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Walker, Robert M. *Tradition and Technique in "El Libro del Cavallero Zifar."* London, Tamesis, 1975. xvi + 252 pp. £9.50.

According to the author, this book is the first full-scale literary study of the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar*. Obviously some time in press, into its writing have gone several years of preparation, a number of quantitative studies, and some intelligent literary analysis coupled with a good bit of speculation. Walker is quite consciously trying to defend and praise the *Zifar*, which he feels to have been slighted by twentieth-century critics.

The first section discusses "Semitic Elements in the *Zifar*," and in it Walker tries to establish that the work comes from an Arabic background, or even from a missing Arabic original. Some of the evidence is persuasive: the proper names, for example, are unquestionably of Semitic inspiration. The stylistic evidence Walker uses to support his thesis is, in a word, inconclusive. The parallels between Arabic literary style and that of the *Zifar* are there, but Walker does not consider whether the same stylistic elements could not be found in the Bible, or in works with no possible Semitic inspiration, nor whether there are any alternative sources for the stylistic elements. The beginning of sentences with a conjunction, to take an obvious example, is a stylistic feature which was nearly universal in the Middle Ages and does not necessarily indicate an Arabic origin for the *Zifar*.

The most satisfying part of *Tradition and Technique* is the central

part, in which Walker defends the unit of *Zifar*. Drawing on previous discussions by Ruiz de Conde and Scholberg, in the first of the two chapters devoted to the *Zifar*'s unity Walker discusses the parallel structure, common themes, and structural links which join the three books of adventures of the *Zifar*. In the second chapter, he directs the reader's attention to the "Castigos del rey de Mentón," showing how the moral principles are not blindly taken from the *Flores de filosofía*, but instead are carefully selected to summarize the moral lessons of the preceding books I and II, and to outline those of the following Book IV.

In the final section of the study Walker returns to the question of the *Zifar*'s style. Basing himself on a discussion by Ruth Crosby of stylistic features indicating oral delivery in medieval English poetry (address to the audience, excessive repetitions, formulas), Walker finds the same features in the *Zifar*, and concludes that the book was intended for oral or semi-private presentation rather than private reading. Surprisingly, using some unconvincing parallels between the descriptions of battle scenes in the *Zifar* and formulas used to the same effect in the *Cid*, he equates the use of oral devices with a debt to the Castilian epic poets. It is true, as Walker points out, that the author of the *Zifar* had no tradition of vernacular fiction to draw upon, but whether he would not have drawn on the vast repertory of medieval Latin narrations is a question Walker does not examine. In the final, primarily descriptive chapter, Walker examines and classifies the numerous synonymous pairs found in the *Zifar*. He sees three possible sources for the abundant and inventive use of this stylistic device: medieval literary theorist[s], Arabic wisdom literature, and perhaps a contact with earlier vernacular literature in Castilian.

This reviewer has a certain sympathy for the problems Walker

faced in trying to study the *Zifar*'s sources. Yet I cannot avoid a certain confusion at the abundance of possible sources which Walker points to, and his repeated failure to convince one that these possible sources were in fact *the* sources. Not even a man of the learning of Alfonso el Sabio would have been acquainted well enough to be influenced by all the works Walker points toÑ the humble oral epic, the more learned vernacular works such as the *Libro de Alexandre*, the Latin *Artes Poeticae*, Arabic wisdom literature, the *Koran*, and French romances. Which one or ones of these were really used by the author of the *Zifar*? Just what was the nature and extent of the Arabic inspiration? These questions remain as challenges to future students of the *Zifar*.

Daniel Eisenberg

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