Tragicomedy and Novelistic Discourse in *Celestina*

The late fifteenth-century Spanish masterpiece *Celestina* is one of the world’s most neglected classics. In this important study one of the most recent editors of the text, Dorothy Sherman Severin, investigates how Fernando de Rojas’ work in dialogue, which parodies earlier genres, is a precursor of the modern novel.

In *Celestina*, the hero Calisto parodies the courtly lover, the heroine Melibea lives through classical examples and popular song, Calisto’s servants Sempronio and Parmeno parody students’ knowledge, the bawd and go-between Celestina deals a blow to the world of wisdom literature, and Melibea’s father Pleberio gives his own gloss on the lament. There is also a fatal clash between two literary worlds, that of the self-styled courtly lover (the fool) and the prototype picaresque world of the Spanish Bawd and her mentors (the rogues). The voices of *Celestina* are parodic, satiric, ironic and occasionally tragic, and it is in their discourse that the dialogic world of the modern novel is born.

In order to make this book accessible to a wider English-speaking readership, quotations from the text are accompanied by English translations, mainly from the seventeenth-century English version by James Mabbe.
Celestina knocks on Melibea's door while Melibea and Lucrecia are in the garden awaiting the arrival of Calisto and his servants; Calisto and Elicia chat with Sempronio and Pármeno in the foreground.
Tragicomedy and Novelistic Discourse in *Celestina*

DOROTHY SHERMAN SEVERIN

*University of Liverpool*
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction: <em>Celestina</em> and novelistic discourse</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The prefatory material: the author's ambivalent intentions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Genre and the parody of courtly love</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 From parody to satire: clerical and estates satire</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Verbal humour and the legacy of stagecraft</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The rhetorical shift from comedy to tragedy: ironic foreshadowing and premonitions of death</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Is Melibea a tragic figure?</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Pleberio's lament, <em>Cárcel de Amor</em>, and the <em>Corbacho</em></td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Conclusion: Rojas' ambivalence towards literature</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrations

Frontispiece from Valencia 1514 – Celestina knocks on Melibea’s door while Melibea and Lucrecia are in the garden awaiting the arrival of Calisto and his servants; Calisto and Elicia chat with Sempronio and Pármeno in the background.  

Act i – Calisto and Melibea’s first encounter in her garden. Calisto’s falcon is perched in a tree (Burgos 1499).  

Act i – Pármeno opens the door to let Sempronio and Celestina into Calisto’s house (Burgos 1499).  

Act iv – Celestina makes her first visit to Melibea’s house; Alisa is called away unexpectedly to visit a sick relative (Burgos 1499).  

Act vi – Celestina leaves Calisto’s house with her bag of gold (Burgos 1499).  

Act xii – Pármeno and Sempronio kill Celestina and then throw themselves from the window as justice approaches (Valencia 1514); their throats are cut by the executioner as the alguazil and his men look on (Valencia 1514).  

Act xiii – Calisto sleeps while Sosia tells Tristán the news of the deaths of Pármeno, Sempronio and Celestina (Burgos 1499).  

Act xix – Calisto scales Melibea’s wall with Tristán and Sosia in attendance; he falls to his death (Valencia 1514).  

Act xx – Melibea hurlt herself from the tower while Pleberio and Alisa look on (Valencia 1514).
Preface

If some of the chapters of this monograph look strangely familiar, it is because, during a long gestation period, they have appeared, usually in a different form, or have been delivered orally and occasionally published in the actas of a learned conference. Textual antecedents and first drafts of some of the chapters in this book can be found in the bibliography. It was my original intention to concentrate on humour in Celestina, but the topic took some unexpected turns, and the relationship of Celestina with its sources – what we now, unfortunately, call intertextuality – became a prime consideration, along with the question of genre in its most recent manifestation as ‘novelistic discourse’.

I am indebted to my former Westfield colleague and dear friend Alan Deyermond, who has seen (or heard) much of this material and commented on it. My mentor Stephen Gilman, who disagreed with my conclusions about genre and Celestina but gamely agreed to look at them and discuss them with me, died before this little book went to press, and I would like it to dedicate to his memory. Without his teaching and influence I would never have come to Celestina studies.

Dorothy Sherman Severin
Liverpool
Abbreviations

*BHS*  *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*

*Ce.*  *Celestinesca*

*Clas. Cast.*  *Clásicos Castellanos*

*CSIC*  *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas*

*CUP*  *Cambridge University Press*

*EUDEBA*  *Editorial Universitario de Buenos Aires*

*HR*  *Hispanic Review*

*KRQ*  *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*

*LCL*  *Loeb Classical Library*

*Neophil.*  *Neophilologus*

*NRFH*  *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*

*OUP*  *Oxford University Press*

*PSA*  *Papeles de Son Armadans*

*R*  *Romanische Forschungen*

*RFE*  *Revista de Filología Española*

*RoN*  *Romance Notes*

*RP*  *Romance Philology*

*TWAS*  *Twayne's World Authors Series*

*UNCSRLL*  *University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures*
Calisto and Melibea's first encounter in the garden. Calisto's falcon is perched in a tree.