

## International Medieval Congress held at the University of Leeds (12-15 July 1999)

Louise Haywood (St. Andrews Univ.) and Connie Scarborough (Univ. of Cincinnati), organized two sessions to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the publication of the Burgos 1499 *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*. Following are synopses of the papers.

### 500 Years of Celestina I

Thursday 15 July 1999: 9:00-10:30

Moderator: *Dorothy S. Severin*, University of Liverpool

1. *Eukene Lacarra Lanz*, Univ. del País Vasco. "Los discursos de vituperio y alabanza de la mujer en la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*."

Lacarra focused on the theme of love, treated as a psychosomatic condition in *Celestina*, especially with regard to Calisto. She cites both Latin and Arabic treatises concerning love sickness which refer to love as a kind of malfunction or ocular pathology whereby the mere sight of the beloved overwhelms the lover with fantasies and images. These fantasies crowd out all other mental images and the lover's interior life is reduced to one image, a condition which theorists associated with a death a spirit. Various remedies were prescribed for the relief of the depression associated with this condition--among these were potions, baths, music and poetry.

Prof. Lacarra especially emphasizes the recourse to poetry as a cure, i.e., the written or spoken word, as curative agent. When Calisto first appears, he seems a perfect example of one suffering from lovesickness — he retires to his room, he verbally abuses his servants, and suffers other signs of the depression and frustration which accompany one suffering from unrequited love. Calisto also manifests the symptom of impatience, as Celestina points out on more than one occasion.

Before his first encounter with Melibea Calisto is nervous, moody, and distressed. His cure is only effectuated after his possession of Melibea. Lacarra points out an importance difference in the way Calisto's obsession with Melibea is treated in the *Comedia* as opposed to the *Tragicomedia*. In the former, after the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Parmeno, Calisto, in order to protect his *fama*, suggests feigning his absence during the time of the deaths so that he can in no way be associated with them and can continue to pursue his affair with Melibea.

In the latter version, Calisto mentions feigning an absence or acting as if he is mad in order to continue seeing Melibea. Calisto's ruse of lunacy is not far-fetched, according to Lacarra, considering the state to which his lovesickness had reduced him. But, and perhaps more importantly, Lacarra notes that once Calisto has had sex with Melibea, and with the expectation of

continuing to have relations with her, his central preoccupation changes from one of love to his honor.

His chief concern after the deaths of the *alcahueta* and his servants is that the events will damage his *fama* if he is any way associated with their sordid and tragic deaths. Lacarra focuses on the lovers' encounter in Act 19 of the *Tragicomedia* as an example of Calisto's insistence on sex with Melibea, what the speaker calls Calisto's "desordenado apetito." For Lacarra, Calisto's death in the *Tragicomedia* is rendered all the more comic because he dies as a result of his continuing need to feed his sexual appetite not, as in the *Comedia*, after the first, virginal encounter with his lover.

2. *Eloísa Palafox*, Washington Univ. in St. Louis: "De plumas, plumíferos y otros seres alados: Trayectoria y enigmas de una metáfora polifacética de la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*."

Palafox's paper centers on the role of language within the *Tragicomedia*, especially with regard to the presence of knowledge and the metaphors used to describe knowledge. She concentrates on four such metaphors, all involving winged-creatures--the bat, the bee, the flying act, and the swan. The bat is mentioned in Acts 3 as part of Celestina's conjuring of the devil, specifically in the form of a paper written in bat's blood. The red letters and their association with written knowledge combined with the symbolic value of writing with blood from an animal often associated with delinquent activities (malfeasance), add symbolic weight to Celestina's use of the knowledge of evil.

The second metaphor treated by Palafox, the bee, has both positive and negative symbolic connotations with regard to knowledge. For example, the bee is positively associated with hard work and when Pármeno describes Celestina as "cargada como abeja," he not only implies that she is diligent in her job as *alcahueta* but also in her ability to use knowledge and language effectively. The bee is also associated with the traditional that its honey is of celestial origin. This metaphorical significance may indeed be associated with the origin of Celestina's name.

The third animal treated by Palafox is the flying ant. It is mentioned in the *versos acrósticos* and is associated with loss, especially that which occurs from a lack of precaution. Moreover, the ant's ability to fly is related to a desire for glory, power and also of knowledge. And since one can see the victims of love, as portrayed in the *Tragicomedia*, as participants in ill-advised 'flights' in pursuit of their desires, the implications of the flying ant metaphor are evident.

Palafox's last metaphor involves the swan. The swan is mentioned only once in the *Tragicomedia*, in Act 19. The swan is said to sing its sweet song when it is closest to death and Melibea applies this attribute to herself

as she happily goes to meet her death upon learning of the fatal accident of her lover. This happiness at the approach of death, as associated with the image of the swan, stands in stark contract to Calisto's death, which occurs as a pure accident. All these images of winged animals are, in one form or another, associated with knowledge as a moral virtue and, according to Palafox, the metaphorical use of these animals accentuates the distortion of this type of knowledge on the part of the characters in the *Tragicomedia*.

3. *Louise M. Haywood*, St. Andrews Univ.: "Mourning and Magic Words in the *Tragicomedia*."

Haywood points out that Erna Berndt decades ago commented on the presence of death in all the conversations between characters in the *Tragicomedia*. Severin has also studied the ironic foreshadowing of death throughout the work as part of its novelistic discourse. Haywood observes that, while much critical attention has been paid to Pleberio's lament in act 21, his is, in fact, only one of many laments throughout the *Tragicomedia*. Haywood concentrates specifically on female-voice laments in the work.

Her research reveals that female voice laments tend to focus on the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the deceased instead of recounting the deeds of the deceased as often in occurs in male-voice laments. However, in the *Tragicomedia*, there is within the corpus of female laments a good deal of variety. As examples she refers specifically to the laments of Elicia and Areúsa in response to the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármemo. Elicia's use of mourning garb is a traditional response to grief. Likewise her expressions of anger and extreme emotion may be considered traditional. In her lament, she also praises Celestina and bewails the lose of worldly goods, an allusion which foreshadows a point later emphasized by Areúsa in her lament.

Elicia curses the agents of death, seeing Calisto and Melibea as responsible. The garden which had symbolized the lovers' union is thus transformed in Elicia's speech in a lover's hell, recalling the motif of the blasted landscape. Areúsa interrupts Elicia's lament and mourns, above all, the lose of earthly pleasure. In contrast to Elicia, Areúsa quickly becomes stoic in her response and finds the strength to comfort Elicia; she too alludes to financial necessity in her reply to the deaths, a topic which had been foreshadowed in Elicia's speech. Moreover, while Elicia and Melibea both use conventional language in their laments, especially regarding the description of a locus amoenus, the readers are actually defrauded.

Negative metaphoric connotations surround this image and, according to Haywood, are activated by the curse which formed part of Elicia's lament. The words in her lament have actually taken on magical properties and imply diabolic intervention. In fact, the curse embedded in Elicia's lament is the last of three uttered by her in the work. In the first act she curses Sempronio;

later, immediately before Celestina's death she curses Sempronio and Parmeno; and, thirdly, as we have seen, she curses the noble lovers in her lament.

### 500 Years of Celestina II

Thursday 15 July 1999: 11:15-12:45

Moderator: *Louise M. Haywood*, St. Andrews University

1. *Dorothy S. Severin*, Univ. of Liverpool: "Pármeno, Lazarillo and the *novelas ejemplares*."

Severin studies the figure of Pármeno in the *Tragicomedia* as a prototype of the pícaro, as represented in *Lazarillo*, *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, and other works of this genre. For example, the earliest memories recounted by both Pármeno and Lazarillo are of child abuse. She specifically points out how the mothers of both Lazarillo and Pármeno hand their sons over to others — in the case of Lazarillo to his first *amo* and in the case of Pármeno, his mother Claudina, the mentor of Celestina, to the alcahueta.

Parallels between other pícaros and Pármeno include the well-spokenness that Rinconete and Cortadillo share with Calisto's servant. Pármeno, in this respect, contrasts with Lazarillo. Similarly Rinconete and Cortadillo, unlike Lazarillo, quickly leave the road and occupy the interior space of the thieves' den. Pármeno, similarly, circulates in the interior spaces of Calisto's and Celestina's homes. Also, a gold chain figures in both the *Tragicomedia* and in *Rinconete and Cortadillo*.

Severin also draws relationship between the presentation of Pármeno and picaresque elements in *Don Quijote*. Both involve the theme of the pícaro displaced and humor replaces the lawlessness which figures prominently in most picaresque works. Also, Pármeno, like Don Quijote, accepts his death in the end, whereas, characters such as Lazarillo and Celestina fight against it until the last moment. Severin emphasizes, through numerous examples the confluence of characteristics of the pícaro with the those of Pármeno in the *Tragicomedia*.

2. *Connie L. Scarborough*, Univ. of Cincinnati: "La avaricia como primer motor en la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*."

Scarborough deals with the themes of avarice and self-interest as the prime motivations for the actions of all the characters of the *Tragicomedia*. Her definition of avarice includes not only the single-minded pursuit of material gain, as is obviously the case with Celestina and her dealings with Calisto, but the similar pursuit of sexual possession, as in the case of Calisto, or the case of job security and financial reward, as in the case of Sempronio.

and Pármeno. She argues against the interpretation of Pármeno as a character who undergoes a moral change.

She agrees with other critics, especially Fraker, who have argued that Pármeno's initial warnings to his master against Celestina are based on self-interest, i.e. the desire to maintain himself in his salaried job in a noble household. She does not see him motivated by any genuine interest in Calisto's welfare. She also emphasizes that the servants' violent murder of Celestina stems largely from an overwhelming sense of greed and envy engendered by their master's generosity to the alcahueta and his lack of rewards to them. Moreover, Melibea singularly pursues her desire for Calisto, rejecting any reminder of her duties to her family or concerns for her fama.

Even Pleberio, in his final lament after his daughter's suicide, emphasizes his own grief and presents himself as the victim in the tragic suicide of her child. The prevailing tone of avarice actually plays an indispensable role in the tragic outcome envisioned by the work's author(s).

### 3. *Andrew Beresford*, Univ. of Durham: "Saints and Sanctity in *Celestina*."

Beresford discusses Sempronio's allusion to Bernard in his diatribe against women and argues that the reference in his speech is to Bernard of Cabrera rather than Bernard de Clairvaux, as argued by some other critics. He points out that Sempronio's arguments are bookish, i.e. he relies on stereotypes and really does not insert any of his own ideas. For example, he mentions Solomon, Seneca and Aristotle — all considered misogynists in Spanish medieval literature — in his tirade on the unworthiness of women.

It is precisely his inclusion of Bernard as an authority that Beresford finds more problematic. Bernard de Cabrera was an Aragonese courtier of the fifteenth century who incurred the king's wrath, was incarcerated in a tower, and later humiliated during his imprisonment when his lover betrayed him and left him on display, for all to see, in nothing but his underclothes. Bernard de Cabrera is mentioned in the *Corbacho* but there is no evidence that the nobleman was known as a misogynist.

In contrast to the sketchy details we have about Bernard de Cabrera and the scant mention of him in other works of literature, the allusions to Bernard de Clairvaux are numerous in medieval Spanish literature, especially references to his teachings on the Virgin Mary. In his writings, Bernard of Clairvaux is scornful of women and their lasciviousness, in his sermons identifying women with Eve and the temptations and the flesh. The task of analyzing Sempronio's references in his speech against women is especially complicated because, according to Beresford, the servant's tirade is essentially confused. His effort to demonstrate his intellectualism is a complete failure and he interweaves without internal logic a number of references and themes.

Further complicating the picture is that fact that Calisto hears only what he wants to hear from Sempronio's speech. Rather than interpreting it as a misogynist litany, he hears it as a lament for love's victims, among whose company the nobleman considers himself. He personalizes Sempronio's diatribe and, as a result, neither *emisor* nor *receptor* is in complete control of the interchange.

Connie Scarborough

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Suplicando a Celestina. A. Gelabert.



Pleberio, Alisa. Maurice L'Hoir (1943).