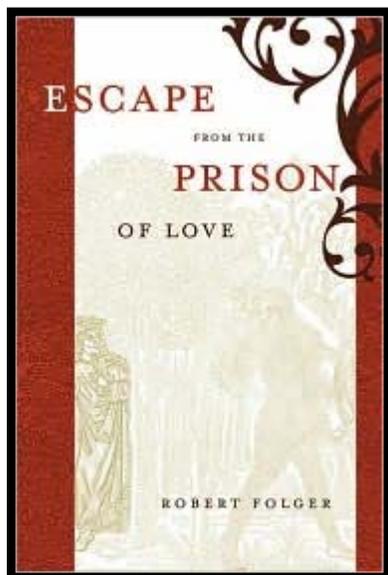


Robert Folger. *Escape From the Prison of Love: Caloric Identities and Writing Subjects in Fifteenth-Century Spain*. North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 292. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 190 págs. ISBN: 978-0-8078-9296-1.

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Robert Folger's book is a seminal piece and groundbreaking study on the analysis of subjectivity in the Early (Spanish) Modern period. His work also has a rare depth and complexity that brings together analyses on a wealth of subjects and literary works. Folger's research focuses on the transition from medieval modes and notions of selfhood to the forms of subjectivity that would characterize Golden Age literature. In the first chapter, Folger provides an overview of premodern models of subjectivity and reviews in depth pertinent scholarship, establishing points of convergence with the positions of post-structuralist theory on subjectivity. A particular focus for the author is faculty psychology (natural philosophy's model of psychosomatic mental abilities). Folger argues that passionate love (*amor hereos*) provided a mode of identification, that is, a form of sudden self-transformation in contrast with the medieval idea of the formation of a mental *habitus* through the gradual assimilation of perceived images ("The premodern subject was a 'dispersed', 'weak' subject constituted by a fold [...] in the choric phantasmatic field. [...] I argue that courtly love, seen in relation to pathological passionate love [...] is a mode of subject constitution reserved for a courtly elite," 15). Glossing on Thomas Laqueur's "one sex-model" –the idea that man and woman are anatomically the same, but differ in their actual existence because of differing degrees of vital heat (*pneuma*)– he shows that passionate love altered "caloric identities," with serious implications for the lovers' gender status.

The study uses Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor* and the woodcut of the 1493 Rosenbach printing with the encounter between the narrator and the savage man and his prisoner, Leriano, to illustrate the effects of self-fashioning through love. It shows that Juan de Flores, in his sentimental romances *Grimalte y Gradissa* and *Grisel y Mirabella*, teased out and graphically displayed the devastating consequences that passionate love had for the courtly male subject. In the concluding portion of this first part, the author turns to Juan Huarte de San Juan's *Examen de ingenios*, written nearly a century later. The rationale of this digression is to show how scientific discourse

grappled with the problems of passionate love and male self-hood, without being able to provide a solution.

Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de Amor* again takes center-stage in the second part, although other medieval texts are used to substantiate the argument (while the author's analysis of Flores's novellas shows how literary texts reflected (on) subjectivity and gender, "my reading of *Cárcel* calls attention to the fact that texts were (or could be) instrumental in shaping subjectivity", 16). The thesis is that San Pedro, unlike Flores, not only exposed the problems of courtly self-fashioning but explored solutions. Associating San Pedro's masterpiece with the media change in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the transition from the performative mode of literature and subject constitution to the practice of silent and solitary reading, Folger argues how *Cárcel de amor* provided a hitherto unknown model for the creation of a writerly self and the possibility of identification between the reader and the literary characters. Hence *Cárcel de amor* is situated at the threshold to the new form of literature and a new notion of what it meant to be a writer and a reader in the Spanish Golden Age. In his conclusion, the author suggests parallels between the emergence of authorship and self-fashioning in *Cárcel de amor* and the first picaresque novel, *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

*Escape from the Prison of Love* is a tour de force of scholarship on medieval and Early modern selfhood from many provinces of medievalism. It is one of the merits of this book to make this wealth of scholarship accessible to Hispanomedievalists and to develop an original model of premodern subjectivity. The author brings this dense theoretical apparatus to bear on Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor*, and, to a lesser degree, on Flores's romances. It's a convincing approach, proffering incisive new readings of these canonic texts. However, the sections on Huarte de San Juan and the *Lazarillo*, in particular, could be thought as 'weaking' the internal coherence of his book. Although they provide suggestive interpretations of these texts (we refer the reader to Folger's recent *Picaresque and Bureaucracy: Lazarillo de Tormes*, Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2009, where Folger develops further some of the ideas contained in *Escape from the Prison of Love*), it could have made more sense to replace them with analyses of the works of Alfonso Fernández de Madrigal, El Tostado, and other 15<sup>th</sup>-century medical texts. Nonetheless, Folger himself answers this *caveat* by indicating that he is convinced that *Lazarillo* is "the text best suited to highlight the transcendence of *Cárcel de amor* and San Pedro's monumental status in the history of Castilian letters" (17):

I hold [...] that Lázaro, the author-*persona*, realizes the potential for 'no-longer-medieval literature' that San Pedro probed in *Cárcel* with his El Auctor, and that this realization is related to the imbrication of literary discourse, media change, and the emerging state and its institutions in Early Modern Spain. (17)

*Cárcel de Amor* explored new ways of subjectification in literature and the reason is that it is a work “indexical of a profound change in governance” (155). Through the condemnation of Leriano to his never-ending prison of Love and through the Auctor’s escape from it, fashioning himself as an author, “*Cárcel* foreshadows the possibility of writing [...] the autobiography of an infamous subject [*Lazarillo*] [...] in which passionate love is totally absent and courtly, amorous service merely a matter of ridicule” (163).

Without any doubt, in quality, depth, insight, and profundity Folger’s analysis represents a splendid study of premodern subjectivity in relation to contemporary discourses on selfhood. It sheds new light on Laqueur’s influential “one-sex model” and provides novel perspectives on the immediate prehistory and the matrix of Spanish Golden Age literature.