

CELESTINESCA

RESEÑAS

Fernando Cantalapiedra. *Lectura semiótico-formal de 'La Celestina'*. Kassel: Ed. Reichenberger, 1986. *Problemata Semiotica*, 8. 229 pp.

This is an interesting little book which should not go unread because of certain problems of form and ways of procedure utilized by the author. It contains information which can be of use to medievalists of a traditional bent as well as those fascinated by the new theoretical models.

The work is divided into two major parts. The first has three subdivisions which are entitled "las calificaciones de los actores," "semiótica del objeto," and "semiótica del espacio." I think that a reading and understanding of this first part is not absolutely essential to an appreciation of the second. Thus the reader who flounders and founders in the beginning section should, before abandoning the book, proceed on to the last part where there is an important theory which can be understood in more traditional terms.

The first subdivision "las calificaciones de los actores" is an analysis of the actantial stances of the various personages (choice of vocabulary is difficult here) in *Celestina*. The mode of analysis is drawn largely from (or related to) the methods devised by Greimas and Barthes and the group of narratologists who have been holding forth in and around Paris for the last twenty years.

It is interesting that the critics who have been deconstructing of late "theory" in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* have declared narratology to be safe from attack as they think it to be "empirical". Those medievalists in Spanish who delight in attempting to find the *urtext* and in establishing firm historical and philological bases for their ideas may see their understanding of "empirical" as greatly different from that of the narratologist. Most humanists have been, of course, trained to understand through some variety of narrative explanation. But the narratologist often has recourse to diagrams and formulae similar to those used by

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mathematicians and scientists to explain their theories. One simply has to learn to expect, accept, and finally appreciate such schemata before they can be of benefit.

For the individual experienced in this new way of reading, Cantalapiedra's discussions in this subsection and in the following two, "semiótica del objeto" and "semiótica del espacio," can be most revealing. His analysis shows in the diagrammatic fashion of the narratologist how the themes of the chivalric-courtly material which are the basis for *Celestina* are crossed, interrupted or intruded upon by elements which have a variety of meanings on the paradigmatic axis. Examples are drawn from the varieties of textiles referred to in the work, corporeal imagery, animal symbols, objects important to the characters, and, of course, the spaces within which the action of the work takes place. All of the themes, images, and objects which Cantalapiedra treats are familiar to students of *Celestina*. It is the manner in which he views their interrelation which is new and worthy of note.

The second part of the book which is called "Estudios formales" is dedicated to the at-first astounding thesis that Fernando de Rojas found a manuscript with nearly twelve complete acts. He finished the twelfth and composed the last four. The work would come to its final form with the addition of the five acts of the so-called *Tratado de Centurio*. One is prepared for this thesis in a manner which seems to be rather medieval cum Cortázar. First the idea appears in the prologue by Joseph Snow. Then with an "advertencia al lector" our author-critic presents his thesis in nuclear form. He somewhat ingenuously states that he does not want to argue with those greats of the past who have had other ideas about the authorship of the work. This stance in my view is a bit silly as what he is proposing is revolutionary in regard to the history of the text.

In the "Estudios formales" section he slides toward or into his thesis with a brief segment in which he attempts (I use this word in a neutral sense) to demonstrate that in the first twelve acts there are an average of three discursive sequences per act while in the last four there is only one per act. The next segment shows that there is an average of 16.08 *refranes* in each of the first twelve but only 2.75 in each of the last four. He continues with brief sections which do tend to establish that there is a difference between the first twelve and the last four in regard to the use of sources, versification, and nomenclature.

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Having adduced the evidence above, Cantalapiedra now faces the sticky problem of Rojas' assertion that he found the first act and began the second with the phrase "Hermanos míos." It would be simplest to claim that Rojas was being less than truthful in order to enhance his own standing as author. This in particular because at the end of the "Estudios formales" Cantalapiedra brings forward some fascinating facts to support his thesis which have to do with the xylography in the edition done by Stanislao Polono (?) in Seville, 1502 (?). Cantalapiedra prefers, however, to believe that Rojas was not fibbing but instead was giving an important *mensaje cifrado* (among several applying to various things) in regard to the authorship. It would be as unthinkable to divulge his explanation here as to give the conclusion of a P.D. James mystery. I'll leave that pleasure of the text to the reader. Is he correct in seeing a *mensaje cifrado* in regard to this point and if so, in his decipherment of it? His reasoning at this juncture is delicate, ingenious, and based upon some of the more subtle threads of the new "theory". My intuition is that Cantalapiedra could well be correct. Those more knowledgeable than I concerning the entangled theories of authorship and editions in regard to *Celestina* are better prepared, however, to judge this question.

Readers may well find Cantalapiedra's way of presenting his material somewhat disconcerting and off-putting. I was given to wonder on occasion if his form is drawn from some theory of "theory" of which I am unaware. Perseverance in the task of reading this book, however, is worthwhile although those disinclined to deal with narratology might be advised not to bother with the first section. The second part proposes a theory of authorship too important to be ignored and thus must be read and considered by all serious scholars of this late medieval masterpiece.

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Litografía por VLADY inspirada en la Celestina, interpretada por Amparo Villegas para la versión de Alvaro Custodio (México 1953)