doubtful also about the connection between feudal society and the patriarchal family. "Patriarchal" as a description of social units larger than the family is a metaphor. It is commonly used nowadays, but that does not turn a metaphor into reality. The family ruled by a father's authority existed long before the feudal system evolved, and it long outlived that system. There is no incompatibility between the patriarchal family and a mercantile or an industrial capitalism: the two major factors that circumscribe the emotional lives of Jane Austen's heroines are money and paternal authority. Yet Ferreras-Savoie maintains, in her chapter on "La crise de l'autorité," that "L'autorité paternelle devant laquelle l'enfant se reconnaît coupable est absente du lien qui unit Mélibée à son père" (p. 121). The statement may be true (though I should have liked to see some recognition of the possibility that Rojas is here showing us an aspect of Melibea's sinful passion), but there is no attempt to demonstrate a connection between the statement and either the economic situation of Pleberio's family or the changed role of the nobility.

This failure to establish the necessary connections between one historical phenomenon and another, and between historical and literary phenomena, is a fatal weakness in Ferreras-Savoie's book, and it contrasts sharply with Maravall's care in making such connections. Ferreras-Savoie has other weaknesses, as well as some good points. Let us take weaknesses first. Some historical generalizations are unsupported by evidence, including the startling assertion that Castile, unlike Catalonia, "semble avoir été peu touché par la grande peste de 1348-1351" (p. 11). Whereas some of the historical detail in Part I of the book is relevant to literary questions, the somewhat disjointed accumulation of data on maritime commerce (pp. 13-15) is never used in this way. There are non sequiturs: "Le mécennat sous tous ses aspects implique un intérêt réel pour la conduite humaine en tant que telle" (p. 58). Although most of the critical points made in Part II are valid (most of them derive from the canonical texts of modern *Celestina* criticism), a few are highly debatable: Pärmeno is incapable of irony when he says that *Celestina* "remediaba por caridad muchas huérfanas y erradas que se encomendaban a ella" (p. 82); Alisa's attitude to *Celestina* is "noble et généreuse--mais non point sotté" (p. 93); *Celestina* relies on natural aids rather than on the Devil ("Le pouvoir auquel elle a recours n'est pas d'essence diabolique, mais naturelle: elle utilise herbes et objets aux propriétés desquels elle croît," p. 104); and she is not a transmitter of traditional wisdom, but speaks only in the name of her own experience (p. 123). These statements are seldom supported by argument, and in the last case there is no recognition of the obvious point that one of *Celestina*'s major weapons is her ability to cloak her real purposes with the traditional commonplaces of moral philosophy.

Ferreras-Savoie's bibliography includes only seven works on *LC* (all books--did she read no articles?). She makes use of all of them, incorporating critical judgments; but she does not express disagreement with any of the critics, and she adopts views that are not always easy to re-

concile: if Bataillon is right about Rojas' intentions (p. 127), can Gilman be right about the significance of dialogue in the work (pp. 138-39)? I have the impression that Ferreras-Savoye is not really at home in *Celestina* criticism. Although she cites Gilman's *Art*, she overlooks *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, which is more immediately relevant to a sociohistorical study. She discusses the attitude to Fortune without referring to Berndt, and the relationship between *LC* and *cancionero* poetry without mentioning Aguirre (Kassier's article probably appeared too late for her to use). More seriously, she nowhere acknowledges that *LC* is heavily dependent on literary sources. Literary tradition is certainly not a full explanation of the features that Ferreras-Savoye discusses, but it plays its part alongside sociohistorical factors.

On the technical level, the book has a markedly unfinished appearance. There is no index. Spanish capitalization rules are repeatedly violated. Pablo de Santa María becomes Pedro (p. 38), and Alfonso de Cartagena becomes Alvaro (p. 52). Six endnote numbers are repeated, and the error seems to have been spotted only at the last minute (p. 146). The bibliography (pp. 160-61) is unsystematic. Pages 165-220 contain texts of poems reprinted from Foulché-Delbosc's anthology. These are presented, nearly always usefully, as analogues, but what is the justification for taking up a quarter of the book and increasing the price? We are told that the poems are included because Foulché-Delbosc is long out of print (p. 7), but scholars have ready access to his collection, and the more general public, for whose sake all Spanish texts are quoted in translation (the originals are given in endnotes), will not be helped by the reprinting of poems in Spanish. Moreover, Foulché-Delbosc is often the wrong source: there are, for example, more recent and much better editions of Alvarez Gato (p. 204), Iñigo de Mendoza (pp. 205, 215), and Cota (p. 219). Finally, one memorable double entendre has eluded the author's scrutiny of her work: "A la relation verticale Areusa préfère une relation horizontale" (p. 117).

Does this long list of criticisms mean that I regard Ferreras-Savoye's book as valueless? Not at all. It makes one think again about the effect of late medieval Castilian society on Rojas's work. It has some shrewd observations (to take but one example, "De son époque l'auteur a retenu ce qui en constituait la nouveauté caractéristique: l'espace urbain avec ses conséquences sur les êtres, la perception du temps qui est nouvelle, de même que la liberté de mouvements," p. 136). And, perhaps most importantly, it gives valuable pointers towards a comprehensive study of the role of women in *LC*.

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