

RESEÑAS

Louise Fothergill-Payne, *Seneca and 'Celestina'*, Cambridge: Univ. Press: 1988. xvii + 172 pp.

The study of the sources of the *Celestina* is a difficult enterprise, doomed to incompleteness no matter how thorough the individual study may be. Castro Guisasola's work (Snow 163)¹ and especially that of Deyermond (Snow 237) have been the works to which we have turned for authority on this issue for some time. Articles and papers have appeared now and then which have added to our understanding of the complex problem of *LC* sources, but none have advanced this area of investigation to the degree that the above mentioned scholars have until the publication of Louise Fothergill-Payne's *Seneca and 'Celestina'*.

FP's central thesis is that the overriding sources of *LC* are Senecan works, especially the *Epistulae Morales*, as well as *De Vita Beata* and *De Beneficiis*, whose spirit seems to underlay the entire work. In addition to *LC*'s primary use of Senecan texts, she confirms that many of the work's references taken from Petrarch found their inspiration in Seneca—not a new assertion, but never before documented so completely.

FP goes about building support for her thesis in six richly annotated chapters as follows: 1. "Towards a Senecan tradition" 2. "Senecan commentary as a frame of reference" 3. "The 'antiguo autor' as a reader of Seneca" 4. "Fernando de Rojas continues the story; the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*" 5. "*Res et verba* in Seneca, Petrarch and Rojas" 6. "Readers ask for more: the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*". The first two chapters provide a general introduction to the reception of Seneca, the importance of his commentators in fifteenth-century Spain, and the changing view of what his words actually communicated to Rojas' and his

¹ The citations are from J. T. Snow, *'Celestina' by Fernando de Rojas: An Annotated Bibliography of World Interest 1930-1985*, Madison: HSMS, 1985.

contemporaries: "This (...) reception of Seneca was the result of a long process of transmission characterized by the arbitrary adaptation, distortion or even pure invention of his words"(1). The first chapter more specifically traces this process by citing the Senecan works most accepted and most translated, some spurious, others true Senecan writings—both of which must be taken into account when studying *LC*. Of the true Senecan works, the *Epistulae Morales* was the favorite of learned readers of the early Middle Ages. FP underscores the different reception that Seneca received through history: the master of *ars vivendi* was to be perceived later by the neo-stoics as a master of the opposite, of the *ars morendi*. The wide circulation of Senecan works and the number of their translations in fifteenth-century Castile—more than quadruple of that of other classical authors—demonstrates Seneca's great potential as a current authority to be cited in and otherwise assimilated by other authors' works. Many of the same printers that were to bring out editions of *LC* were publishing translations of Seneca (especially of the *Proverbios*) between 1491 and 1504. It is apparent that the choice of what to edit and publish was very much market driven: *De la vida bienaventurada* and *De la providencia de Dios* rather than *De la clemencia* or *De la constancia* which appealed less to the more worldly-oriented reader of the late fifteenth-century.

Chapter Two enters more directly into the relationship, probable and possible, between the translations of Senecan and pseudo-Senecan writings and *LC*. Along the way we are given interesting insights into the methods of commentary of two of Seneca's most important translators, Alonso de Cartagena and Pero Díaz de Toledo. FP cites as possible sources of *LC* these translator's commentaries on a variety of themes common in both Senecan works and *LC*: Calisto's heresy in likening Melibea to God, the role of anger—especially in regard to the relationship between servants and masters—greed, work and reward, giving gifts, women, the practice of rhetoric by non-virtuous orators, Fortune and worldly goods, friendship and sharing, etc. The most important include the translations and commentaries on the *Epistulae Senecae*, *De Ira*, *De beneficiis*, *De Brevitate Vitae*, *Tranquillitate Animi*, and *Proverbia Senecae*. FP calls special attention to the pseudo-Senecan treatise, *Titulo de la amistanza y del amigo*, because of its particular interest to those seeking a connection between Seneca and *LC*. This heavily glossed translation is full of notions on

friendship and love related to the art of giving, the problems arising from dealing with the wrong kind of friends, treachery, etc., all very relevant to themes and subthemes in *LC*.

Chapter Three turns to the author of the first act of *LC*, assumed by FP, as by most scholars, to be other than Rojas. While the "antiguo autor"—who probably read Seneca in Latin during "Seneca's Incunabula Period" (FP, p. 45 —quoting L. D. Reynolds)—was writing his work, numerous Spanish translations of Senecan works (*Proverbios de Séneca* and the *Cinco libros de Séneca*, etc.) were being printed. Only a little later, in 1496, the *Epístolas de Séneca* would be printed, as well. With this large corpus of Senecan works available to scholars and lay readers, both in Latin and the vernacular, the stage was set for the informed reader to receive *LC* from a Senecan perspective. FP discusses many insightful possibilities about the first author's referencing of Senecan works, especially the weaving of *sententiae* into his text. The core of this chapter, however, involves FP's demonstration that the "antiguo autor's" recourse to Seneca's popular wisdom occurs at three points of confrontation in Act I: between Calisto and Melibea, between Calisto and his servants, and between Celestina and Pármeno. In these confrontations, FP sees a number of references to Senecan concepts (i.e. on nature and happiness in Calisto's initial words to Melibea, on ill-treatment of servants, on consolation, on verbosity and jargon, on the art of giving and receiving, etc.) to be found in a variety of Senecan and pseudo-Senecan texts. FP's focus on borrowings, intentional and unintentional misquotes, omissions and other alterings of Senecan texts, especially of the *sententiae*, is an interesting and challenging way of looking at the proverbial core of the text of Act I. The final scene of Act I closes with another in a series of references to Seneca's ideas on rewards related to both master and servants. FP claims that, "At this point, Rojas knew how to continue the story. He had recognized the frame of reference of both the author and his fiction, he had spotted the provenance and subtext of the 'fontecicas de filosofía' and he had grasped the potential of the quotation" (68).

In Chapter Four, FP develops her theory of the Senecan "frame of reference" and the "subtext" already present in the "antiguo autor's" first act—the seeds of Rojas's work to follow. FP demonstrates that Rojas created the dialogue of the *Comedia* (the "characters' actions and reactions", 70) from Senecan *sententiae* and *exempla*, drawn

principally from Pero Díaz de Toledo's *Proverbios de Séneca*² as well as from a translation of the *Epistulae Morales*. The themes of servitude, friendship, associating with the crowd, the reversal of day and night, anger and rage, suicide, and sorrow and tears, all are seen as taking-off principally from particular "Epistulae". Rojas's famous irony is in evidence in his use of Senecan ideas: "The character who best fits Seneca's description of a slave is Calisto, the master, judging by the examples Seneca adduces: 'Tú hallarás que algún alto hombre fue siervo de una vieja, algún hombre rico sirve a una mala mujer...'" (71). Indeed, the ironic and parodic aspects that many claim for *LC*, are applied and extended by FP to the *LC* authors' parodic use of Senecan *sententiae*.

In Chapter Five, FP demonstrates that Rojas added Seneca's *De Ira* and Petrarch to his frame of reference for the continuation of the *Comedia* without abandoning the Senecan underlay of the original author's Act I. Because of the Senecan continuity in the work as a whole, as well as that of Petrarch in Rojas's additions, FP comes down on the side of those who see Rojas's hand in all of the additions, including the added acts and interpolations. The bulk of this chapter is given over to a study of the fifteen acts of the *Comedia*, analyzed by groups in order to demonstrate Rojas's use of the interplay of *sententiae* and *exempla*—a deft interweaving of Petrarchan wisdom mostly from the "Index" of Petrarchan *sententiae* and of Senecan wisdom derived from Pero Díaz's *Proverbios*—to build the plot of the *Comedia* "through the logical sequence of speech and action in each consecutive act" (98). Quite often we are shown that the characters' speech and actions do not jibe, which creates a sense of parody, especially of the courtly love tradition. FP perceives a pattern in Rojas's use of Petrarchan quotations that differs from his use of Senecan wisdom: "They [the Petrarchan quotations] either reflect solid Senecan doctrine, or are rather bizarre anecdotes" (103). The themes of flattery, love as a disease, magic (the latter perhaps related to Senecan drama), condemnation of long-windedness and

² For an earlier glimpse of the presence of the *Proverbios de Séneca* in *LC* see B. R. Dubno and John K. Walsh, "Pero Díaz de Toledo's *Proverbios de Séneca* and the Composition of *Celestina*, Act IV," *Celestinesca* 11, i (1987): 3-12.

other excesses of speech, "codicia", etc., are often expressed by a combination of Senecan philosophy and Petrarchan *sententiae*.

The sixth and final chapter demonstrates that the author of the added acts, the interpolations, omissions, deletions and substitutions (i.e. the transformation of the work to the *Tragicomedia*) continued the use of Petrarch and Seneca, now adding a possible new Senecan frame of reference: the Tragedies. The turn to a more serious and tragic denouement and the similarities with Senecan "manifestations of *affectus* and *insania*" (143), seem to make this a good possibility, according to FP. The hypothetical role of the reader in motivating the expanded twenty one-act version and the actual composition of the additions is discussed (Rojas alone, or with collaborators, etc.). The interpolations, FP says, generally "fall into three categories: *Sententiae*, explanations and emotions" (119). The use of misquotes and *exempla* continues. Seneca is added to the authorities responsible perhaps for the title, *Tragicomedia*, due to a reference in "Epistula 8" to poets who use the sayings of philosophers and playwrights, describing them as "halfway between comedy and tragedy" (128).

The final pages of this succinct and articulate book are comprised of a comprehensive bibliography broken into three main divisions. The "Table of editions" has a useful list of modern editions of Seneca, fifteenth-century translations in print, and a complete list of "Seneca's extant canon": true, pseudo and semi-Senecan texts in Latin; Anonymous fifteenth-century translations of Seneca; as well as those of Pero Díaz de Toledo and Alonso de Cartagena. The seven and a half page "Select Bibliography" is copious, considering the 144 pages of the main text of the book and it is, to the best of my knowledge, complete. The most recent entry is 1986. There is an index of Senecan *sententiae* found in *LC* divided into three sections: "Near-textual quotations," "Altered quotations," and "Hidden quotations."

Among a host of positive things that can be said about this book, one can cite especially its author's extraordinary assimilation of Senecan texts, demonstrated through her ability to relate convincingly great quantities of Senecan wisdom directly to *LC* and her fine insights into how the author(s) of *LC* inventively manipulated Senecan and Petrarchan quotes and other intertextual references in order to develop characters, action and dialogue of great diversity. If there is a negative comment to be made, it is related to one of the positives

stated above. It is obvious that FP knows Senecan thought so well that the reader may begin to suspect that she unintentionally stretches on occasion the presence of Senecan wisdom and its use and misuse in *LC*. On the other hand, the presence of two sections in her "Index"—"Altered quotations" and the bracketed "Hidden quotations" (164-166)—indicates that the author intends to make a clear distinction between what is in the text and what isn't, whereby she implicitly suggests that these "citations" in *LC* may be coincidental or part of a common wisdom only indirectly related to her proposed sources. FP alternates between positive claims for Senecan authority in *LC* ("Thus, we see that the name Calisto drew [Rojas's] attention to *Epistula* 47 on masters and slaves..." 70) and caution in her attributions, ("So, Parmeno's and Calisto's explicit mention of the time of day might well refer to the content of this letter..." [referring to '*Epistula* 122'] 83). Perhaps more characteristic of the highly informed and insightful analysis that pervades FP's book is the tone of her statement concerning the interesting relationship she draws between *LC* and the pseudo-Senecan treatise, *Titulo de la amistad y del amigo* in Chapter Two: "This is not to say that *Celestina* is based on this particular *Titulo*, but rather that both books reflect and reproduce a general fifteenth-century preoccupation with what the wise and virtuous man is supposed to be (...) And, just as it is not always possible to identify a particular spice in a well-seasoned dish, so too we should not be looking for a specific origin for certain *sententiae* in *Celestina*, but should, rather, be able to spot the Senecan way of thinking that pervades the book" (44). With this caveat in mind and with FP's book securely at our side, we are certainly able to savor Rojas's "dish" with greater relish than before. This is a wonderful book that *celestinistas* will no doubt consult until it is yellow and dog-eared, like their copies of Deyermond's and Castro Guisasa's source studies probably are by now.

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