

# CELESTINESCA

## DEAN WILLIAM MCPHEETERS [1917-1987]: TWO MEMOIRS

### 1. THE SCHOLAR

Joseph T. Snow  
University of Georgia

"Mac" as Dean William McPheeters was known to many, was a mid-western boy (Milton, Iowa, January 6, 1917) raised in Illinois farm country a stone's throw from Champaign-Urbana, where he would later go to seek a career in journalism. He attended school in the years immediately following the Great Depression for, even though those were indeed hard times, his family values always stressed education. He fought to finish, and did, with the active support of his family. The schooling of 1936-1940 was, in fact, to lead to a B.S. in Journalism, an avocation he had developed even in high school, but his genuine fondness for languages, at first a secondary pursuit, was eventually to prevail. A stint in Spanish at the Universidad de México was part of the impetus, as was a growing fondness for things French, but what is certain is that when it came time to plan for further study, McPheeters chose the University of Florida at Gainesville, and Spanish and Education, as a career focus. It was here he read for the first time the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.

He finished the M.A. but was not to utilize his secondary teaching certificate, as the breakout of war was to affect the lives of many in the mid-forties. He had, by then, added to his languages by picking up Portuguese (which he once taught at the University of North Carolina) and his knowledge of languages caused him to be assigned to the Army Signal Corps, where his skills were put to work in decoding. More language work followed his discharge. The academic year 1945-46 saw Mac enrolled at the Sorbonne, building on an old love of France. And here, in France, he was to witness a revival of Paul Achard's production of *La Célestine*. While the native audience seemed to revel in its bawdy, something about the production revived old memories of the deeper tragedies that his first reading of the work (back in Gainesville) impressed upon him. These memories stayed with him.

Back in the States, he went to work at Louisiana State University and wound up falling in love with and marrying the departmental secretary, his beloved life's companion after that, Anna Bess. This union was blessed with two daughters, Leslie and Linda, who

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were the light of their eyes, as many generations of students and friends well know. The happy couple went off to New York in 1949, where Mac whipped through a Columbia Ph.D. in an amazing three years. Mac always spoke fondly of his mentors there, Federico de Onís, Angel del Río, Tomás Navarro Tomás... These were some of the people who pointed out to him the value of pre-Renaissance Spanish studies. For a time he was engaged in following up the question of the involvement of the "corrector," Alonso de Proaza, in the writing of *Celestina*. But a chance to work with the famed bibliophile and bookdealer, Hans P. Kraus, appealed to him and he picked up a knowledge of early printed books that was to enrich many of his later publications. But it was not only Kraus that gave him hands-on appreciation of early printed books; he was also an avid visitor of the collections of the Hispanic Society of America. Here he was to come to know, and be befriended by, Clara Louisa Penney and Homero Seris. His *Celestina* interests were now intensified by long and fruitful conversations with these two, and he subsequently returned with great fervor to his studies on Proaza and made it his dissertation.

In 1951 he departed for a post as Assistant Professor at Syracuse University and in ten years worked his way up to Full Professor while becoming versed in editorial skills with Syracuse's *Symposium*. It was while he was teaching there that the MLA decided, in 1957, to hold its annual meeting in September, in Madison, Wisconsin. He was to read a paper on one of his most cherished fields: "The Present Status of *Celestina* Studies" (polished and published later in *Symposium*). He met there J. Homer Herriott, then deeply committed to the *Celestina* and the search for a way to prepare a critical edition of it [a study later published, 1964, and reviewed by McPheeters in MLN, 1969]. He also met Erna Berndt-Kelley, a student of Herriott's hard at work on her dissertation on humanistic aspects of *Celestina*, later published in Spanish by Gredos in 1963. These fruitful interactions were the beginning of long and happy associations for McPheeters. But, Mac himself tells us that one important Madison-related event--of an unusual nature--was also to impress him significantly. It was that Wisconsin professor Mack Singleton had been preparing an English translation of the *Tragicomedia* and it was given a dramatic reading at that same MLA gathering. Herriott's wife, Margo, as *Celestina*, was special, as was Singleton himself as *Pleberio*. But the reading of Carol Cowan as *Melibea* affected McPheeters enough that it set him to thinking about the nature of this young woman of the early Renaissance and how she might be the real protagonist of the work. This idea was to guide much of his view of the work in subsequent studies.

The many *Celestina*-related discussions of 1957's MLA proved irresistible and Mac returned to Madison to continue them, as well as to expand upon his bibliographical work on Rojas's masterwork, in the summers of 1958 and 1959. When his reworked dissertation on Proaza was ready for publication in 1961, it appeared in Valencia, a most apt locale for a volume on one of its adopted sons. Time and again, McPheeters' bibliographical searches led him to cross paths with Antonio Rodríguez Moñino, who became most interested in helping McPheeters publish with Castalia/Soler in Valencia. Mac returned the favor with an entry in the 1966 homenaje to Moñino, and they remained friends until Moñino's untimely death. In the same year, 1961, Oxford published Alan Deyermond's *The Petrarchan Sources of 'La Celestina'*. Deyermond and McPheeters met soon after, in Oxford, at the inaugural gathering of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas (1962). Mac often recalled how glad he was to meet Deyermond, whose researches corroborated his own findings--those that served to show that Proaza was never actively involved with writing any of the text proper of the *Tragicomedia*. Another scholar present was Maria Rosa Lida, who, although her paper on this occasion was not on *Celestina*, had corresponded with Mac about her magnum opus--even then awaiting publication: *La originalidad artistica de 'La Celestina'*. Her sudden death saddened him and, later, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary year of that

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AIH meeting and the publication of her study, Mac sent to *Celestinesca* a letter he'd received from her and it was printed to honor that anniversary [vol. 11, no. 1 (May 1987): 21-23].

Mac moved from Syracuse to Tulane University in 1964, and was active there with the Tulane Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures. He would stay at Tulane teaching and occasionally guiding the department until retirement in June of 1982. His scholarship continued unabated and he was one of the first to comment on the little-known Hebrew translation of the mid-16th century of *Celestina*. In 1971, his work in early Renaissance studies earned him Corresponding Member status in the Hispanic Society of America [he was made a full member in 1976]. Also in 1971, Mac went off to Spain to participate in the AIH [a triennial meeting he always tried to attend; his last was at Berlin and I know he had hopes of attending the coming one in Barcelona] and read there a paper on the role of 'codicia' in the *Celestina*. A friendship was struck up with Bruno Damiani there in Salamanca, one which would later lead Damiani to propose and produce the 1986 homage volume in Mac's honor, seventeen studies which explore the many areas of his wide-ranging interests in the 15th through 17th centuries in Spain.

Some of the ideas that germinated in Madison in 1957 were now turned to profit in his 1973 article on "Melibea and the New Learning," in which the Renaissance character of Rojas's work is placed on vivid display. He was later to enrich this piece with data from a paper presented at the 1979 San Francisco MLA and to use the new version as the lead study in his *Estudios humanísticos sobre 'La Celestina'* of 1985, a collection of six studies that underscore his authority as a serious reader of that work. Typical of him, he dedicated this retrospective to "mis hijas y nietas." One of the six studies was his commentary on Calisto's Act 14 soliloquy, originally a paper read at the Toronto gathering of the AIH [1977] and much admired by Rafael Lapesa who was then the organization's President. Lapesa had himself written a study exploring facets of the same soliloquy and his kind words meant a great deal to this "student."

Mac and Anna Bess, when retirement (and Emeritus status) came at Tulane, were not ready for real retirement. They returned to Gainesville, where, in "retirement," Mac was an adjunct professor. He loved these final classes, as they kept him active and in contact with students, always a vital sounding board for his many enthusiasms.

When Anna Bess departed this life--in Gainesville--something stopped for Mac as well. He tried to find outlets in his classes, and in attending professional conferences, but it wasn't the same. Late in 1987, not long after moving back to Louisiana to be near his daughter, this good Renaissance man died, surrounded by friends and family, wishing no one ill, to be remembered with love and affection by those many whose lives he touched.



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### 2. THE TEACHER; OR, "ON THE ROAD AGAIN"

Nancy Joe Dyer  
Texas A & M University

Recently having arrived at Tulane in the mid-sixties, Dr. McPheeters in his impressive scholarly classes only occasionally permitted students a glimpse of his personal warmth and dry wit. His low-key classroom manner and seemingly unlikely background in Army intelligence in World War II often figured into students' conversations over bottomless cups of coffee with chickory. His unexpected, droll, academically-oriented joke and the half-muttered aside, punctuated with a wry lop-sided smile, became more frequent as the semesters progressed. He seemed to enjoy the juxtaposition of Spanish Renaissance/Golden Age topics and a contemporary perspective; even now a half dozen former students still remember the punch line of his bad joke about an unsuccessful admiral known as the "chicken of the sea."

Outside class, Dr. McPheeters' pipe wreathed him in a constant aromatic haze and his gaze traveled the ground about four feet ahead while he contemplated intricate scholarly matters later brought to seminars. At the time, his enthusiasm about the intricacies of the stemma of *Celestina* manuscripts shared over a week of seminars puzzled new graduate students; two decades later his solutions appear in stunning clarity in his *Estudios humanísticos sobre 'La Celestina'*. After getting to know him better, one could see how this type of problem was just another cryptogram to the former military analyst.

The teacher became more accessible to students during his first year as department head, when he and Mrs. McPheeters entertained the faculty with a Christmas party and included all the graduate teaching fellows. Students long remembered Mrs. McPheeters' spectacular amusé bouche and an introduction to the light of his eye, his beautiful teenage daughter Leslie, a dead-ringer for the then-famous Twiggy. From then on, he was less of a "bibliografía con tripas" and more of a friend who treated students as worthy individuals and remembered their interests. Mary Jo Strausser Brown recalls that he periodically inquired about her father years after the two men had a long conversation about growing up on a farm in the midwest.

Dissertation students valued their mentor for his erudition, careful attention to detail, and sensitively tendered suggestions. Emilia Navarro appreciated his infinite patience, *misericordia*, honesty, modesty and freedom from *soberbia*. She adds: "he instilled in you a sense of your worth which was a reflection of his own *caritas*." The qualities for which he is remembered by dissertation students are remembered by others. One MLA, when he had to meet a job interview candidate whom he did not know at the time, he advised her to "just be in the lobby at 10 and find the most ordinary-looking man you've ever seen." Once Dr. McPheeters replied to Georganne Huck's questions about a topic tangential to her dissertation with the gracious loan of an armload of new books. The next day he approached her in the hall with an expectant look, and eagerly intoned, "Well, Miss Huck, *what* do you think?" That became one of his most endearing, oft-quoted one-liners. For her, his often impossible expectations and trust motivated her when she felt near faltering.

After his retirement, Dr. McPheeters returned to research interests established earlier in his career, and continued to help other scholars by thoughtful, generous offerings of bibliography, offprints, transcriptions and books from his library. Michele Cruz-Saenz and Sam Armistead both speak of his generosity with his ballad materials.

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In the summer of 1984, he presented a paper on *juglaria* at the Franciscan convent at Pastrana. After several days of meetings, he arranged transportation to the train station with a Swiss Hispanist who was headed north. I tagged along, and, quite by chance in the leisurely 35 kilometer per hour ride, the threesome discovered a common burning curiosity about the *juderia* in Tudela which promptly became our ultimate destination. Winding our way through the hills toward an intermediate stop at Burgo de Osma, the group rehashed the conference and hoped to be able to inspect the archives at San Pedro in Soria. The Swiss Hispanist described in detail his indoor swimming pool, and Dr. McPheeters recalled his Scots-Irish pioneer ancestors who settled in Pisgah, Tennessee, and shared his love of Old Testament place names. When the conversation finally lulled, from the back seat Dr. McPheeters began to hum and then to sing aloud a meaningful and unselfconscious rendition of what he shortly revealed to be one of his favorite songs, the Willie Nelson hit "On the Road Again." Incongruities of time and place did not occur to the distinguished professor who relished the lyrics as though he himself had written them: "On the road again, Goin' places I've never been, seein' things I'll never see again. Just can't wait to get on the road again. The life I love is making music with my friends, can't wait to get on the road again." The next week, over a paella dinner to which he graciously invited a large group of younger American Hispanists at the Hotel Valencia in Madrid, he mentioned the song casually again. That was to be his last trip to Spain.

Unable to attend the 1986 Pastrana conference because of his pending trip to the AIH in Berlin, he wrote to thank me for delivering his plenary: "I hope you have a pleasant trip, and please give my best to all the folks. I'm sorry I didn't get a travel grant, but it is only right that younger folks get them. Anyway, can you imagine Goya on a Guggenheim or Menéndez Pidal on a Fulbright? Maybe our little Swiss friend will have some interesting caper." Later in Berlin at the AIH meeting he seemed to cherish each renewed contact with old friends, like Margherita Morreale and Ted Beardsley, and with new ones. He thoroughly relished the role of knight-errant, escort to María Eugenia Lacarra, Dorothy Severin, Kathleen Kish and myself on an unforgettable tour of Berlin by night.

A few months later, his annual Christmas note once again arrived in a card bearing the familiar, emblematic Reyes Magos scene, this time a reprint of an exceptional medieval manuscript illumination. For Dr. McPheeters, the singular coincidence of sharing a birthday with the celebration of the venerated sages' arrival at Bethlehem must have endowed him with a sense of history and imparted special, private meaning to his life's journey. His sense of purpose, generosity, fairness, and his overwhelming feeling for the continuity of time bonded his immediate present and his beloved Hispanism. Dean McPheeters--wise man, scholar, teacher and chivalrous picaro--brought Hispanism and humanism into clear, living perspective for his students and friends, and we always will remember him.



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### D.W. MCPHEETERS AND 'CELESTINA'<sup>1</sup>

#### Books

*El humanista español, Alonso de Proaza.* Valencia: Editorial Castalia, 1961.

*Estudios humanísticos sobre la 'Celestina'.* Potomac, Maryland: Scripta Humanistica, 1986.

#### Articles

"The Element of Fatality in the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*." *Symposium* 8 (1954): 331-335.

"Comments on the Dating of the *Comedia Thebayda*." *Romance Philology* 9 (1955): 19-23.

"The Corrector Alonso de Proaza and the *Celestina*." *Hispanic Review* 24 (1956): 13-25.

"The Present Status of *Celestina* Studies." *Symposium* 12 (1958): 196-205.

"Cervantes' Verses on *La Celestina*." *Romance Notes* 4 (1963): 136-138.

"Newly Discovered Correspondence of Alonso de Proaza, Editor of *La Celestina*." *Symposium* 17 (1963): 225-229.

"Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI." In *Homenaje al profesor Rodríguez-Moñino*. Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1966. 399-411.

"Melibea and the New Learning." In *Essays and Studies in Honor of Albert D. Menut*, edited by Sandro Sticca. Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1973. 65-81.

"*La Celestina* en Portugal en el siglo XVI." In *La Celestina y su contorno social. Actas del Congreso Internacional sobre La Celestina*, ed. M. Criado de Val. Barcelona: Hispam, 1977. 367-376.

"La 'dulce ymaginación' de Calisto." *Actas of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas (Toronto 1977)*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. 499-501.

"Alegorismo, epicureísmo y estoicismo en *La Celestina*." In *Actas del IV Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas (Salamanca 1971)*, II (Salamanca: Universidad, 1982): 251-262.

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<sup>1</sup> McPheeters was, of course, a more well-rounded scholar than just these 'Celestina' items indicate. For a more full account of his scholarly production, see the list provided in Bruno M. Damiani, comp., "Publications," *Renaissance and Golden Age Essays in Honor of D. W. McPheeters* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1986): xiii-xviii.

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### Book Reviews

*The Book Called Celestina*. By Clara Louisa Penney. New York: The Hispanic Society of America, 1954. *Symposium* 8 (1954): 191-196.

*Polidorus, comedia humanística desconocida*. By J. de Vallata. Introducción, estudio y notas por José María Casas Homs. Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1953. *Symposium* 9 (1955): 182-185.

*Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea y de la puta vieja Celestina*. M. Criado de Val and G.D. Trotter, editors; and Facsimile edition of *La Celestina* by A. Pérez y Gómez, editor. *Revista Hispánica Moderna* 26 (1960): 165-166.

*La Célestine selon Fernando de Rojas*. By Marcel Bataillon. Paris: Didier, 1961. *Modern Philology* 61 (1963): 46-49.

*The Petrarchan Sources of La Celestina*. By A.D. Deyermond. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961. *The Romanic Review* 54 (1963): 286-288.

*The Evolution of the Go-Between in Spanish Literature through the Sixteenth Century*. By Michael J. Ruggiero. University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 78. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966. *Romance Philology* 22, No. 1 (1968): 111-114.

*Towards a Critical Edition of the "Celestina"*. By J. Homer Herriott. Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964; *Printing in Spain, 1501-1520, with a Note on the Early Editions of the "Celestina"*. By F.J. Norton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966. *Modern Language Notes* 84 (1969): 344-348.

*La Comedia Thebaida*. Edited by G.D. Trotter and Keith Whinnom. London: Tamesis, 1969. *Hispanic Review* 39 (1971): 319-322.

*Allegory, Decalogue, and Deadly Sins in "La Celestina"*. By Dorothy Clotelle Clarke. University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 91. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968. *Hispanic Review* 40 (1972): 312-315.

*Lectura existencialista de 'La Celestina'*. By Esperanza Gurza. BRH-Estudios y Ensayos, 257. Madrid: Gredos, 1977. *Celestinesca* 12, i (1988): 61-64.

### Papers Read

[1957] "The Present Status of *Celestina* Studies." *MLA*, Sept. 9, 1957. Madison, Wisconsin.

[1960] "*La Celestina* in Portugal in the 16th Century." *MLA*, Dec. 28, 1960. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[1965] "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI." Second Congress of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas. August 20-25, 1965. Nimegen, Holland.

[1968] "Diez años de estudios celestinescos." South Central Modern Language Association, Nov. 1, 1968. San Antonio, Texas.

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[1971] "Alegorismo, epicureismo y estoicismo escolástico en *La Celestina*." Fourth Congress of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas, Sept. 2, 1971. Salamanca, Spain.

[1972] "Melibea, the Renaissance Woman." South Atlantic Modern Language Association, Nov. 2, 1972. Jacksonville, Florida.

[1974] "*La Celestina* en Portugal en el siglo XVI." Primer Congreso sobre *La Celestina*, June 17-22, 1974. Madrid, Spain.

[1977] "La 'dulce ymaginación' de Calisto." Sixth Congress of the Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas. Aug. 26, 1977. Toronto, Canada.

[1979] "Antifeminism and the Education of Women." MLA, Dec. 30, 1979. San Francisco, California.

