
Ricardo Castells. *Fernando de Rojas and the Renaissance Vision: Phantasm, Melancholy, and Didacticism in Celestina*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. 125p.

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Five hundred years since its publication, *La Celestina* is still very much a source of scrutiny by critics who aspire to unravel its seemingly many contradictions. One of the most problematic scenes is the supposed meeting between Calisto and Melibea, the star-crossed lovers, in the first scene of Act I. The debate centers upon the nature of the meeting: does the encounter actually take place, or does it only exist in Calisto's dream? In *Fernando de Rojas and the Renaissance Vision*, Ricardo Castells explores the European cultural and literary tradition of physiological studies to resolve the ambiguity surrounding the first scene as well as other apparent inconsistencies found throughout the text. Castells attempts to place Rojas' masterpiece in "its appropriate cultural and historical setting" and "to present an innovative critical framework for future studies of *La Celestina*, while respecting the cultural and intellectual traditions of the Spanish Renaissance" (8). *Fernando de Rojas and the Renaissance Vision* consists of an introduction, six chapters, a section of works cited, and an index.

In the Introduction Castells details the contradictory interpretations of the opening conversation between Calisto and Melibea as evidence of one of the many textual difficulties. The first part of the Introduction is well written and particularly useful to readers unfamiliar with the different interpretations of the first scene. It is necessary for the reader to be familiar with this information because Castells refers to it throughout the book. The second part of the Introduction consists of a brief description of each chapter.

Castells traces the history and development of lovesick dreams in European literature in Chapter I, titled "La presencia angelica de aquella ymagen luziente: *Celestina* and the Medieval Phantasmal Tradition." He proposes that Andreas Capellanus' love manual *De Amore*, Dante's *La vita nuova*, and Petrarca's *Rime in morte di Madonna Laura* represent only three of the medieval works of literature that establish a phantasmal tradition in Europe that Rojas could have had at his disposition while writing *La Celestina*. Castells skillfully defends his conclusion that the opening scene is indeed a manifestation of Calisto's lovesickness. He notes that while the anonymous author of Act I and Rojas did not necessarily utilize specific literature from the phantasmal tradition as models for *La Celestina*, there

did exist throughout medieval and Renaissance Europe sufficient documented literary sources that could explain Calisto's physiological state.

Castells considers the physiological and psychological factors that contribute to the origin of lovesick dreams in Chapter II, "De dónde son los fantasmas: Dream Theory from Plato to the Renaissance." The dream theories of scholars and writers from the classical period to the Middle Ages—including Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, and Hildegard de Bingen—lead Castells to conclude that sixteenth-century writers, such as Rojas, subscribed to Aristotle's physiological explanation of lovesickness, but within a Neo-platonic context. Calisto's dream, therefore, is a result of his physiological and spiritual love for Melibea and a natural reaction of a young man in love.

In the first part of Chapter III, "Calisto's Lovesickness and the Diagnosis of Heras and Crato, Médicos," Castells explains and attempts to resolve the confusion surrounding another textual variant that appears in the different editions of *La Celestina*. Heras and Crato, two doctors whom Calisto calls for in the second scene of Act I (1499), are mentioned as Crato and Galieno in *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (1500), and as Erasistrato in later editions. Following a lengthy summary of the variants that appear in editions as late as those of the twentieth century, Castells returns to Calisto's lovesickness. Scientific and philosophical treatises from western Europe, many of which Castells discusses, explain that the eyes and the ears are the instruments by which *amor heros* begins. Castells concludes, therefore, that the textual inconsistency surrounding the names of the doctors can be attributed to editors' ignorance that Heras and Crato were doctors of sight and hearing.

Robert Burton's seventeenth-century treatise on love melancholy, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), is the context within which Castells analyzes the behavior of both Calisto and Celestina in Chapter IV, "Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*." According to Burton, Calisto's death is a terrible consequence of love melancholy, the malady that plagues him. Castells concludes the chapter by pointing out the importance of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* to modern scholars. Since Burton's work contains nine references to the *Tragicomedia*, Castells deems it a valuable source of commentary from the English-speaking world.

In Chapter V, titled "Castiglione's Il cortegiano and the Depiction of Sensual Love in *Celestina*," Castells utilizes Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* to further define and explain Calisto's behavior. The author refutes those critics who describe Calisto as a parodic character and cites as evidence Castiglione's description of Renaissance *inamorati*, according to which the person who suffers this malady is not capable of reason because of uncontrollable sensual desires. The description of *inamorati*

given by the character of the poet Pietro Bembo at the end of *Il cortegiano* provides the most complete explanation of Calisto's behavior. In this chapter Castells perceptively states that if Calisto were the inept character depicted by critics, it would not make sense that Melibea, a presumably beautiful and intelligent woman, would commit suicide because of him.

In Chapter VI, "Echando mis sentidos por venturas y my juyzio a bolar: Melancholy and Didacticism in *Celestina*," Castells examines the didactic nature of work. According to Castells, the interrelated nature of Rojas' prologue and Pleberio's lament in the final chapter underscore the didactic nature of *La Celestina*. The work's message, the tragic results of lovesickness, is shared by both Rojas in the opening commentary and Pleberio in the closing commentary.

Ricardo Castells presents to the reader a well-researched study that represents an original and significant contribution to studies of *La Celestina*. His analysis of the bodies of literature that make up the European cultural and literary tradition is both thorough and stimulating. Castells, however, is somewhat overambitious in the amount of material he covers in Chapters II, IV, and VI. The abundance of information provided in a relative few number of pages would benefit from the inclusion of a formal conclusion. Despite these minor shortcomings, Castells accomplishes his goal of placing *La Celestina* in "its appropriate cultural and historical setting" and resolves through careful analysis many of its problematic scenes. ✨