

RESEÑAS

James R. Stamm. *La estructura de la 'Celestina': Una lectura analítica*.
Salamanca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Salamanca, 1988. 214
pp.

This is a book for the self-motivated, dogged specialist. Anyone else is apt to lose patience before reaping its benefits. Evidently not wishing to tip his hand, the author offers the reader no initial help in understanding either his design or his purpose: the "Introducción" heralded in the "Índice" is inexplicably absent. Instead, he proceeds methodically to offer his disquisition on *Celestina*, devoting a chapter apiece to "el marco textual," the *Auto* (Act I), the *Comedia* (Acts II-XVI of the sixteen-act version), and the *Tragicomedia* (the long interpolation, containing the *Tratado de Centurio*, that produces the twenty-one act form). Although he sprinkles this close reading with occasional hypotheses regarding authorship, it is only in the "Conclusiones" that the reader comes to appreciate the appropriateness of Stamm's approach, since, for once, the end justifies the means. Thanks to the meticulous exposition, his principal findings turn out to be more compelling than startling.

My reportage can be bolder and begin at the end. (In fact, the opposite tack would seem to call for a close reading of Stamm's close reading, with *Celestina's* getting lost in the shuffle.) Upon subjecting the parts of the text to separate scrutiny, Stamm discerns evidence for at least three different authors, with Rojas' responsibility limited to the brilliant continuation of the anonymous *Auto* in the *Comedia* and, possibly, to the *Tragicomedia's* new Act XVI (where Melibea heeds Lucrecia's suggestion that she eavesdrop on her parents' discussion of her marriageability). The vengeance sub-plot known as the *Tratado de Centurio* cannot be ascribed to Rojas, Stamm believes, because it is so clumsily joined to the main story as to be full of holes, not to mention the fact that its jocular humor (not unlike that in the *Auto*) differs radically from the sardonic wit found in the body of the *Comedia*. Whereas either Rojas or the unknown author of the *Tratado* might have written Act XIX's lyrical opening, neither is likely to have composed any of the preliminary materials or closing verses, since "los elementos del marco textual no tienen claras e innegables relaciones con el cuerpo

dramático de *La Celestina*" (187). Finally, the interpolations in the *Comedia* have no bearing on this discussion, since they do not lend themselves to analysis as a discrete structural unit.

Are there reasons other than virtuous devotion to duty for accompanying the author as he leads us earnestly toward these conclusions? Yes, of course. As always, it is useful to test one's own assumptions against those of a well-read expert. In addition, it is a pleasure still to encounter fertile ideas regarding a work that has occasioned so much critical commentary, especially when they are advanced without vitriol. Granted, temperate rhetoric risks evoking yawns, but Stamm's surface objectivity avoids this pitfall because one senses behind it a steely resolve, an absolute self-assurance that fairly invites one to conjecture which amongst us fall into the wrong-headed camp, in the author's view (he is plain, however, about his disappointment with Gilman's *Celestina* criticism). Fortunately, other matters also hold one's attention. No doubt these will vary from reader to reader. I shall mention only a few.

It is remarkable that even a severely analytical inquiry proves susceptible to the sheer vitality of the celestinesque world. To my taste, it is precisely when Stamm examines the characters that he is most irresistible, whether one finds his views engaging or maddening. Let me illustrate, confining the demonstration to the female figures. He tends to admire Melibea and Areúsa in their quests for personal freedom and to despise the servile Lucrecia as "sosa" (95). Elicia he finds uninteresting (she never changes, despite M.R. Lida de Malkiel's theory, he posits), while the naive Alisa "sirve sólo para situar a Melibea en una familia de cierta categoría social, a la vez que revelarnos un poco más de la persona e historia de la alcahueta; y quizá para demostrar en términos más amplios la eficacia del conjuro" (143). *Celestina*, whose prior friendship with Claudina is accentuated by Rojas, becomes "repugnante" for Stamm when, in her visit to Areúsa's bedroom, "sale a presentarse en términos clarísimos de lesbiana y *voyeuse*" (105).

If I am unable to subscribe fully to Stamm's ideas about these characters, it is partly because he seems not to have taken into account the relationship between them and the work's structure, forerunners, and meanings. Lucrecia, for example, in her capacity as foil to Areúsa, heightens the latter's portrait as a captivating *fille de joie*. Alisa's mistaken appraisal of her daughter's innocence increases the ironic

tension of Act XVI, and her foolish decision to leave Melibea to Celestina's devices may owe as much to tradition (the go-between was wont to interview her female client out of earshot of the mother; cf. *Pamphilus*) as to her ignorance or to the effects of the spell Celestina had cast on the thread. In any case, it seems to me less than certain that contemporary readers of the work would have been as inclined as Stamm to absolve Alisa of all guilt in the tragic suicide of her daughter. Furthermore, had the old bawd herself impressed these same readers as negatively as she has Stamm, Bataillon might well have had the last word (in his *La Célestine selon Fernando de Rojas*, not cited here) about the work's moral message.

That Stamm would not concur with such a view of things is obvious not only from the material fact of this monograph, but also from his assessment of Celestina's death (a complete surprise, for him) and from his understanding of Pleberio's lament. Neither vehicle for rhetorical platitudes nor shrine of hidden meanings, the value of this speech is universal. Like Melibea, this father is a new figure in Castilian literature. He functions to ask the hard human questions, and even though he can supply no answers, his monologue "debía haber abierto los ojos de muchos lectores a la posibilidad de ternura y hasta agonía existencial de parte del padre destrozado por la pérdida de su hija," giving the last act "un valor sobresaliente y sumamente original" (141).

Sentiments such as these, especially when uttered in the context of an ostensibly "scientific" analysis, serve to remind us of the reason for the enduring appeal of *Celestina*: its timeless humanity. They also encourage us to accept wildly disparate items as elements of structure (Stamm includes space, time, fate, love, death, *melibeísmo*, medicine, humor, verse, images, freedom, the closed circle of acquaintances who make up the cast, and what he calls "perspectivismo literario"), since these are capable of leading to new insights about one of the world's literary jewels. Our sense of reassurance is augmented by the relatively error-free text, although we may be taken aback by those that follow:

In quotations from the Severin (Alianza) edition:

"Y le traeré manso" (52) > "Yo le traeré manso"

"No oigo yo" (93) > "No oiga yo"

"simple rascaballos" (157) > "simple rascacaballos"

In French expressions:

"déjà vu" (97, 141) > "déjà vu"
"dénoûement" (98) > "dénoûment" (as on 162)

Other:

"*Buen Amos*" (98) > "*Buen Amor*"
"Russell Thompson" (196, n11; 211) > "Bussell
Thompson"

It is also distracting to encounter the abbreviation *LC* (even though restricted to the notes and bibliography) for "*La Celestina; la obra en su totalidad*" (11), since it is used even in recording titles without the article or in languages other than Spanish (e.g., Clara Louisa Penney's *The Book Called 'Celestina'*, cf. 193, n12 and 210; Marcel Bataillon's "Gaspar von Barth, interprète de *La Célestine*," cf. 208; J. Homer Herriott's *Towards a Critical Edition of the 'Celestina'*, cf. 209; F. J. Norton's *Printing in Spain 1501-1520 with a note on the early editions of the 'Celestina'*, cf. 210), not to mention when referring to the recent, two-volume edition of Miguel Marciales, entitled *Celestina: Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (cf. 208).

It is a pleasure to note that (*La*) *Celestina*, on the eve of its five-hundredth birthday, continues to incite the curiosity of well informed readers willing to share their knowledge and speculations with each other. In this light, Stamm's analysis appears as a welcome repast. ¡*A comer!*



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