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Louise Fothergill-Payne
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Seneca and *Celestina*

This book examines the reason and intent behind the many Senecan and pseudo-Senecan quotations in Fernando de Rojas' masterpiece *Celestina* (1499), which enjoyed enormous popularity in sixteenth-century Europe.

The author considers the importance attached to Senecan thought in the oral, scholarly and literary traditions of fifteenth-century Spain, and demonstrates how readers' tastes and sensibilities were shaped by it. The main themes of *Celestina*, such as self-seeking friendship and love, pleasure and sorrow, gifts and riches, greed, suicide and death, are shown to be rooted in this intellectual background. The Senecan tradition, albeit treated in a satirical vein, is also seen as underlying the later additions and interpolations to the text, with a shift towards Seneca's tragedies in response to changes in fashion; Professor Fothergill-Payne reveals that even the Petrarchan quotations in *Celestina* have Senecan sources.

Seneca and 'Celestina' thus offers an entirely new perspective on the literary and intellectual sources that shaped this famous book.

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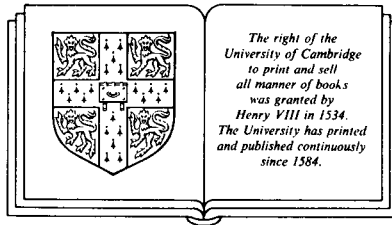


Seneca, the *amicus principis*. Woodcut frontispiece of the first edition of *Las epístolas de Séneca* (Zaragoza, 1496). (Reproduced by permission of the *Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid*.)

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LOUISE FOTHERGILL-PAYNE



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To Peter,
my best friend and husband,
'nullius boni sine socio iucunda possessio est'
Seneca, Epistula 6, 4

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Illustrations

Seneca the *amicus principis*. Woodcut frontispiece of the first edition of *Las epístolas de Séneca* (Zaragoza, 1496). *frontispiece*

- | | | |
|---|---|----------------|
| 1 | Queen Isabella owned a manuscript of <i>Las epístolas de Séneca</i> shown here with her own commentary alongside the marginal glosses of the translator. (Escorial MS S-II-9.) | <i>page</i> 19 |
| 2 | A page from Pero Díaz de Toledo's <i>Proverbios de Séneca</i> (Zaragoza, 1491), showing how the translator's glosses dominate the text. | 20 |
| 3 | Title-page of BN, INC. 661, of <i>Los cinco libros de Séneca</i> (Seville, 1491), clearly a very heavily used copy of the book. | 21 |
| 4 | A page from Cartagena's translation of Luca Mannelli's <i>Tabulatio et Expositio Senecae</i> , printed as Book 5 of <i>Los cinco libros de Séneca</i> (Seville, 1491). Note how printers copied the manuscript lay-out of gloss and text. | 22 |
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Preface

The very suggestion that Seneca might have been the main source for the composition of *Celestina* generally meets with disbelief if not outright rejection. The reasons usually put forward against this argument are that Seneca is such a stern moralist, cold and unsympathetic to human plight, while *Celestina* is cherished as a book full of life, humour and deeply human insights.

This study, therefore, faces the double task of convincing the disbeliever that in the fifteenth century Seneca was considered to be the opposite of all the negative things he represents to many today, and that *Celestina* is squarely rooted in a fifteenth-century Senecan tradition. In both the medieval and the modern context, then, we are faced with a problem of transmission.

Transmission, then as now, was as much a question of oral communication expressed by a *vox populi* or *vox auctoritatis*, as of written testimony in the form of texts, their dissemination, translation and the literary criticism that concerns itself with them. The main reason for the ups and downs in Seneca's reception is that his words have always been more cited than read and that his message is so applicable to contemporary needs and expectations in all ages. In *Celestina* all these various aspects of Seneca's reception and transmission come together. Chapter 1 therefore traces how the medieval Senecan tradition was a curious mixture of myth, hearsay and second-hand sources, all nurtured in Spain by heavily glossed translations. These vernacular versions are anything but a true reflection of the 'real' Seneca; in fact they mainly excerpt semi- and pseudo-Senecan works.

In chapter 2 I study how early attempts at literary criticism in the form of introductions, prologues and notes to the translations reflect and define a fifteenth-century intellectual frame of reference into which the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* fits so neatly.

It is generally accepted that *Celestina* is not the work of a single

author; therefore we should not consider the development of its intent as if it were. With this in mind, I have divided this study into three different parts: the first act, the 16-act *Comedia* and the 21-act *Tragicomedia*.

The Senecan influences in Act 1 have already been well documented. As early as the mid-sixteenth century, an anonymous commentator was alive to various textual borrowings from the *Epistulae* and *De Beneficiis*, which were picked up by Castro Guisasaola, by Heller and Grismer, and by Blüher. However, one should not content oneself solely with pinpointing sources but should inquire into the reason and the intent of such quotations. This is what I attempt to do in chapter 3, through the examination of the first author's skill in fitting the 'sentencias dos mil' into the general framework of his 'dulce ficción'.

Fernando de Rojas, whom I have accepted as being the author of the 16-act *Comedia*, then develops the subtext of the first author's *sententiae* into a full-scale plot, continuing the first author's gentle mockery of the new reader's superficial knowledge of Seneca's *De Vita Beata* and *De Beneficiis*. His immediate source is that used by the first author, Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, to which Rojas adds Seneca's *De Ira* as an important factor in the development of the story. Chapter 4 thus follows the continued Senecan presence in *Celestina*, a presence reinforced by a host of quotations from the pseudo-Senecan *Proverbios* and other popular words of wisdom.

And then there is Petrarch, that other important source of *Celestina*, so expertly studied by Alan Deyermond. The Petrarchan quotations reflect the same Senecan tradition as informs the moral context of *Celestina*, simply because many stem from *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, a book modelled on the pseudo-Senecan *De Remediis Fortuitorum*. The other great storehouse of quotations is Petrarch's Index, which, as I show in chapter 5, served Rojas as a rich source for pedantic name-dropping, metaphors and other contrived poetics.

Finally, in chapter 6, taking the *sententiae* as a point of departure, I analyse the interpolations and added Acts which transformed the 16-act *Comedia* into a 21-act *Tragicomedia*. And again we detect the same Senecan tradition as underlies the previous acts, but with one major shift. While the *Comedia* was inspired by Seneca's prose work, the *Tragicomedia* now shows a much greater debt to Seneca's tragedies – apparently in answer to readers' changing tastes and sensibilities.

In choosing the title *Seneca and Celestina*, I wanted to give equal prominence to the Roman philosopher and to the book that fictionalizes his message. By abbreviating the title of this book to *Celestina* I pay tribute to Keith Whinnom who first suggested we drop the article. In a study which basically deals with translations, quotations could not be translated into English without doing the text an injustice. I also trust that readers with an interest in *Celestina* are sufficiently conversant with Spanish to appreciate the original language. Finally, it is my sincere hope that modern students may discover Seneca's sound advice and committed concern for humankind in much the same way as the fifteenth-century 'new readers' did.

The longest book Seneca wrote on any single topic is *De Beneficiis*. In it he analyses how free and disinterested gifts form the basis of our society. This is particularly true in a community of scholars who benefit most from each others' precious gifts of wisdom. I want here to express my deep gratitude to all those who have given so freely of their time and knowledge in advising, helping and encouraging me to study the Senecan connection further. Some colleagues may not even remember a casual reference in conversation or a subtle pointer to untapped information, but each of them has contributed immensely to the completion of this book. My greatest debt, however, is to Nick Round, Alan Deyermund and Dorothy Severin, who each have taken the time and trouble to read parts of this book in draft and, by doing so, have opened up new perspectives and prevented major disasters. Any error of judgement, therefore, is entirely mine. A special word of thanks is also due to Charles Faulhaber, who trusted me with his entire card-index, and Joseph Snow, who, as friend and editor of *Celestinesca*, created a bond between us all. I am also grateful to Lisa Storozynsky, whose assistance extended beyond the call of duty because of that same disinterested commitment to research.

The year I spent working in Oxford was made both more profitable and congenial by the welcome extended to me by the Sub-Faculty of Spanish and Portuguese and the Principal and Fellows of Linacre College. My special thanks are due to Ian Michael, Tom Earle and Leighton Reynolds. As always in the past, I was immeasurably assisted by the ever-patient and resourceful staff of the Taylor Institution Library.

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P R E F A C E

the award of a generous Release Time Stipend and other research support allowed me the leisure to work in the great libraries of Europe unshackled from the cares of office.

And then there is my family, who through the years have Stoically accepted the Senecan presence in their life, and especially my husband, who continuously processed my words and thoughts in more than the technical sense of the word. Without his unfailing belief and his daily encouragements this book simply would never have become a reality.

Abbreviations

Anth.	<i>Las epístolas de Séneca</i> (see p. 152, (a) II)
BN	Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid
CL	<i>Los cinco libros de Séneca</i> (see p. 152, (a) II)
D.	Deyermond, <i>The Petrarchan Sources of 'La Celestina'</i>
<i>De Ben.</i>	<i>De Beneficiis</i>
<i>De Brev.</i>	<i>De Breuitate Vitae</i>
<i>De Prov.</i>	<i>De Providentia Dei</i>
<i>De Tranq.</i>	<i>De Tranquillitate Animi</i>
DVB	<i>De Vita Beata</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae Morales</i>
<i>Helv.</i>	<i>De Consolatione ad Helviam</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>De Consolatione ad Marciam</i>
M.	Marciales (ed.), <i>Celestina. Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea</i>
NQ	<i>De Naturalibus Quaestionibus</i>
<i>Poly.</i>	<i>De Consolatione ad Polybium</i>
R.	Riss (ed.), <i>Los proverbios de Séneca</i> (see p. 152, (a) II)
S.	Severin (ed.), <i>La Celestina</i>