ALBRECHT VON EYB'S 'MARGARITA POETICA': WHAT EVERY 'CELESTINISTA' SHOULD KNOW

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The Margarita poetica of Albrecht von Eyb (1420-75) is one of those works to which, from time to time, scholars have tried to call our attention—Marcelino Menéndez

* [Keith Whinnom promised Celestinesca an article triggered by Ivy A. Corfis’ article of 1984 (see note 1, below), and he refers to it in his "El género celestinesco: origen y desarrollo," in Literatura en la época del Emperador, ed. V. García de la Concha, Acta Salmanticensia, Academia Literaria Renacentista, 5 (Salamanca: Universidad, 1988), pp. 119-30, at p. 123, n. 15. He worked on the article at some time during 1985, but at his death in March 1986 it was left unfinished. As his literary executor, I am preparing for publication various unfinished projects, including a book on Celestina (of which I shall give an account in a later issue of this journal). The present article cannot be in any way completed: there are two typed pages of text, and one and a half of notes, all with some emendations, but no handwritten drafts of the remainder, or even an outline. Either Keith got no further, and any draft of this part was destroyed once he had transformed it into typescript, or a draft of the whole has been lost; I suspect that the former is the case. Whichever is the correct explanation, although Keith clearly states what he intends to do in the article, there is no possibility of discovering exactly what he would have said. My intervention has therefore been confined to copy-editing, without any change in either content or style, and to the provision of a few bracketed notes. I am grateful to Dr. Leslie P. Turano for verifying a bibliographical reference.]
Pelayo, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, and, most recently, Ivy A. Corfis—but it has not, even now, received the detailed study it deserves. We know, of course, that Fernando de Rojas had acquired a copy of the book before he died, but we cannot be certain that he owned his own copy when he undertook to complete the Comedia. It is doubtful that we shall be able to say with entire confidence whether or not he knew it as early as 1498 (?) before someone has done a great deal of work on the subject, not merely listing all the coincident sententiae but checking the possible alternative sources for them. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Margarita was a widely diffused and readily accessible manual, and it may be suggestive that the anonymous author of Celestina comentada used it—as Corfis shows—to identify many of the flores with which Rojas clearly felt obliged to decorate his text.

There seem still to be a great many copies of the early editions of the Margarita lying around, there is at least one book on Albert, of which forty-odd pages are devoted to the Margarita, and the Corfis article contains some extensive parallel citation of Albert—and texts quoted by Albert—and Celestina. However, it is clear that most Celestina-scholars are not familiar with the Margarita, summary descriptions of it can be, I have found, highly misleading, and it has finally occurred to me (having had microfilm of the work for over ten years) that a simple account of it might be of some use to celestinistas, who may decide either that it contains nothing of any possible interest to them or that here is a book worth checking on certain specific points, especially, perhaps, the extent of Rojas’ reading.

First of all, it should be noted that the "poetica" of von Eyb’s title has nothing to do with poetry, and depends on the antique senses of poesis and poeta, and means merely "pertaining to creativity, particularly literary" (just as Rojas describes Petrarch, in the prologue to the Tragicomedia, as a "poeta," alluding, we may suppose, to his prose writing in

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2 See Fernando del Valle Lersundi, “Testamento de Fernando de Rojas, autor de La Celestina, otorgado en la villa de Talavera, el 3 de abril de 1541,” RFE 16 (1929), 366-88.

3 Corfis, using only Brunet and Graesse, counts fifteen editions before 1503. The first edition appeared in Nuremberg in 1472. Corfis quotes the edition of Venice, 1493, which happens to be that used by the author of Celestina comentada (BNM MS 17631), whereas I shall refer to that of Rome, 1475, printed by Ulrich Hahn ("Udalricus [sic, for 'Udalricus'] Gallus alias Han Alamanus ex Ingelstat"), Cambridge University Library, Inc. 2.B.2.2 (1139).

Latin rather than to his verse in Italian). "Margarita" provides a useful abbreviated reference for von Eyb's book, but in fact we have to do with a "Summa oratorum omnium: poetarum ac philosophorum autoritates in unum collecte ... que margarita poetica dicitur." And this descriptive clarification in turn requires interpretation: an authoritas is a sententia, synonymous, as we shall see, with flos (Rojas' flor) and familiar locutio; and orator clearly embraces both poeta and philosophus, even though numerous authors anthologized in the Margarita would hardly be described as "creative writers" or "philosophers" in modern usage.

[The distinction is less clear-cut than this suggests. Petrarch also wrote Latin verse—the literary epic Africa, the pastoral Bucolicum carmen, and Epistolae metricae--, so that Rojas could have had his poetic achievement in mind without going outside his Latin works. The general validity of Keith Whinnom's argument is, however, unaffected by the qualification just expressed. Rojas' words, "aquel gran orador e poeta laureado," are a standard way of referring to Petrarch, and very similar words are used in the Basel 1496 edition of the Opera, as headings to Bucolicum carmen and to Book II of De remediis.]

6 I observe that George A. Shipley, "Authority and Experience in La Celestina," BHS 62 (1985), 95-111, has failed to notice, or chosen to ignore, my remarks on author and auctoritas in "Autor and Tratado in the Fifteenth Century: Semantic Latinism or Etymological Trap?," BHS 59 (1982), 211-18, which were partly provoked by Barbara F. Weissberger's "La elegía de Madonna Fiammetta as a Source for the Siervo libre de Amor," JHP 4 (1979-80), 203-36. She returns to the theme in "Authority Figures in Siervo libre de Amor and Grisel y Mirabella," Revista de Estudios Hispánicos (Puerto Rico), 9 (1982 [1984]: Homenaje a Stephen Gilman), 255-62. Celestinas will recall that Rojas also calls Petrarch an "orador;" Francisco Rico, prologue to Joan Rois de Corella, "Tragedia de Calesa" i altres proses, ed. Marina Gustà, Les Millors Obres de la Literatura Catalana, 50 (Barcelona: Edicions 62 & La Caixa, 1980), p. 18, argues that orador is precisely equivalent to "humanist," but even if we allow the term to embrace classical writers, the writers pillaged by von Eyb seem to spill over that semantic area.

[ Apart from the typescript printed above, Keith's file for this project contained only two small-format pages of jottings. Most of these are crossed out in red (Keith's practice when he incorporated material into his text). Of the few that remain, all but one turn out to be brief summaries of sections of Corfis' article (e.g. "Cel. com. attributes many other Cel. commonplaces to Marg. poet."). But the one exception, "Gilman The Spain says not-- pp. 431-32," merits commentary. Gilman's words are: "The Margarita poetica is nothing more than a compendium of rhetoric followed by an enormous commonplace book which, as far as I can determine, Rojas never bothered to use." He adds in a footnote: "This statement is based on three long days spent checking for commonplaces from La Celestina both in the text and in the copious index. My search was hardly exhaustive, but a complete lack of positive results led to the above conclusion." Gilman's conclusion is examined, and shown to be wrong, by Corfis; but he was not alone in error: in The Petrarchan Sources of "La Celestina." 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. viii, I say that: "My own check of Petrarchan material in von Eyb, made in 1960, supports Gilman." It is clear that we both, sampling the Margarita poetica extensively, chose the wrong samples; moreover, neither of us had the good sense to check Celestina comentada, a task that Corfis was to carry out many years later.]
"Hojas recuperadas...

Un ensayo teatral dio a España, a la mitad del siglo XV, el autor del primer acto en prosa de la comedia intitulada La Celestina, por otro nombre Calixto y Melibea. Dícese en su Prólogo que Juan de Mena es su autor, o más bien Rodrigo de Cota. A los fines del mismo siglo, tomó a su cargo el empeño de acabarla el jurisconsulto Fernando de Rojas, pero lo hizo, de modo que se conoce bien la diferencia de una mano a otra; además de concluir en tragedia lo que empezó en comedia, por cuyo motivo vino a quedar monstruosa y desarreglada, intitulándola trágicomedia. En el primer acto sobresale la elegancia del estilo, la pureza de la lengua y la diestra facilidad del pincel en retratar los caracteres al natural. De este modo, aseguró en él, su autor, la gloria de ser el primer trozo de composición teatral que en España se vio hasta entonces, siendo capaz de competir con las comedias griegas y latinas. La Celestina fue traducida, desde luego, en latín; varias veces en francés, muchas veces en italiano y se imprimió también en Toledo el año de 1538 y en Sevilla en 1539. La edición que yo tengo en dozavo es de 1599, de la oficina Plantiniana, compuesta de veintiocho actos, con los versos de Rojas al principio y al fin de ella que quiso serviesen de clave al lector.