

J. A. Garrido Ardila, *Charlotte Temple. Estudio de tradiciones, géneros y fuentes*. Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 2002. 253 pp. ISBN 84-7723-493-0.

It is now fifty years since Ian Watt claimed the novel as English territory. His seminal work, *The Rise of the Novel*,¹ taught several generations of students in the anglophone world that the novel originated in late-seventeenth century England with the pseudo-journalism of Daniel Defoe and was developed in the laboratory of the eighteenth century by writers such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. The distinguishing features of this novelistic tradition were middle-class morality and the protestant mercantile ethic: in the great works of Richardson, such as his epistolary novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, virtue is rewarded and the heroine's modesty protected, while in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* vice is justly punished. While Cervantes's *Don Quixote* has long been recognised as an important influence on the English novelistic tradition, the debate for much of the second half of the twentieth century was partly about whether or not Cervantes could truly be regarded as the first novelist, or whether that distinction did not indeed belong to the merchant turned writer, Daniel Defoe. John Ardila's study of the English novel *Charlotte Temple* must be read in this context of an anglo-centric history of the novel, for its conclusion is that this work draws part of its inspiration from *La Celestina*.

Charlotte. A Tale of Truth by Mrs Susanna Rowson was first published in London in 1791. In 1794 it was published in the United States and has never since been out of print there: Ardila notes more than 200 editions between 1791 and 1933 and the book is often described as the first

1. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1957.

American best-seller. Pirated editions, with slightly different titles, were common; by 1797 the book had become known simply as *Charlotte Temple*. Although the novel has never been as popular in the United Kingdom as in America, the American novelist Jane Smiley links its author Susanna Rowson with Harriet Beecher Stowe as 'the two most popular and successful American novelists before the modern era'.² The storyline is simple: a fifteen-year old girl is encouraged by an older woman to accept the advances of a soldier who is about to sail for service in America. Inevitably, this leads to the downfall of the girl and she dies, homeless in New York, in childbirth. The older woman at first is socially successful in New York, and refuses help to the dying Charlotte; but eventually dies from the effects of her dissolute life, 'a striking example', as Mrs Rowson writes in the last sentence of the novel, 'that vice, however prosperous in the beginning, in the end leads only to misery and shame.' It is in this character, first known as Mlle La Rue and then as Mrs Clayton, that Ardila sees the influence of *La Celestina*.

Susanna Haswell Rowson had lived on both sides of the Atlantic before she wrote *Charlotte Temple*. Born in England in 1762, she had grown up in Massachusetts but returned to her native country in 1778; she married young and spent much of the rest of her life struggling to support her husband, at one time working as an actress as well as a writer. Having settled permanently in North America in 1793 she ran a successful girls' boarding school from 1797 until 1822 and her last works were textbooks. Instructing the young was important for her: she stresses throughout *Charlotte Temple* that she is writing this story to encourage young women to avoid Charlotte's mistakes. She is particularly anxious that daughters should follow their parents' guidance and the portrayal of Charlotte's parents is especially sympathetic. *Charlotte Temple* is a moral tale and quite clearly sets out to demonstrate to girls what will happen if they fail to keep the Fifth Commandment: honour thy father and thy mother.

John Ardila gives a detailed examination of the critical history of *Charlotte Temple*; he looks at it as a feminist novel and he considers its place in the Richardsonian tradition of the puritan novel. He demonstrates convincingly, however, that neither of these approaches is satisfactory: Charlotte's seducer is treated in a more complex way than the villains of Richardson's novels and poor Charlotte is not a feminist icon. Although he does not make explicit reference to it, Ardila moves close to the revisionist movement of recent years that has traced the origins of the novel far beyond Daniel Defoe. As Terry Eagleton says, 'Because it is so hard to

2. Jane Smiley, «Introduction» to Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, New York, The Modern Library, 2004, p.xi.

say what a novel is, it is hard to say when the form first arose',³ and Margaret Anne Doody argues that the novel as a form is at least two thousand years old.⁴ Over the last decade it has increasingly been argued that the rise of the novel is a European phenomenon in which Spain played a particularly important part: that Cervantes, far from being the first novelist, was the culmination of a Spanish tradition of prose fiction that can be termed 'novels'.⁵ This tradition included *La Celestina*.

Having carefully demonstrated that *Charlotte Temple* owes little to feminism or to the tradition of the puritan novel, in his final chapter Ardila deals in depth with *Charlotte Temple's* relationship to *La Celestina*. He argues convincingly that La Rue is a literary descendant of Celestina and that she forms the psychological heart of the novel. Further, he considers, and dismisses, an impressive array of possible sources for the character of La Rue, from Chaucer's Cressida to the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is in Celestina that Ardila finds the closest analogue to the ambition and ruthlessness of La Rue. *La Celestina* had been translated into English by James Mabbe as *The Spanish Bawd* and published in 1631; it had been several times reprinted in the eighteenth century and would, Ardila believes, have been available to Susanna Rowson.

Ardila's study of *Charlotte Temple* is an important contribution to the rediscovery of the Spanish roots of the European novel. It is to be hoped that an English translation of the book will be made available: it deserves to be known in the anglophone world. (If an English edition is published, however, the opportunity should be taken to correct the many typographical errors in the quotations from English texts.) It is salutary to have so clear a demonstration of the influence of Spanish prose on the first American best-seller.

Trudi L. Darby
King's College London

3. Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel. An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p.2.

4. Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, Brunswick NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1996.

5. See Jenny Mander (ed.), *Remapping the Novel. The Rise of the Novel in Europe*, Oxford, *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, special volume, 2007 (forthcoming).

