

TEACHING 'CELESTINA': A COLLABORATIVE VENTURE

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While preparing to teach a graduate seminar on *Celestina* last year, I thought enviously of the useful volumes published by MLA on teaching various classic literary works. In spite of its potential value to teachers of Spanish, such a pedagogic and interpretive guide for *Celestina* seems unlikely to be undertaken by MLA, as the work is not known widely enough in English translation. It occurred to me as I planned and taught the seminar that *Celestinesca* would be the logical vehicle for seeking cooperation in a venture like this and for disseminating the results of a survey of our experiences in teaching *Celestina*. In a December conversation with Joe Snow over a wonderful seafood gumbo in New Orleans, he suggested that sharing my own recent experiences with a *Celestina* course would be an appropriate way to begin this project.

Although I have often taught excerpts from the work in surveys and the whole book in medieval literature courses, I had not previously taught it in a seminar format with a fifteen-week semester at my disposal. Certainly *Celestina* provides an appealing seminar topic, situated as it is on the border between written culture, and, in form, between drama and novel. It is, as Alan Deyermond describes it, a work which "requiere tratamiento independiente ... por su grandeza, singularidad y la magnitud de la erudición y de la crítica que ha suscitado."¹ Beyond the importance of the work itself, my choice of *Celestina* was also based on its potential to interest students and to deal with issues of importance to them, as well as providing ways to facilitate their growth in liberal learning.

¹ "La Celestina," in *Historia y crítica de la literatura española*, vol. I: Edad Media, gen. ed. F. Rico (Barcelona: Ed. Critica, 1980), 485.

There were nine M.A. candidates in the class; none had any background in medieval literature, and only one had read *Celestina* before. I decided to include other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works to give them some acquaintance with the medieval period and to accommodate my own interests and expertise while, most importantly, providing the literary, socio-historical and cultural settings for *Celestina*. Using Dorothy Severin's edition,² we spent the first two weeks doing a quick reading of the text so that the students would be familiar with it and have it in mind as we read the other works. They wrote brief reaction papers (1 1/2-2 pages) to record their first impressions. These papers served as a basis for early discussions and for comparison with their later acceptance of the work. In order to encourage their own imagination and intuition, we did not read the Gilman introduction to the text nor any other critical readings at this point.

The obvious work to initiate the next four weeks of supplemental readings was the *Libro de buen amor*. Since our purpose was to form a context for *Celestina* rather than to know the other works completely for their own sake, we concentrated on the most closely related portions. Using the *Odres nuevos* version of the *LBA*,³ we began with the prose introduction and stanzas 11-125 to become acquainted with the work: its structure and style, the narrator's persona, early remarks on love, and two amorous adventures. The remaining selections dealt with attitudes about love (praise of love: stanzas 151-65, criticism of love: 181-96, and Amor's advice: 423-49) and the two major episodes dealing with go-betweens (Endrina 575-891 and Garoza 1331-1578). To provide another essential element of contrast or influence, and as a balance to the misogynist readings to come, we included two sentimental romances: *Grisel y Mirabella* and *Cárcel de Amor*. We read most of the Flores text from Barbara Matulka's version,⁴ utilizing her summaries to provide continuity for some omitted portions of the Braçayda - Torrellas debate. We studied all of Keith Whinnom's edition of *Cárcel*.⁵ The final additional work was *Arcipreste de Talavera*, using the Zeus edition simply because it happened to be available.⁶ I chose the following chapters: Part One-1, 2 and 38; Part Two-1, 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14; Part Three-1 and 8 and the final mock apology. These sections amply demonstrate Martínez de Toledo's basic ideas about the sinful nature of "mundano amor," his condemnation of women, and his narrative and dialogic techniques. In the reaction papers on each work, in the discussions, and in choosing critical articles, we always maintained our focus on how these works compared with or enhanced our understanding of *Celestina*.

We then returned to *Celestina* and spent the next four weeks doing an in-depth, critical reading. The Snow annotated bibliography was an indispensable guide in choosing

² Fernando de Rojas. *La Celestina. Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. Madrid: Alianza, 1969, etc.

³ Juan Ruiz, Arcipreste de Hita. *Libro de buen amor*, ed. María Brey Mariño, Madrid: Castalia, 1973.

⁴ *Novels of Juan de Flores and Their European Diffusion*, N.Y.: NYU Centennial Series, 1931.

⁵ Diego de San Pedro. *Obras completas, II*. Madrid: Castalia, 1971.

⁶ Alfonso Martínez de Toledo. *Arcipreste de Talavera. Corvacho. o reprobación del amor mundano*. Barcelona: Ed. Zeus, 1968.

articles to accompany the text assignments.⁷ In addition to continued reaction papers, students outlined and gave oral reports on the articles with the result that in a week they might be exposed to as many as a dozen critical studies. All students read portions of the following works: Deyermond, *Historia y crítica*; Dunn, *Fernando de Rojas*; Gilman, *La España de Fernando de Rojas* and *La Celestina: arte y estructura*; Green, *Spain in the Western Tradition*; Lida de Malkiel, *La originalidad artística*; and Maravall, *El mundo social*.⁸ These books and the Snow bibliography were placed on library reserve. During this time, students began developing and identifying special areas of interest which led to the choice of term paper topics.

For a change of pace and as a review, we topped off the reading by viewing the Films for the Humanities version of *Celestina*. After a spirited discussion which in the main condemned the presentation, I wondered aloud if I should ever use this film again in class. The students said yes, on the grounds that their reactions to the film confirmed in them a positive sense that they knew a great deal about the work and that they had begun to develop their own ideas about its interpretation. In the penultimate week of class, a visiting lecturer incorporated scenes from several filmed versions into her lecture. During finals week, the class members got together on their own to view the Teatro Repertorio production. In a future *Celestina* class, I would like to consider ways to use filmed versions more extensively, in order to stimulate discussions of contrasting interpretations of the work.

During subsequent weeks, students continued reading and reporting on criticism of their own choice, guided by the Snow bibliography as well as suggestions from me and their classmates. For the twelfth week of class, they identified a research paper topic and distributed a tentative annotated bibliography. The following week, they prepared outlines of the paper and presented progress reports. Research papers of twelve to fifteen pages were handed in the fourteenth week, and, in the last week, students gave a twenty minute oral presentation of the results of their research. I did not suggest any possible topics as I often do in undergraduate courses. Individual topics developed out of student interests. Students understood that although the body of criticism on their topic was to be reflected in the paper, they had to arrive at some original observations. We also proceeded with the understanding that any aspect of the text itself and all prior works of scholarship were open to question as they were constructed knowledge influenced by historical and cultural situations, gender, class and other circumstances. Throughout the semester, I attempted to decentralize the class so that the seminar in general might give us the opportunity for mutual exploration of ideas. Finally, each activity--whether reading, discussion, reaction papers, reports or term paper--provided another opportunity for independent learning, creation of knowledge and development of individual areas of interest. Response from students was uniformly positive in regard to organization of the course, their interest in the readings and self-assessment of intellectual growth.

⁷ Joseph T. Snow. *Celestina by Fernando de Rojas: An Annotated Bibliography of World Interest 1930-1985*. Madison: The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, Ltd., 1985.

⁸ Deyermond, 485-528; Peter N. Dunn. *Fernando de Rojas*. NY/Boston: Twayne, 1975; Stephen Gilman. *La Celestina: Arte y estructura* (Spanish version by Margit Frenk Alatorre). Madrid: Taurus, 1974, and *La España de Fernando de Rojas. Panorama intelectual y social de La Celestina*. Madrid: Taurus, 1978; Otis Green. *Spain and the Western Tradition*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963; María Rosa Lida de Malkiel. *La originalidad artística de La Celestina*. Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1970; and José A. Maravall, *El mundo social de la Celestina*. Madrid: Gredos, 2nd ed. 1968.

SURVEY OUTLINE

As a guide in sharing our experiences in teaching *Celestina*, I have adapted the format used in Part One of *Approaches to Teaching Cervantes' 'Don Quixote'*.⁹

A. Choice of text

1. Edition(s) used. Reasons. Advantages and disadvantages. Have you tried a student edition?
2. Anthologies. Criteria for usage. Do you supplement or give summaries of omitted parts?
3. Teaching in translation. Edition used or source of translation. What was the course title? Did teaching in translation affect your approach?

B. Required and recommended further reading for students

1. Other primary works prior to or contemporaneous with *Celestina*.
2. Later primary works
3. Other primary works (ie., from other languages and cultures)
4. Literary, cultural and historical background material
5. Commentaries on *Celestina*
Essay collections. Books and articles most useful for beginning students. Additional books and articles for advanced students.
6. Readings to provide conceptual frameworks or bases in critical theory.

C. Secondary works the teacher should know, beyond those recommended for students

1. Other editions or texts
2. Background studies (ie. histories: intellectual, cultural, artistic, economic, social; themes; antecedents; relation to other authors and works)

⁹ Richard Bjornson, ed. NY: MLA, 1984.

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3. Criticism

4. Would you find a book on teaching *Celestina* useful? The MLA Bjornson book contains the survey results plus 15 original articles on the topic. Would you be interested in submitting an article? If so, what would be the subject you would develop/discuss?

D. Course structure

1. Focus - medieval, renaissance, other
2. Level of course
3. Visual aids used in class
4. Critical or scholarly approach
5. Themes or problems of special interest. Methods of dealing with them.

E. Other topics

Please add items not covered above.

Please send your responses to the survey to:

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I will attempt to organize the results of the survey so that we can compare our approaches with those of others in order to serve students and inexperienced as well as experienced professors.





Ilustración al Auto XIX, traducción anónima al francés de 1527