

AUTHORITY FIGURES IN *SIERVO LIBRE DE AMOR* AND *GRISEL Y MIRABELLA*

The problem of fictional authorization—of how best to validate a fictional narration so as to insure the listener's or readers, acceptance—is as old as storytelling itself. In the Middle Ages the problem was exacerbated by the belief that fictions were justifiable only to the extent that they conveyed historical or doctrinal truth. In order to de-emphasize the fictional nature of their narratives, the authors of the romances of chivalry made frequent use of two related devices: the fictitious author and the fabulous provenance. To the modern reader such explanations as Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's (Chapter 99 of the *Sergas de Esplandián*) that he received from Urganda la Desconocida the original Greek version of the *Sergas*, written by the official chronicler and eyewitness, Maestro Elisabat, seem naive at best. However, as Daniel Eisenberg reminds us, in their time they represented a sincere effort on the part of the authors of the chivalric romances to enhance the historicity of their works and consequently their moral and aesthetic status.¹

The authors of the sentimental romances, the romance of chivalry's rival sub-genre, were also acutely aware of the need to authorize their fictions. A major cause for their concern was no doubt the unprecedented first-person point of view from which they chose to narrate their tragic tales of subjection to love. However, their way of mitigating the impact of such unauthorized subjectivity is somewhat more complex than that chosen by the authors of the romances of chivalry. They fashion a unique kind of authority figure, and incorporating him into their works as a full-fledged character. What is interesting about this character is his hybrid nature. He is partly invented, partly appropriated from that indistinct region where history, myth, and literature meet, a region much more extensive in the fifteenth century than later. Authority figures of this sort are not a feature of all sentimental romances, but they do appear often enough to merit study. In this essay I will examine the nature and very different roles of the authority figures in two sentimental romances: *Siervo libre de amor* (c.

¹ Daniel Eisenberg, "The Pseudo-Historicity of the Romances of Chivalry," *QIA*, Nos. 45-46 (1975), pp. 253-59.

1440) and *Grisel y Mirabella* (c. 1495).

The prototype of the authority figure is found—as so much else that defines the sentimental genre—in Juan Rodríguez del Padrón's *Siervo libre de amor*. He is the character Macías, modeled on the historical fourteenth-century Galician poet of the same name. Macías' role in *Siervo* is small but thematically and structurally crucial. He serves as the mediator between the romance's two contrasting texts and their respective protagonists: the autobiographical narration of "El Auctor" and the love story of Ardanlier and Lyessa, the "Estoria de dos amadores."

The two different texts of *Siervo* represent what Northrup Frye has identified as a central structural principle of all romance: the polarization of the action into two worlds. In *The Secular Scripture* he defines the two poles as follows: "one pole ...is an idyllic world where human desires and ideals can find more scope... The other pole is a night world symbolized by human sacrifice, a world which is more an object of moral abhorrence than strictly a tragic one."²

The "caso" narrated by "El Auctor," the story of his love for an "alta senyora," her rejection of him for an infraction of the courtly code, and the subsequent deepening despair that leads him to the brink of suicide, clearly deals with a descent into a dark, morally abhorrent world. It is in fact explicitly identified as such in the introductory allegorical framework, which refers to it as "el tiempo que bien amó y fue desamado; fygurado por el árbol del parayso, plantado en la deciente vía que es la desesperación."³ However, the same introduction tells us that "El Auctor" will finally overcome his despair, repent of his sinful love and despair, thereby becoming the "siervo, libre de amor" announced in the title.

The transformation from slave to freedman is accomplished by means of the second of the romance's two texts, the tale of fulfillment and triumph embedded in "El Auctor's" account of frustration and despair. The "Estoria de dos amadores" conveys its idyllic world of love and loyalty, martyrdom and fame, through a skillful blending of pastoral and chivalric motifs.⁴ Although the exact nature of its relationship to the surrounding narrative is the subject of continuing critical debate, most scholars agree that the love story of Ardanlier and Lyessa has what can be termed a redemptive function in the romance as a whole.⁵ It is the imaginative self-identification of "El

² Northrup Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 91.

³ Juan Rodríguez del Padrón, *Siervo libre de amor*, ed. Antonio Prieto, Clásicos Castalia, 66 (Madrid: Castalia, 1976), p. 66. All subsequent references to this edition of *Siervo* appear as page numbers in the text.

⁴ For an extensive analysis of the narrative technique of *Siervo* as an alternation of diverse narrative "registers," see my "'Habla el Auctor': *L'Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* as a Source for the *Siervo libre de amor*," *JHP*, 4 (1980), 203-36. In that article I also deal briefly with Macías from a different perspective.

⁵ See, e.g., Gregory Andrachuk, "The Function of the 'Estoria de dos amadores' within the *Siervo libre de amor*," *RCEH*, 2 (1977), 27-38; Javier Herrero, "The Allegorical Structure of the *Siervo libre de*

Auctor" with the heroic and loving Ardanlier that makes it possible for him to abandon the "deçiente vía de perdición" and seek out instead the "muy agra y angosta senda" of freedom from love which is the road to spiritual salvation.

What facilitates the therapeutic identification of the romance's two protagonists is the unique, hybrid authority of Macías. On one level Macías is simply another character in the "Estoria." He is introduced towards the story's end, which explains how Ardanlyer and Lyessa acquired the status and fame of martyrs. Essential to the apotheosis of the dead lovers is the enchantment of their palace-tomb. Hundreds of knights attempt to break the spell, but only one is successful: "el buen Macías... por su grand gentileza, lealtat, destreza y grand fortaleza" (104). In recognition of his victory the King of Spain grants Macías the magic palace "con el puerto seguro de Morgadán, llamado Padrón por sola causa del Padrón encantado, principal guarda de las dos sepulturas" (104). Then, in the final sentence of the "Estoria," the transition back to the autobiographical narrative, "El Auctor" states that Macías' extraordinary feat won fame for him "y todos aquellos que del descendieron, de los quales yo siendo el menor, rico del nombre de ser de los buenos, he solo heredado en su lealtat" (106).

The remarkable aspect of the moment of *anagnorisis* just quoted, when "El Auctor" discovers his true identity as heir to Ardanlier and Macías, is that it depends as much on extratextual factors as on intratextual ones. In order to link Ardanlier, Macías, and his own fictional *persona* in a chain of loyal and famous lovers, Padrón relies heavily on his audience's familiarity with the "facts" of the real Macías' life. As is well-known, Macías was already famous in Padrón's time as a "martyr for love" as a result of the popular confusion of his real biography and the fictional autobiography of his lyric *persona*.⁶ In *Siervo* that very process is repeated as the audience conflates the "old" legend of Macías with a "new" one that includes Ardanlier and "El Auctor". The authority of Macías must be imaginatively pieced together from the fictional traits he shares with Ardanlier ("lealtat," "gentileza," "fortaleza") and the historical or pseudo-historical ones he shares with "El Auctor," himself the fictional counterpart of the historical poet Juan Rodríguez del Padrón.⁷ Thus, for example, by making Macías the new lord of Padrón, Juan Rodríguez/"El Auctor" asks the audience to remember that both he and Macías were born in that Galician town. Through the mediation of Macías, then, "El Auctor" is able to inherit the fame of the loyal lover Ardanlier, a fame that has eluded him in his own love

amor," *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 751-64; and Antonio Prieto, Introduction to his ed. of *Siervo* (fully cited in n. 3), pp. 32-55.

⁶ On the life and works of Macías, see Carlos Martínez Barbeito, *Macías el enamorado y Juan Rodríguez del Padrón* (Santiago de Compostela: Editorial de los Bibliófilos Gallegos, 1951).

⁷ Padrón explicitly identifies himself with his narrator-protagonist in the epistolary introduction to *Siervo*, p. 67.

affair. And paradoxically, that inherited fame frees him from his subjection to human love.

Fiction and reality converge in similar fashion in the authority figures Torrellas and Bregayda, central characters in Juan de Flores' *Grisel y Mirabella*. As we shall see, however, their authority serves a destructive rather than a redemptive purpose in the romance.

Grisel y Mirabella has been studied almost exclusively for its ideological content, as a rather bizarre dramatization of the fifteenth century's literary *cause célèbre*, the feminist debate. In this regard most scholars support the pioneering work of Barbara Matulka, who read the romance as a straightforward tragic tale in vindication of women.⁸ Even those who disagree with Matulka's interpretation limit themselves almost exclusively to the romance's content, especially that of the central debate between Torrellas, the defender of men, and Bregayda, the champion of women. Anthony van Beysterveldt, for example, has criticized what he considers the anachronistic assumption of Matulka and others that fifteenth-century defenders of women espoused a twentieth-century feminist philosophy of equality between the sexes. Basing himself on an analysis of the debate, which he views as heavily biased against women, van Beysterveldt argues that *Grisel* actually exemplifies a late medieval resurgence of Christian asceticism intent on destroying the privileged position women held in the code of courtly love.⁹

Recently, however, Patricia Grieve has called into question the traditional approach to Flores' romance. Pointing out the work's many ambiguities of plot, imagery, and characterization and the fact that "for every point presented there is a stated or implied counterpoint" she suggests that they result from Flores' intentional undermining of the standard romance material he sets up as the primary system of *Grisel*.¹⁰ In support of this new interpretation, I will examine briefly the way Flores uses the authority of Torrellas and Bregayda in that undermining process.

Pamela Waley was the first to remark that in both of Flores' romances, *Grimalte y Gradissa* as well as *Grisel y Mirabella*, the narrative interest is equally divided between two strikingly different amorous couples.¹¹ This

⁸ "Juan de Flores approached the feminist debate in a severe and polemical temper. To him it was no society game nor a vain display of erudition; it was a plea against an unjustifiable oppression, a lasting injustice which frequently crushed the lives of even the most admirable and loveable among women." Barbara Matulka, *The Novels of Juan de Flores and their European Diffusion* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1931), p. 45. Dinko Cvitanovic also finds in *Grisel* a "nuevo feminismo" (*La novela sentimental española* [Madrid: Prensa española, 1973], p. 207).

⁹ Antony van Beysterveldt, "Revisión de los debates feministas del siglo XV y las novelas de Juan de Flores," *Hispania*, 64 (1981), 1-13.

¹⁰ Patricia Grieve, "Nunc sit quid scio Amor: Love as Destroyer in *Grisel y Mirabella* and *La Celestina*," delivered at a program of the Division of Spanish Medieval Language and Literature at the 1981 Modern Language Association Convention. I am grateful to Prof. Grieve for her helpful comments on this paper.

¹¹ In the Introduction to her edition of *Grimalte y Gradissa* (London: Tamesis, 1971), p. xli. Also useful is her essay "Love and Honour in the *novelas sentimentales* of Diego de San Pedro and Juan de Flores," *BHS*, 43 (1966), 253-75.

bipartite structure reflects the same polarized action observable in *Siervo*. The eponymous couple of *Grisel y Mirabella* are highly idealized, noble lovers whose loyalty is unswerving even in the face of death. They are readily identifiable with Ardanlier and Lyessa and their idyllic world. But the other, dark world, represented in *Siervo* by "El Auctor" alone—his beloved being no more than a shadowy presence—is now just as extensively portrayed in the strange relationship of Torrellas and Breçayda, the authority figures —cum— lovers. The two contrasting love stories are tightly interwoven by means of the central debate on whether men or women are more guilty of inciting the opposite sex to love; the outcome of the debate determines the tragic fate of Grisel and Mirabella and their fate in turn governs the resolution of the love affair of Torrellas and Breçayda.

The perverse love story of Torrellas and Breçayda is entirely Flores' invention, but their status as authority figures is not. Like Macías, they both enter Flores' text trailing well-established extra-textual reputations. Torrellas is remarkably like Macías in that he is also the fictionalization of a historical poet, the Catalan Pere Torrellas who may well have been Flores' contemporary. But whereas Macías was celebrated for his service to women, Torrellas had become famous for the profound misogynism expressed in his vitriolic "Coplas de maldezir de mujer" (c. 1458). The "Maldezir" was immensely popular; if judged by the number of responses it elicited from supporters and detractors alike it easily ranks as one of the fifteenth century's most influential poems.¹²

Breçayda, on the other hand, is an autonomous character, the heroine of a minor episode in the vast corpus of the Troy legends. The story of her love for and betrayal of Troilus so fascinated medieval audiences that, taken out of context, it underwent scores of reworkings.¹³ By the time Chaucer eloquently retold her story in *Troilus and Cryseide* she had already gained renown as the quintessential fickle female, inconstant in thought and deed.¹⁴ For his characterization Flores seems also to have drawn on the Spanish adaptations of the Breçayda story, particularly on the letter included by Juan Rodríguez del Padrón in the *Bursario*, in which Breçayda defends herself against Troilus' charges of infidelity. More than her innocence, the letter underscores her eloquence and wit, traits that Flores no doubt found especially apposite for his conception of the heroine as the "champion of women."¹⁵

One might well wonder why Flores selects as paladins of the male and

¹² The standard work on the life and works of Torrellas is Pedro Bach y Rita, *The Works of Pere Toroella* (New York: Hispanic Institute, 1930). For additional information, see Matulka, pp. 95-137.

¹³ On the evolution of the Breçayda legend in Spain, see Matulka, pp. 88-94.

¹⁴ "Ne me ne list this sely woman chyde
Further than the story will devyse.
Her name, alas, is published so wyde,
That for her guilt it ought suffyse." (*Troilus and Cryseide*, Book V, stanza 157)

¹⁵ Matulka, pp. 91-92.

female sexes a virulent misogynist and a woman of easy virtue. The answer, I think, is that their patent unsuitability for such roles is intentional, that as presented by Flores their authority is fundamentally and ironically negative. He places these mock-authority figures in the midst of the love story of Grisel and Mirabella so as to undermine its high seriousness and idealism. As was the case with Macías, the authority of Torrella and Breçayda derives to a great extent from the author's and reader's shared knowledge of their "history," but that knowledge now serves to place in doubt their moral status and thus their credibility.

Both the method and the content of the debate between Torrellas and Breçayda subtly reinforce the dubiousness of their "real" credentials. Waley has outlined several ways in which their debate departs from convention, including the absence of moral earnestness, pious claims, and references to authority and exempla; Torrellas, continual shifts away from the facts and into the realm of imponderables; and his exaggerated conceitedness and skepticism.¹⁶ Of particular interest as an illustration of the way Flores adapts Padrón's technique of mingling fact and fiction in his authority figures are the repeated references Torrellas makes to the "Maldezir."¹⁷ Similarly, many of the arguments Breçayda marshals in defense of her sex parallel those set forth by the real Torrellas in his prose recantation, "Razonamiento en deffensión de las donas," published some years after the "Maldezir."¹⁸ Most damaging of all, perhaps, given its immediate structural juxtaposition with Grisel and Mirabella's "combats of generosity," is the debate's endorsement of self-interest. A good example is Breçayda's reaction when the judges render their decision in favor of Torrellas, thereby condemning Mirabella to death. Even as she accuses them of conflict of interest, being "juezes y partes y avocados del mismo pleyto," she excuses their bias on the grounds that "cada uno es más obligado asi mismo que a othro" (356). The declaration could well stand as the motto of the entire debate.

If the authority of the debaters is undermined by the debate, it is completely demolished by the outrageous reversal that takes place in the final pages of the romance. Amanzingly, Torrellas the woman-hater falls in love with Breçayda and declares himself her courtly "servidor," thus unwittingly falling victim to the Queen's desire to avenge her daughter Mirabella's death. The spectacular ritual murder of Torrellas is to my mind best understood as an ironic *coup de grace* to both his and Breçayda's already

¹⁶ Waley, "Love and Honour," 265-67, and "Cárcel de amor and Grisel y Mirabella: A Question of Priority," *BHS*, 50 (1973), 348-52.

¹⁷ E.g., "como ya otras vezes dixé en alguna obra mía: soys lobas es scojer. Esto lo causa el encendido desseo, que ninguna diformidad os es fea..." (*Grisel y Mirabella*, ed. Barbara Matulka [fully cited in n. 8], p. 354). In citing from this edition of *Grisel* I have modernized the punctuation and added written accents; future references appear as page numbers in the text.

¹⁸ Waley, "Priority," 352.

precarious authority. How else are we to interpret the fact that Torrellas now explicitly recants the mysonigism so aggressively maintained both by his fictional self in the debate and by his real counterpart in the "Maldezir":

¡O maldita la hora en que tomé dezir mal de aquellas que los virtuosos en las lohar se trabaian... y quando alguno quiere contra las damas mal dezir con malicias del perverso Torrellas se favorece. Y ahun que digan lo que yo porventura no dixé, mi fama me haze digno que se atribuyan amí todas palabras contra mujeres danyosas, y esto porque delos yerros agenos y míos haga ahora penitencia. (365)

Also, predictably, in his pursuit of Breçayda, Torrellas is guilty of precisely the things his opponent accused men of doing in order to force women to submit, such as pretending to be dying of love and begging for the beloved's pity. As for Breçayda, she can rightly be accused of deceitfulness and cruelty, two of the female vices most vigorously attacked by Torrellas in the debate, since she invites Torrellas' advances only so that "con el enganyo recebiesse dellas la muerte" (365).

Matulka maintains that in portraying Torrellas' change of heart Flores is simply adhering to the historical fact, i.e., the previously mentioned prose palinode to the "Maldezir."¹⁹ The insistent intermingling of history and fantasy that characterizes the authority figures of the two romances discussed herein certainly lends support to her theory. I would qualify it however with Charles Aubrun's evaluation of the grotesque end of Torrellas the woman-hater: "Tout porte a croire que Juan de Flores a voulu monter une bonne farce a l'ami Torrellas."²⁰

Whether or not the ending of *Grisel* is an elaborate inside joke, or, as Grieve suggests, a grotesque literalization of Torrellas' hypocritical wish "to die for love," it is difficult to accept the more traditional view of it as a clear pronouncement for the women and a condemnation of Torrellas.²¹ It seems rather that murderer and victim are equally debased by this final elaborate ritual, just as Grisel and Mirabella are exalted equally by their spontaneous acts of self-sacrifice. As Breçayda and her female friends tear Torrellas' skin from his body with their teeth and nails they are reduced to the level of the royal lions that devoured Mirabella, "los quales más antes miraron a su fambre que a la realeza de Mirabella, a quien ninguna mesura cataron; y muy presto fue dellos spedaçada y delas delicadas carnes cada uno contentó el apetito" (363). In the spectacular ending to *Grisel*, the two

¹⁹ Matulka, p. 351.

²⁰ Introduction to his edition of the *Chansonnier d'Herberay des Essarts* (Bordeaux: Féret, 1951), p. xlix.

²¹ Grieve, paper cited in n. 10. Among those who take the ending of *Grisel* as a serious indictment of Torrellas is Alan D. Deyermond, *A Literary History of Spain: The Middle Ages* (London: Ernest Benn and New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), p. 166.

relationships it contains are revealed as mirror-images of each other, two fictional poles revolving around the ironic authority of the debate.

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Both the method and the content of the debate between Torrellas and Gristel and Mirabella so as to undermine the authority of the male. He places these mock-authority figures in the position of authority to... Also, predictably, in his position of authority, Torrellas is guilty of precisely the things his opponent accused him of doing in order to force women to submit, such as pretending to be dying of love and begging for the beloved's pity. As for Mirabella, she can rightly be accused of deceptions and trickery, two of the female vices most vigorously attacked by Torrellas in the debate. Since she invites Torrellas' advances only so that, can Mirabella's trickery be... Mirabella maintains that in portraying Torrellas' change of heart she is simply adhering to the traditional fact, i.e., the previously mentioned plot pattern of the "Maiden." The instance of Mirabella's trickery and fantasy that characterizes the authority figure of the two heroines... however with Charles Lubin's evaluation of the grand end of Torrellas' like the woman-hater: "Ioul porte a croie que Jean de France n'avoit honorez le boune fait a I'ant Torrellas." Whether or not the ending of Gristel is an elaborate inside joke, or, as Gristel suggests, a grotesque idealization of Torrellas' hypocritical wish to die for love, it is difficult to accept the more traditional view of it as a clear pronouncement for the woman and a condemnation of Torrellas. It seems rather that murder and victim are equally debased by this final elaborate ritual, just as Gristel and Mirabella are exalted equally by their spontaneous acts of self-sacrifice. As Torrellas and her female friends tear Torrellas' skin from his body with their teeth and nails they are reduced to the level of the loyal lions that devoured Mirabella's "fox cubs that snare" their on a seal island due to the level of Mirabella's "a puer n'ingrante n'est pas un homme" and Torrellas' "de la fidelidad y de la caridad, y muy presto me d'ellos separdras y de la fidelidad y de la caridad" (307). In the spectacular ending to Gristel, the two

¹⁹ Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.
²⁰ Mirabella, p. 251.
²¹ Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.
²² Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.
²³ Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.
²⁴ Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.
²⁵ Waley, "Love and Honour," 73-75; and "Gristel and Mirabella," 194.