

Literature and History: Jorge Manrique and Fernando de Rojas on Castilian Society

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RESUMO: O presente artigo trata da análise de dois textos escritos na Castela Medieval tardia. Ambos são do século XV. Inserem-se no gênero história e literatura. O primeiro é ‘Coplas pela morte de meu pai’ de autoria de Jorge Manrique e o segundo é a obra de Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*. Analisa as ações humanas em prol da salvação de sua alma neste contexto, através destas obras. O tema da morte em Castela é muito presente nos séculos XIV e XV, e segue no XVI. Temas morais e de pureza de sangue permeiam o texto através da análise das duas obras. A reflexão direciona para a construção de uma perspectiva de ênfase da nobiliarquia, valorização do ‘sangue’ e a crítica a presença de conversos nos cargos da sociedade. A discriminação se espelha na arte, que reflete a realidade. O diálogo entre a realidade e a ficção se faz através da arte literária. Uma homenagem a Adeline Rucquoi pioneira dos estudos medievais ibéricos.

Palavras chave: Castela Medieval, Literatura, Jorge Manrique, Fernando de Rojas.

ABSTRACT: The present article deals with the analysis of two text written in late medieval Castile. Both are from the fifteenth century. They are inserted in the genre of history and literature. The first one is “Couplets for my father’s death” by Jorge Manrique and the second one is the work of Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*. Analyses the human actions in favor of the salvation of his soul in that context, through these works. The theme of death in Castile is very attendant in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and follows through in the sixteenth. Moral and blood purity themes permeate the text through the analysis of both works. The reflection directs to the construction of a new perspective of emphasis of the nobiliararchy, appreciation of the “blood” and the critic towards the presence of converts in society’s shrievalties. Discrimination mirrors itself in art, which reflects reality. The dialogue between reality and fiction is done through literary art. A homage to Adeline Rucquoi pioneer of medieval Iberian studies.

Keywords: Medieval Castile, Literature, Jorge Manrique, Fernando de Rojas.

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Throughout her prolific and influential scholarly life, Adeline Rucquoi has opened new vistas on diverse aspects of Castilian medieval history. From issues related to the questions of royal power, education, the pilgrimage to Compostela, religious minorities, education, and a significant number of other topics, Rucquoi has taught all of us to see the history of the Castilian (and Spanish) realms in new and insightful ways. But Adeline is far more than a singularly notable historian. Her kindness and generosity, attested to by all of us who have benefitted from her hospitality and intellectual guidance, are legendary. As great a historian as she is, Adeline is also a remarkable human being. In this modest tribute to her scholarly life, I attempt to touch on two aspects of her diverse interests: the links between knowledge and politics and the representation of religious minorities (in this case, Jewish Conversos) in two significant literary texts written in late medieval Castile, as well as explore, in a very superficial fashion, the relationship between literature and history.

Literature and History

How do we know what we know as historians? Where are we to find a body of evidence to support and shape our arguments? Where, if ever, does it end? As a medievalist and an early modern historian of Spain and the Mediterranean, I have begun with the archival evidence. Medievalist more than other historians have long reified our enduring commitment to manuscripts and archives, whether inquisitorial records, administrative proceedings, judicial encounters, or long lists of peasant fiscal dues. The latter is the type of source that, as social historian, has always been closest to my heart. Yet, the world of medieval scholarship and medieval studies has been radically altered by technology, as well as by new critical questioning of our

sources. The dissertation I wrote many years ago drew almost exclusively on the city of Burgos' unpublished municipal and ecclesiastical archival collections. This intimate relation with original sources and with the tactile pleasure of parchment and paper did not prevent me from writing a terrible dissertation. Today, I could have written a much better thesis without ever leaving my office at home. All the documents I used then have now been published or are available digitally. The ideal of the archives, which my mentor at Princeton in the early 1970s cultivated assiduously, has now been replaced by the somewhat ironic situation in which you go to the archives to read digital copies and never actually touch a document. That is certainly the case at the Archivo de la Corona de Aragon. There is little romance in doing that.

Moreover, as the challenge of post-modernism and the linguistic turn showed us in the 1980s, archival texts seldom provide an accurate view of the past. Compromised by the mediation of the written word and by the instability of language, we found ourselves in the middle of an empty desert with no oasis in sight. Doubting the validity of our sources eroded our confidence on the primacy of archival sources. Moreover, as Natalie Z. Davis has shown, a good number of archival accounts used narrative strategies that turned them into fictional literature.¹

Although as a historian I have long been committed to supplementing archival research with literary texts, this evidentiary hierarchy was clear: archival sources first, the rest as ancillary sources. But we live to change and to learn.

For many years now, I have come to see and use fictional texts as providing unique entry points into culture and what Le Goff and others

1. Natalie Z. Davis. *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

described as *mentalité*. In this article in honor of Adeline Rucquoi, I would like to continue that trajectory and to explore the manner in which two central texts in late medieval Castilian literature illuminate historical events, social relations, religious sensibilities, and the moral economy of the period in which they were written. Both provide distinct lenses through which to examine late medieval Castilian society in ways that the archival sources often do not allow. Although the two well studied works I examine here, *The Ode to the Death of my Father* by Jorge Manrique and Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* have points of convergence in their moral lessons and the role one's actions have on the negotiations of salvation, they also differ greatly in their scope and their reliance on historical events. In placing them side-by-side, one is able to see and to illustrate the complexities and contradictions of Castilian society at the end of the middle Ages.

“Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre:” Castilian Society in the Late Fifteenth Century.

Born around 1440, the scion of a high noble family with a long tradition of poetic contributions – Jorge Manrique was related to Íñigo López de Mendoza, the Marquis de Santillana, owner of one of the great libraries in Castile, and a poet of considerable stature. Pero López de Ayala, chancellor and chronicler of the early Trastámara rulers in Castile, was also a relative. Manrique was an active participant in the civil war triggered by Isabella's ascent to the throne in 1474. Fighting on behalf of Isabella's claims, Manrique died in 1479 at the siege of the castle of Garciamuñoz, a fortress held by the supporters of Juana la Beltraneja. It is said that, as he lay mortally wounded outside the castle, he carried a poem against the

world within his vest and close to his heart.²

Manrique's poem in reaction to the death of his father pointedly noted the political conflicts of his age. The poem clearly referred to the struggle for power that agitated most of fifteenth century Castile. His *Coplas* echo both the bitter antagonism between the powerful Infantes of Aragon, Don Juan and Don Enrique on one side, and the King Juan II and his cunning adviser, Don Alvaro de Luna, on the other.³ The *Coplas* also remind the reader of the ephemeral nature of these political intrigues and displays against the passing of time and the inexorable coming of death. It may be useful to focus on some significant general themes that illustrate the poem's role as a historical document.

Memento mori

As we learned long ago from Huizinga's insightful, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, late medieval society was deeply concerned with the image of death and, far more important, with the Christian attitude towards one's demise, the classical memento mori. The opening stanzas of Manrique's poem, perhaps some of the most lyrical lines in Castilian poetry, reaffirmed this sense of the inevitability of death. Comparing our lives in the third stanza (149) to rivers flowing to the sea, a metaphor for death, Manrique's

2. On Manrique and the text of the *Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre* see the edition of Jesús –Manuel Alda Tesán, Jorge Manrique, *Poesía*, 13th edition (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, S.A., 1989), 11-74 for his life and literary achievements. See also 148-167 for the text of the *Coplas*. Direct references to stanzas will be made parenthetically to the page in the edition cited above.

3. For the political context to the writing of these two works see Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Spain's Centuries of Crisis, 1300-1474* (Oxford/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 86-109; John Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 101-281.

ode is first and foremost a reflection on the ephemeral nature of human existence. As such, his description of our intimation of our end and of the human tendency (as we age or in the face of death) to think that the past was always better than the future provide us with a window into the cultural values of late fifteenth century Castilian society or, at least, on the values of some of that society's members, mostly the high nobility and some middling sorts. Equally, Manrique displayed a series of classical themes and familiar tropes, all in line with the mental world of late medieval Europe. These included his insistence on the vanity and ephemeral nature of wealth, on the high prize we pay for wanting things, and on benefit of a short life (a theme also present in the ending monologue of *la Celestina*) over a long one, since the longer we live, the greater are our chances for pain and sadness.

Far more remarkable is Manrique's emphasis on the egalitarian nature of death. Whether powerful or weak, high nobleman or poor peasants, we are all rivers flowing to the eternal sea and equal in the face of death. As he writes, "allegados son iguales los que viven por sus manos e los ricos." (149) Manrique's not so subtle term, "los ricos," addresses, while emphasizing the *memento mori* theme, a particular issue in Castilian late medieval culture, that is, the impact of money as a social leveler and disrupter of distinctions between social orders. This was also present in much harsher terms in Rojas' *la Celestina*. Nonetheless, regardless of his Christian sentiments, Manrique, an aristocratic par excellence, was certainly troubled by the rise of new men in Castilian society. Conversos, flocking to the newly created universities, joining the ranks of cathedral chapters, acquiring municipal offices, and many of them manning the growing bureaucracy of the Catholic Monarchs represented a threat to the hierarchical values that Manrique upholds in his poem. In many ways, as we shall see, Calisto, the protagonist of *La Celestina*, the text with which I am contrasting the *Coplas*, represented those

kind of dishonorable new comers, rich but fatuous, that Manrique detested so profoundly.

While pointing to the ephemeral nature of wealth, of youth, and human beauty (after all his father, the master of the Order of Santiago, accumulated no wealth), and the leveling nature of death, Manrique provides us with the opportunity to measure how much certain values and cultural motifs were common to all of Western European society in the last decades of the Middle Ages. In Manrique, while we are all equal in the face of death, we are certainly not all equal in the manner in which we live, in the social and moral values we choose to uphold or neglect, and, most significantly, how we are remembered.

Fame

The other constant theme in Manrique's poems is fame. How fame was acquired in late fifteenth century Castile follows along vectors common to the nobility's most cherished values. In the Castilian context, Don Rodrigo Manrique lives in memory because he fought the infidel. Through his role as master of the Order of Santiago, Don Rodrigo spearheaded Castilian efforts against Islam on the Granada frontier. "Amigo de sus amigos / ¡qué señor para criados e parientes," he was, as Jorge Manrique tells us, a lion to his enemies. (160)

Don Rodrigo sought no earthly goods or wealth, a path followed shamelessly by most of the magnates in late fifteenth century Castile, above all by the Villenas, sworn enemies of the Manriques and of Isabella's claims to the throne. Don Rodrigo chose to live in relative poverty but to do so with honor. He was exemplary in his treatment of his family, friends, and servants. He was exemplary in his public behavior and loyalty to his lord.

Because of his selfless commitment to an honorable Christian life, Don Rodrigo's fame, the remembrance of his deeds, conferred on him a form of life after death. Memory (fame) was, in many respects, far more enduring than the life eternal granted by religious salvation. The poem's final lines are a vivid reminder of that. As María Rosa Lida de Malkiel's great book, *La idea de la fama en la edad media castellana*, shows how fame (and the pursuit of it) was one of the central issues in late medieval Castilian life. Fame, what in the early modern period was often referred to as "reputation," conferred a sort of immortality that paralleled the Christian ideal of a life after. It was part of that moral economy, shared by most people at the top of society.⁴

Politics in the Coplas

In Manrique's *Coplas*, there are numerous themes related to fifteenth century Castilian and peninsular history. They can be mined with great profit as they also reflected Manrique's own perspective on these matters. Because of the limitation of space, I focus here on three of these themes. The first one, mentioned in the context of the ephemeral character of human existence, is the enduring civil conflict between the Castilian Crown and its noble adversaries (mostly the Infantes of Aragon) in the period between the 1420s and the reforms of the Catholic Monarchs in the late 1470s and 1480s. The second and third points to be explored, though consisting of only a few passing remarks in Manrique's *Coplas*, are tropes closely related to an evolving late fifteenth century anti-Converso and anti-Jewish discourse.

4. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *La idea de la fama en la edad media castellana* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).

One is that of Gothic blood and descent and the other, closely associated with this emphasis on the Visigothic past, is the question of blood and purity. Although Manrique's silence on this last topic is deafening – after all the Manriques had Converso blood among its ranks – what he does not say is quite telling of Castilian attitudes towards Conversos and Jews.

Manrique introduces the political struggle in mid-fifteenth century Castile with an evocation of a cycle of festivities held in Valladolid in May 1428, more than a decade before his birth. I have already examined the meaning of these festivities in the past and for me, Manrique's mention of them almost a half century afterwards has always been evidence of the symbolic valance of May 1428 in Castile's political discourse.⁵ The chivalrous displays, use of colors, and other gestures found in the accounts of these festivals remained part and parcel of the literary imaginary of late medieval Castile into the late fifteenth century. Manrique's short mention (he was no friend of the Infantes of Aragon) reads as follows: *Qué se hizo el rey don Joan?/Los infantes d'Aragón/¿qué se hizieron?/¿Qué fue de tanto galán/qué fue de tanta invinción/quetruxeron?/¿Fueron sino devaneos/que fueron sino verduras/de las eras/las justas e los torneos,/ paramentos, bordaduras/e çimeras?* (155-56)

The feasts of 1428 served as the site for the *mise-en-scene* of the hostilities between the Infantes, wishing to control the Crown and its resources, and the king of Castile. The feasts, after excessive displays, echoed in Manrique's poetry, ended with a temporary victory for John II and Alvaro de Luna and the exile of the Infantes from Castile. Yet, in the turbulent decades that follow, Manrique's poem echoes the political events that followed the fatuous displays on 1428 Valladolid. The heir to the

5. Teofilo F. Ruiz, "Festivités, couleurs et symboles du pouvoir en Castille au XVe siècle. Les célébrations de mai 1428," *Annales E.S.C.*, 3 (1991), 521-46.

throne, Henry (half brother of Isabella and king of Castile as Henry IV) fell under the influence of the Infantes and other high nobles, the Villenas above all. Alvaro de Luna was beheaded, and a putative claimant to the throne, Alfonso, was briefly elevated to the throne before his untimely death. Anarchy descended upon Castile. We know of these events through the chronicles and archival sources for the period, but what Manrique offers us are not only references to events that had occurred half a century before, but also the poet's insistence on their importance for the political life of the realm and as context to his father exemplary deeds.⁶

Here is the history, he tells us. All that pomp, all the excesses of 1428 came to nothing. They were, as he tells us, like the fruits of the garden that rot with time. Their bodies (that of John II, the Infantes of Aragon, and others), their displays and all of their struggles, ambitions, antagonisms, schemes were as ephemeral as life itself. They rotted away, as the bodies of the participants did. In the end, while the Infantes of Aragon's actions created almost half a century of political disruptions, none of them was as deserving of eternal peace in heaven or of glorious fame as Don Rodrigo Manrique who dutifully served his king and religious duties.

Gothic Descent and Purity of Blood

A single line in the poem evokes the importance of Gothic descent, specifically of Gothic blood, while reminding the reader of the manner in which even those in high positions are swept by circumstances into

6. See note 3 above and also the very detailed account by Luis Suárez Fernández, *Nobleza y monarquía: puntos de vista sobre la historia política castellana del siglo XV*, 2nd edition (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1975).

ignoble occupations and lives.: “Pues la sangre de los godos,/y el linage e la nobleza/ tan crescida,/!por cuantas vías y modos/se pierde su gran alteza en esta vida! (151) While reflecting on the manner in which those on top may end up at the bottom (the well-known medieval trope of the wheel of fortune), Manrique makes in this line one salient point.

That point is that of equating Visigothic descent, a powerful ideological tool in late medieval Castile and central to emerging discourses of blood and difference within the high nobility. What Manrique does in his *Coplas* is to reify a sense of nobility transmitted by blood and Gothic descent. In that sense, his single phrase parallels the feverish attempts by Christian polemicists against the rising social status of Conversos in Castilian society, as they competed for positions and for access to the ranks of the nobility. To have Visigothic blood was to be of pure blood and worthy of nobility, even though, as he notes in the poem some end up, in spite of the nobility of their blood, in lesser positions. Not to have Visigothic blood, that is to be a descendant of a Jew or a Muslim, was to be not deserving of nobility. In time, this would become an important tool in the arsenal of those trying to build statutes of purity of blood or anti-Converso and anti-Morisco legislation. Visigothic descent will be extended to those born in the mountains or to peasants, places in Castile that Muslims and Jews, supposedly, did not reach. Cervantes, at his ironic best, has Sancho proclaim that since he is an Old Christian (a peasant), he could be a duke.⁷

Thus the *Coplas* provide us not just with a literary work of the highest quality and lyricism, but it serves as a window into the values of late medieval

7. There is a vast literature on the topic. Some of it is summarized in my “Discourses of Blood and Kinship in Late Medieval and Early Modern Castile,” in *Blood and Kinship. Matter for Metaphor from Ancient Rome to the Present*, edited by C.J. Johnson, B. Jussen, D.W. Sabeen, and S. Teuscher (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 105-124.

Castilian society, into its turbulent political history, extending its narrative back to the 1420s. More significantly, Manrique joins the debate on blood, on purity, and on the nature of nobility. These historical categories, central to Rucquoi's insightful work, serve as context for the life of Don Rodrigo Manrique, for his exemplary deeds, for his faithfulness to his king, love of his friends, and redoubtable struggle against his enemies.

Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina*

Written by Fernando de Rojas (ca. late 1460s or early 1470s, d. 1541), a man of converso origin, whose name or that of some of his relative attracted the attention of the Inquisition, a graduate of Salamanca, and a lawyer, *La Celestina* or, as in its original title, the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* is one of the most important texts in Castilian literature. The story is fairly straightforward, but revealing of Rojas' insightful understanding of social relations, moral questions, and the impact of money and desire on human life.⁸

In the simplest of summaries, Calisto, an idle young member of the urban elite, desires (and I use the word purposely for it is not love but desire) Melibea, the daughter of a nouveau urban aristocratic family. Calisto, besotted with his wanting and prompted by one of his servants (who wishes to entrap him into the webs and wiles of an old procuress) encourages Celestina to try to overcome Melibea's resistance to Calisto's wooing. Celestina, who hides under the guise of piety, is an "old whore." Betrayed by his servants, who Calisto treats harshly, the idle young man

8. There are numerous editions of *La Celestina* and of the author. See José Luis Canet Vallés, ed. *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2011), 9-165.

descends into a world of scam artists, prostitutes, and betrayal that leads, at the conclusion of the work to everyone's death. The servants kill Celestina as they argue about their share of Calisto's rewards. Soon afterwards, they hang from their necks for their crime. Calisto, as inept and idle a character as one could depict, falls from a ladder after taking Melibea's virginity. He spills his brain on the ground and dies. Melibea, heart broken, commits suicide. They all die without confessions, so, even though the play is heavily laced with sexual references, with prostitutes, and malice, the conclusion follows on the gospel's admonition that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans, 6, 23)

La Celestina borrows freely from Juan Ruiz's *Libro del buen amor*, whose Doña Endrina (the trotaconventos) is an earlier model for the figure of la Celestina. Other influences are to be found in the text, such as works by Petrarch, Juan de Mena (1411-56), the Castilian author of the highly regarded *Laberinto de fortuna*. and a host of other sources, highlighting the inter-textuality of Rojas' work. The author does not miss an opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of classical culture, something that Manrique does as well, and some of *La Celestina*'s most dramatic monologues, such as that of Pleberio at the death of his daughter, are marred by the continuous allusions to classical examples. Thus, both works are windows into the learned culture of the period; redolent with allusions to the classics or, as is the case in Manrique, to passages of Roman imperial history.

Different from Manrique, Rojas's work captures also the speech of those below, the billingsgate discourse so well explored by Bakhtin in his *Rabelais and His World*. "Hijo de puta" and other expletives, and accusations of being the child of the intercourse between one's mother and a monkey are hurled, either directly to describe Celestina or muttered by the servants against Calisto as a form of resistance to his harsh tone and general

stupidity.⁹ Yet, both authors are also concerned with conduct, reflecting the wider world of the late middle Ages and its preoccupation with death, behavior, and with the misery of one's life.

What is most telling are the different tones of each of the works and intended audience. When we shift from Manrique's late 1470s aristocratic poem to Fernando de Rojas' story of Calisto and Melibea at the turn of the fifteenth century, we travel into an entirely different social and moral sphere. Although there are some elements in common in the critique of wealth and the underlying moral message, we transit from the wider world of knights and kings, as treacherous and undeserving as they may have been, to that of the *nouveau riche* urban nobility, often mistrusted by their relation to money and trade. We also enter into the demi-monde of its often-disloyal servants, and to a whole gallery of criminal elements that foreshadowed the picaresque novels of the mid-sixteenth century and afterwards. As original as the *Celestina* is in terms of its innovative composition, language, and its introduction into European literature of the full figure of the go-between, the work is a profound reflection on the transition from medieval to the dawn of a world dominated by self interest, greed, the absence of honor, and of Christian and knightly values. In some respects, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is an extensive and idealized response to *La Celestina's* concerns with wealth, disloyal servants, and tyrannical masters. In *Don Quixote* medieval ideas of a society of orders, of honor, and commitment to service marked the final end of the Middle Ages and the birth of capitalism and greed, already forecasted in Rojas' work.

Furthermore, although the inherent ambivalence of *La Celestina* allows for a diversity of readings; there is, undoubtedly, a profound

9. See, above all, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

misogynistic trend running throughout the work. This is less so Rojas' own views about which we know little, than a social construct reflective of his age. The old bawd, la Celestina, is a repairer of maidenhoods, a sort of alchemist, procuress, an "old whore," and a witch. She has her fingers into all sorts of shady and illicit dealings, and, more often than not, her clients (or the clients of the women she keeps in her house) are members of the clergy. Melibea is a vain, thoughtless young woman, arrogantly enamored of her social privilege. Published in 1499, thirteen years after the *Malleus maleficarum*, the eponymous character would most have certainly burned as a witch in other parts of Europe. But although the Spanish Inquisition dealt from time to time with some cases of witchcraft, there was no systematic hunt for witches.

The Social Context

Jose Antonio Maravall's *El mundo social de la Celestina* is an unrivalled guide to the social meaning of the text and to its importance as a window into diverse cultural and ideological trends present among the middling sorts and the lower segments of at the dawn of the early modern period. As such, it offers a perfect portrait of the attitudes of certain social classes (or at least some members of specific social classes) in the late middle Ages. There is little one may add to what Maravall wrote long ago or to his argument as to La Celestina's historical significance. In eight short but substantive chapters, Maravall, through a close reading of Rojas's work, explores the mental world and social positioning of specific groups: the

urban petty nobility, its servants, and the criminals that preyed upon them.¹⁰

Opening with an examination of how Rojas' work offers an entry into the middling sorts' morality (or absence of it) and a sense of an impending social crisis on the eve of modernity, Maravall goes on to explore topics to which I have alluded before. Among them are: the role of servants and the breakdown of the relations between masters and servants, celebrated by Manrique: "Que señor para criados," an idea glorified by Cervantes. These developments showed, Maravall argues, the rise of selfishness as integral to a pre-capitalist society. Further, and these are the themes that offer the most material for discussion, Maravall saw the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* as a guide to the rejection of the established order by the lower classes, the rise of a pragmatic attitude that eschewed the idealization of honor and military deeds so prevalent in late fifteenth century Castile. This one may also be described as a general trend towards secular attitudes. In many respects, it is clear that the *Celestina* parallels the attitude of some Conversos in their confessions to the Inquisition. John Edwards brilliantly described the question of unbelief that permeated Converso statements, and their views as forerunners for Spinoza's ideas and for the rise of secular attitudes towards the world.¹¹

Being an unrepentant social historian, I am most interested, however, on the social transformation of the bourgeois leisure class and their pursuit of wealth in the growing monetary and urban economy of Castile's late Middle Ages. These are topics that deserve glossing and which offer opportunities to go a bit beyond Maravall's analysis. The two main representatives of

10. See (in a new updated edition but originally published in 1968) of José Antonio Maravall's insightful study of *La Celestina* in his *El mundo social de La Celestina* (Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2003)..

11. John Edwards, "Religious Faith and Doubt in Late Medieval Spain: Soria, circa 1450-1500," *Past & Present*, 128 (1990): 152-161.

these evolving attitudes towards wealth and duty (compare to Manrique's distaste for wealth and display) are Calisto himself and Melibea's father, Pleberio. Calisto is an idle and vacuous young man, whose pleasure is to hunt, hawking, and to feed his imagined love sickness, prompted not by romantic notions of love but by his need to possess Melibea's body. He does not serve in the Castilian armies at a time in which Castile and Spain were deeply involved in Italy, North Africa and the lands beyond the Ocean Sea. He does not partake of the administration of the city, as many in his social rank did. His views on Melibea, as he declares himself a Melibeian, are close to heretical, and, in fact, one of his servants notes that his statement border on that. Melibea, I fear, is not too far behind, she is also idle, enjoying the benefits of her rank and wealth with not a thought for others. Her early dealings with Celestina and her treatment of Lucrecia, though not as harsh as Calisto's dealings with Parmenio and Sempronio, are not kind either.

The interesting and revealing intervention, however, is that of Pleberio in the concluding words of the play. We have not heard his voice or met him directly until his daughter commits suicide. In a long monologue, marred as I noted earlier by his many references to Classical mythology and literary sources, he pronounces several sentences that are revealing indeed and which are either mistranslated or not included in the English version. The exact quote (borrowed in toto from Petrarch) and following a long reflection on the cruelty of life and his embracing of the Greek classical dictum that not to be born is best of all, reads as follows:

“¡Oh duro corazón de padre! ¿Cómo no te quiebras de dolor, que ya quedas sin tu amada heredera? ¿Para quién edificué torres, para quién adquirí honras, para quién planté árboles, para quién fabriqué navíos? ¡Oh tierra dura! ¿cómo me sostienes? ¿Adónde hallará abrigo mi

desconsolada vegez?¹²

In these short sequence of sentences, besides offering a plaintive reflection on life, on this valley of tears in which we all live, Rojas, besides depicting Pleberio's selfishness (it is all about him. About not having an heiress to bequeath his fortune), reveals his social class and the sources of his wealth. He is an active economic agent, building towers, planting trees, and building ships. Far more significant, he acquired honors, that is, he purchased them. Not unlike many of his contemporaries, moving from the urban oligarchical elite into the ranks of the aristocracy by marriage or purchase, a lot of Conversos, among them probably Calisto and Pleberio, belonged to a bourgeoisie that purchased their exalted rank within their respective cities.

Pleberio's monologue gives also a brief inventory of the sources of his wealth. His investments were diversified. He built towers, that is, urban dwellings, he planted trees, which meant he also invested in the countryside, probably the hinterland of his city, and, not unlike most of his counterpart, owned rural estates close to his urban dwelling. He also built ships. Since in Castile around this time, there were few locations where ships were built, one may assume that the unnamed city where the fictitious characters of Pleberio and Calisto lived must have been Seville, and that also is in accord with his planting of trees, probably olive trees in the rich Aljarafe region in Seville's hinterland. The only other choice of location for building ships would have been some of the ports on the Bay of Biscay, but Rojas, lived in New Castile and must have been sensitive to the rise of Seville in the fourteenth century and its new role as conduit to the Atlantic trade.

12. Luis Canet Vallés, ed. *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*, 342..

Pleberio and Calisto lived in a city. Contemporary with the publication of la *Tragicomedia of Calisto y Melibea*s Andres Bernáldez and others' vitriolic anti-Jewish and anti-Converso writings. One of the charges that Bernáldez hurled against Jews and Conversos was that they lived in cities: urban inhabitation was synonymous with suspected bloodlines and heretical behavior. Fernando de Rojas was deeply aware of this discourse. In many respects, *La Celestina* is redolent with veiled references and allusions to the suspicious pedigree of the main characters. Calisto is branded a heretic, Pleberio acquired honors, built ships. Many of the rich urban oligarchs of course were not Conversos, but the philosophical musings of Pleberio at the conclusion of the book moved sharply away from Manrique's religious discourse to a secular and materialistic one: precisely the kind of discourse that underlined most of the Inquisition's suspicions of Conversos' orthodoxy. In Pleberio's planctus, there is no recourse to Christian consolation, except for the concluding sentence stating that he has been left alone *in hac lachrymarum valle*. His solace, if there is any solace, is the pessimistic philosophy that prevailed towards the end of the Middle Ages, those sentiments so richly described by Huizinga. There is no hope of a life after, but only a relentless pessimism and pain. The servants, of course, are not much better. They are animated by greed; there is no fear of divine punishment; there is no heaven and hell, but how much money one could gain. Precisely, what one Converso stated around the end of the fifteenth century, when brought in front of the Inquisition on the charges of Judaizing.¹³ It was all about selfish behavior, as compared with Manrique's emphasis on selflessness. All died unconfessed and unrepentant (except for Celestina's cries for a confessor, ironically the most evil of the

13. Henry C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition in Spain*, 4 vols. (New York: McMillan, 1906-07): I, 601.

figures in the play). They are all going to hell, while Don Rodrigo Manrique was surely expected in heaven and to live on in memory.

La Celestina also offers some clues into social history. Pleberio was forty years old when Melibea was born. He was sixty when she died. We must assume, though it is not evident in the text, that his wife, Alisa, was probably much younger, following on the patterns of marriage among the members of upper social groups. That they had one daughter may also seem to indicate that other children may have died at birth or in infancy. It would have been very odd to have one single child, especially only a female one, even though in Spain, women had rights of inheritance. The text also provides evidence for paternal love, intense paternal love (mixed with intense selfishness) that reconfirms the recent understanding of family relations towards the end of the Middle Ages. As such, we have a window, small window I must admit, into the mentality of certain social classes in this period.

Conclusion

I think it is time to bring this to a conclusion. Although written a bit over twenty years apart, Manrique's *Coplas* and Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* inhabited very different worlds. Both are valuable sources for historians in attempting to reconstruct the past. While there are some similarities in the manner in which Manrique openly posits a well-lived life to its counterpart and the rewards that are due to those who act according to the highest standards in society, as opposed to Rojas' emphasis on the tragic end of those who sin, there is so much more that is different. It is not just because Manrique was an aristocrat and Rojas belonged to the educated middling sorts of Converso origins. Nobles could and did write

salty and lewd stories, mostly in a misogynist vein, think of the *Corbacho*. Conversos (and Conversas) could also write deeply spiritual and orthodox works. I think that in this case the life of a warrior as opposed to the life of civil servant in New Castile had a lot to do, as did the contrast between urban and rural. Manrique knew his world and his history. So did Rojas. In the end, both addressed those issues that they knew best. In doing so, they opened windows for us into the complex world of Castile's social norms, hopes, expectations, the highest and most lofty desire for fame and salvation, as well as the most sordid displays of a changing world that then, as in our world today, was inhabited by greed and proto-capitalists.

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