

Labyrinth of Errors: Celestinesque Ploys against Death

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Por esto se dize que los muertos abren
los ojos de los que biven...

La Celestina, xvii

Of all the different types of prose fiction popular during the Spanish Golden Age the family of texts composed as continuations and/or derivations of Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), stands out as a veritable museum of death, dying, mourning, and melancholy. The *celestinesca*, or celestinesque genre, as this group of texts is known, includes works such as the anonymous *Comedia Thebaida* (1521), Feliciano de Silva's *Segunda comedia de Celestina* (1534), Sebastián Fernández's *Tragedia Policiana* (1547), and many others.¹ Indeed, although structural differences separate it from its generic precursors, Lope de Vega's *La Dorotea* (1632) also demands a reading fully inscribed within the *celestinesca*.² As prescribed by Rojas's foundational text, all too frequently characters in the *celestinesca* meet cruel ends. Lovers are killed or commit suicide, servants murder each other, re-

1. The principal works that constitute the Celestinesque genre are the anonymous *Comedia Thebaida* (1521), Feliciano de Silva's *Segunda comedia de Celestina* (1534), Gáspar Gómez de Toledo's *Tercera parte de la tragicomedia de Celestina* (1539), Sancho de Muñón's *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselia* (1542), Sebastián Fernández's *Tragedia Policiana* (1547), Juan Rodríguez Florián's *Comedia llamada Florinea* (1554), and Alonso Villegas Selvago's *Comedia llamada Selvagia* (1554). These are all hybrid works, neither theater nor prose fiction, and like Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), something quite different from the Latin humanistic comedy.

2. Much like Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcellos's *Comedia Euphrosina* (1555), Lope's *La Dorotea* (1632) does not fit squarely within the *celestinesca*. The break with the genre is perhaps stronger in *Euphrosina*, given the hardly relevant role of the go-between, Philtra, but indeed both works fall well outside the *celestinesca*. Lope's text, partly an homage to *La Celestina* and partly an exercise in fictionalized autobiography, asks from its readers complete familiarity with the works of Rojas and his followers. This is so, not because he is writing within the genre, but rather because the latter is being used as a pretext that often obscures what are radically different aesthetic goals. In a nutshell, Lope is using the *celestinesca* in 1632 to write in fictionalized fashion about personal events that took place between 1584-1588.

venge is exacted, relatives stand alone grieving, and so on. Further, as sure as the advanced age of the ever-present old bawd prefigures her eventual death, an air of melancholy is common to these texts. Still, these are not identical stories. As I have argued elsewhere the texts of the *celestinesca* are highly original, for lack of a better term, and consistently aim to stand out on their own.³ Nowhere is this more evident than in their representation of the end life, its process and its consequences.

Death in *La Celestina*, as Stephen Gilman brilliantly showed, obeys a logic removed from considerations such as sin, moral justice, or punishment.⁴ Rojas's characters die on account of the contingencies of space and time in a world ruled by alien, that is, inhuman forces. Briefly stated: Death happens. Celestina, a master of language and manipulation, dies as a result of the rashness of her accomplices. Pármemo and Sempronio, as we all remember, wake her up noisily in the pre-dawn hours. They simulate to be seeking refuge in her house after supposedly having had a run in with some street thugs while guarding Calisto on his first visit to Melibea. They fake having taken huge risks protecting the lovers and claim to have suffered costly material losses. They hope that these make-believe claims will additionally justify their real demand, that is, their part of what Celestina had received from their master. However, their request leads to a heated and ultimately fatal argument. Betting that they are incapable of resorting to violence, the *puta vieja* opts to deal with them by deploying a three-step strategy. First, she attempts to set the record straight by claiming for herself the fruits of her labor. Then, she repeats her offer to serve them as a procuress. Finally, she suggests that she will divulge all she knows before a magistrate if push comes to shove. It turns out though, that she miscalculates. She who rightfully had bragged: «Que no sólo lo que veo, oyo y cognozco, mas aún lo intrínscico con los intelectuales ojos penetro» (117) is notable to realize the extent to which both Sempronio and Pármemo are fed up with her mendacity. It is late and they are mad. They feel powerless and resent her. In addition, her garish figure seems at this time especially repugnant and vulnerable. In a second, they lose control and mortally wound her.

After her demise, many other deaths soon follow, all of them characterized by a logic alien to moral, political, or divine disciplines. Pármemo and Sempronio jump out of a window and suffer severe injuries in a desper-

3. Cf. «Cruel and Pathetic Dissonance: The Grotesque and the *Celestinas*». *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 29 (1995), pp. 51-72; «Leyendo a dos Belas: *La Dorotea* como anti-celestina». *La Torre: Revista de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, IX, 36, Octubre-Diciembre, 1995; *La celestinesca, la comedia y La Dorotea: Huellas de un intertexto*. (Colección Aquilafuente), Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1994; and «Celestina 'a lo divino': el caso de la *Tragedia Policiana*». *Celestinesca*, Vol. 17.1 (May 1993), pp. 3-16.

4. Cf. Stephen Gilman, «Fortune and Space in *La Celestina*», *Romanische Forschungen* 66 (1955), 342-60 and his *La España de Fernando de Rojas*, (Madrid: Taurus, 1978), 349-382, among other works.

ate attempt to flee the scene of their crime. They are then apprehended and summarily executed. This is devastating for Celestina's pupil, Elicia, who witnesses this sudden catastrophe. On a visit to Areúsa, her cousin as well as Pármeno's girlfriend, she complains bitterly: «¡Ay, qué ravio, ay mesquina, que salgo de seso, ay, que no hallo quien lo sienta como yo; no ay quien pierda lo que yo pierdo!» (297). This cry is the first instance of a frustrated desire to grieve and remember the passing of loved ones.⁵ Yet, the logic of death in Rojas's text prevents it from developing further. Elicia's lament becomes part of a movement towards vengeance and restitution. Seeking to impress Elicia with her strength and independence, Areúsa then resolves to avenge her weaker cousin's losses. In what amounts to a pale imitation of Celestina's ability to manipulate others in order to assert her dominance, she orders a thuggish pimp and occasional lover, Centurio, to murder Calisto. Her plan, however, fails. Centurio may appear tough but is nothing but a cowardly braggart and has no intention of killing anyone. Still, to save face, he sends an insignificant hooligan, Traso *el cojo*, and a couple other petty scoundrels in his stead. Their orders are to get rowdy around Melibea's house so as to scare away the lover and his two remaining servants, inexperienced youngsters who are sure to flee at the smallest sign of trouble.

That night, Calisto, a vain and eager lover if there ever was one, hears the mock disturbance and attempts to make an impression on his lady with a showy display of valor. Unfortunately, as he climbs over the wall of her garden he misses his step, falls, splits his head open, and spills his brains on the street. Left alone, Melibea succumbs to her grief and her excessively literary disposition. Aping, the example of virtuous figures from myth and history she chooses to commit suicide in order to rejoin her dead lover. Melibea's demise, in turn, plunges her parents, Alisa and Pleberio, into an abyss of bereavement in which the repetition of the word *solo* resounds as a reminder of the senselessness of life itself.

Subsequent writers of celestinesque works or *celestinas*⁶ had to contend with Rojas's legacy of death. Between 1521 and 1554 the followers of Fernando de Rojas worked with a model that required the inclusion of some definite elements:

5. It should be noted, though, that earlier, in the ninth act of *Celestina*, the protagonist launches on a heartfelt lamentation for all things past. The *puta vieja*'s feeling that all the privileges, pleasures, friendships, etc. that she enjoyed in the past are simply gone forever and that, as she puts it, «sobí para descender, floreí para secarme, gozé para entristecerme, nascí para bivar, viví para crecer, crecí para envejecer, envejecí para morir» (234) permeates the whole text.

6. We follow Manuel Criado de Val's usage of the term *celestinas* to mean celestinesque works composed in imitation of Fernando de Rojas. Cf. Manuel Criado de Val, et. al., eds. *Las Celestinas* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1976).

- a) Two or more upper class lovers in need of amorous mediation.
- b) One or more go-betweens in the tradition of the old crone *Celestina*.
- c) An assortment of servants loosely connected to the world of prostitution and pandering.
- d) One or more pimps in the tradition of Rojas's cowardly Centurio.

In particular, as we have already seen, the model prescribed a truculent ending rather akin to a massacre. This article explores the tangled web of death and dying, mourning and melancholy present in the works of the *celestinesca*. It aims to show the extent to which Rojas's followers attempted to open ways out of his dreadful «laberinto de errores» (338).

The anonymous *Comedia Thebaida*, which starts the series, is also the first of these texts to dispense with Rojas's deadly universe. To Pleberio's disconsolate words: «¿Por qué me dejaste penado? ¿Por qué me dejaste triste y solo in hac lachrymarum valle?» (236), the *Comedia Thebaida* opposes the company of friends and the security of comforting words. «¡O cómo descansaré, Menedemo!» (256), exclaims the blissful crone Veturia as the wise Menedemo and all the servants in the male lover's household gather for a final chat among friends in the fifteenth *cena* or act of the text. The aim of this talk is no other than providing an answer to a direct allusion that Veturia makes to Pleberio's bitter final questions in the last act of Rojas's *Celestina*:

Del mundo me quexo, porque en sí me crió, porque no me dando vida, no engendrara en él a Melibea; no nacida, no amara; no amando, cessara mi quexosa y desconsolada postremería. O mi compañera buena, y [o] mi hija despedaçada, ¿por qué no quesiste que estorvasse tu muerte? ¿Por qué no oviste lástima de tu querida y amada madre? ¿Por qué te mostraste tan cruel con tu viejo padre? [¿Por qué me dexaste, quando yo te havía de dexar?] ¿Por qué me dexaste penado? ¿Por qué me dexaste triste y solo in hac lachrymarum valle? (343)

Veturia's paraphrase of Pleberio is not motivated by any catastrophe. Rather, it is prompted by the wish to enjoy a nice little lecture by a wise friend: «Grandes doctrinas fueron las de Christo. Y si las gentes mirásemos, muy clara y llana está la carrera de la gloria, aunq'es bien estrecha, y más y más con nuestro miserable bivar. Y no sé cómo nos andamos en este valle de lágrimas» (256). Though Menedemo's lecture is a serious one it is not meant as a sermon, as he himself makes clear: «...algo diré, por servir a Veturia, llanamente, como quien habla entre compadres» (256). In sum, this is no somber gathering but rather a joyful one as its conclusion well shows: «Pues yo me voy. Y vosotros que tan alegres estáis y con tanto gozo, holgaos bien y regozijaos. Y dad palmas, que yo,

Veturia, he acabado de representar la comedia» (266). In this and other ways *Thebaida* substitutes the horror of death and its aftermath with the pleasures of love, sex, food, and friendship. Veturia's metafictional call to readers and listeners amounts to an invitation to choose and celebrate life here and now in what by no means is a vale of tears.

In fact, *Thebaida* offers only a resemblance of death and then always linked to the extreme emotions of amorous melancholy. Both lovers, Berintho and Cantaflua, are prone to extended spells of fainting, «small deaths» on their road to eventual joy. Such is the frequency of these extreme signs of passion that they end up becoming a source of amusement to their servants, as the following exchange between the go-between, Franquilla, and the maid, Claudia, shows:

FRA.— ¡Jesús, Jesús! Y parece que está muerta Cantaflua.
 CLA.— Déxala al presente, que sin dubda es peor hablalle.
 Y de la manera que está, a según otras vezes es tortas
 y pan pintado. (102)

As already stated, this is merely the likeness of death, not the real thing. Consequently, the characters are free to resurrect at will, most often, upon the arrival of good news:

CLA.— ¡O cuitada! ¿Y por qué no lo havías dicho antes? Y hoviéramosla reçucitado aunque estoviera muerta. Espera, espera, y verás por esperiencia lo que digo. Señora, señora, que está aquí Franquilla y os trae una carta de Berintho, y ha dos horas que espera aquí. (103)

Not even any of the minor characters comes close to death in *Thebaida*. This is a community in harmony with itself and in agreement with pleasure. Berintho and Cantaflua, on the one hand, and their respective young servants, Amintas and Claudia, on the other, enjoy each other sexually and everybody appears content.

The only crime in *Thebaida* is the rape of a servant girl named Sergia, the niece of Galterio, a pimp at the service of Berintho. It is the male lover's pageboy, Aminthas, whose sexual awakening the text chronicles, the one who commits this infraction (157-60). Though appalling, this assault falls well short of murder. Still, for a moment, the text highlights the physical consequences of the girl's violent deflowering. When Galterio enters the room where the rape has occurred he exclaims: «¿Han degollado alguna vaca? ¿Y qué has hecho, di?» (159). However, true to its medieval sensibilities, *Thebaida* does not concern itself much with the brutality of the incident. The girl immediately recovers and agrees to forget the matter entirely. The event merely goes on to accrue fame for the young man whose virility the text exalts (173-74). Towards the end even

Galterio, whose violent streak suggests a tendency towards crime, learns to behave prudently and peacefully.⁷

Awakening from death, which in *Thebaida* is but a joke among the lovers' servants becomes a real event in a later imitation. One of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, resurrection would seem to be the perfect antidote to death and mourning. The stories of both Lazarus and Christ clearly demonstrate the dramatic potential of this operation. This fact did not escape the attention of Feliciano de Silva who was quick to use it in his *Segunda Comedia de Celestina*, anticipating a move that many other writers of fiction would later undertake. The desperate period of mourning that Celestina's protégé, Elicia, had endured in Rojas's work comes to an abrupt end in the *Segunda Celestina*. Canarín, the male lover's youngest page, and Pandulfo, the merry braggart who serves alongside him, describe the situation thusly:

CAN.— Señor, la mayor nueva y d'espanto que jamás oís-te (...) has de saber que toda la cibdad va corriendo a casa de Celestina, que es fama que ha resuscitado.
(...)

PAN.— Ríome, que pienso por las reliquias de Roma, que alguna devota iluminaria de las boticas del burdel, con sus oraciones, ha hecho tal milagro; o por la santidad de tan buena persona como ella era y de la piedad que en esta vida usava con remediar muchas erradas donzellas, renovando sus quiebras, haciendo correr por buena su moneda falsa, la deesa Venus l'ha querido tornar al mundo para que tan santas y buenas obras no falten, por faltar tan buena y santa persona. (186-87)

Thus, Celestina reappears and claims to have come back from death. The whole town is then afforded the luxury of a miracle bestowed on its most undeserving denizen. The *puta vieja* whose death in Rojas's text could have illustrated a moral lesson of the first order arises triumphant.

7. Galterio, like Centurio, is a braggart. Unlike him, however, he is a dutiful servant and a steadfast friend. His past is checkered and his boasting lends it credibility, yet, there is nothing truly menacing about him, as Amintas explains:

AMIN.— te quiero avisar porque no estés engañada... como mucha parte de la ciudad... Berintho huelga mucho de oír mill cuentos que tiene... Y d'esta manera métenlo en juego y dize cosas maravillosas... Y con eso, y porque en otras cosas es gran servidor, cúbrello... Y dexado aparte el mentir y blasonar que tiene, bive muy sin perjuizio de persona nascida. Pues con nosotros los de casa... qu'él se haze el menor, y que nunca entiende sino en hazer por todos nosotros y en contentarnos, y que qualquiera necesidad que nos ocurra de las que tú, señora, puedes pensar, él lo remedia; y él [lo anda] todo y él lo rebuelve de tal manera que a todo su poder hemos de quedar contentos... Y d'esta manera nos holgamos y passamos tiempo con él, y estamos tan hechos que cuando no stá [sic] en casa parece que todos stamos sordos. (76-8)

The etymological contradictions present in her name, the origin of which oscillates between the heavenly (*caelestis*) and the wretched (*scelestia*), is operative in this «miracle». Still, Silva's Celestina cannot undo the facticity of death, its unappealable quality. As the reader later learns, the joy of resurrection is but the product of a hoax. The truth is that the go-between had never really died. Just as many centuries later Sherlock Holmes returns to meet his friend Watson in «The Adventure of the Empty House» (1903) after having died a few years before in «The Final Problem» (1893), Celestina has a logical explanation for her comeback. With a certain measure of amazement, readers discover that actually, somehow, she had survived the wounds that Calisto's servants had inflicted on her. In fact, she had been recovering in hiding until then. What at first appears as a prodigy and then a fabrication turns out to be, though, something extraordinary in its own right. Elicia's past mourning appears now as an empty gesture. At the time of Celestina's presumed death her words stirred authentic pathos:

ELIC.— Pues más mal ay que suena; oye a la triste, que te contará más quexas. Celestina, aquella que tú bien conociste, aquella que yo tenía por madre, aquella que me regalava, aquella que me encubría, aquella con quien yo me honrrava entre mis yguales, aquella por quien yo era conocida en toda la cibdad y arrabales, ya está dando cuenta de sus obras. Mil cuchilladas le vi dar a mis ojos; en mi regaço me la mataron. (296)

These cries of grief, which provoke Areúsa's indignation, now have to be taken back. Words that led the latter to recruiting the cowardly pimp, Centurio, in order to kill Calisto and ruin Melibea's joy now appear to have been but a mistake. There was no actual murder of Celestina in Rojas's text according to Feliciano de Silva. The hoax that leads to the *Segunda Celestina*, the *puta vieja's* fake demise, is the same one that causes the series of events that culminate in Calisto's accidental death, Melibea's suicide, and Pleberio's sorrowful lament. When the event that is often interpreted as the first in a series of exemplary disasters warning about «los engaños de las alcahuetas y malos y lisonjeros sirvientes» (82) turns out to be a fraud, the rest lose all moral or ethical relevance. There can hardly be any Christian exemplarity when the guilty party escapes harm while all others suffer cruel deaths. Moreover, Celestina's return from the dead not only brings joy to all the followers of Venus, as Pandulfo suggests, it also succeeds in annulling the very memory of death, as the latter again observes: «Señora, tú dizes verdad que hasta aquí no se hablava sino en la muerte de Calisto y Melibea, y agora con tu venida, está ya olvidada» (238). With the banishment of death, mourning and melancholy, Feliciano de Silva presents the readers of the first sequel to *La Celestina* with

the happy and bawdy story of two lovers, Felides and Polandria, all told in the best venereal tradition. Such is the puzzling twist that the *Segunda Celestina* introduces in the genre.

Death though, is so much a part of the *celestinesca* that its suspension, or rather its deliberate diminution by Feliciano de Silva, could not go on uncontested. This task, readers of the genre discover, befell Gaspar Gómez de Toledo whose *Tercera parte de la tragicomedia de Celestina* (1539) aims to conclude the story that the *Segunda Celestina* had left unfinished. In order to accomplish this goal, Celestina must die once and for all. Indeed, so eagerly does Gómez de Toledo pursue his plan that in the process the old hag suffers all sorts of beatings, attacks, humiliations, punishments, etc. In the end, after having successfully arranged the marriage of the lovers, Felides and Polandria, the old crone darts out of her house hoping to collect her *albricias*. In a moment of carelessness, Celestina slips, tumbles down the corridors of her house, cracks open her head, and ends her life. Gómez de Toledo, however, approaches death more as the finishing line after a long race than as an occasion for pause and reflection. The reaction of Celestina's neighbors before her still warm body does not leave much room for moralizing:

VEZ.— ¡Oh Celestina y cuán mal has vivido, pues tan mal acabaste! Creed, señores, que toda persona que no es buena en la vida, no tiene verdadera ni natural muerte. (...) ¡Oh mundo! Que no sé qué diga de ti, sino que la prosperidad que das es poca, y aunque al parecer alegra, al gustar amarga. (...) ¡Cómo das placer a palmos, y pesar a varas! No sabemos de ti decir por tener tanto que decir, más de que eres mentiroso, eres falaz, eres infame. Finalmente, en todas tus cosas eres inicuo.

VEZ.— Todo lo que habéis dicho, y cuanto dijésedes de las falsedades del falso mundo está tan averiguado que no hay entre nosotros qué averiguar, sino que lo mejor será buscar modo en que se entierre y sepa su amargo fin. (939)

In proverbial Castilian fashion: *El muerto al hoyo, y el vivo, al bollo*. Celestina's death fades away. Although some of the above speakers take time to explicate the moral that can be extracted from her death, the general move is towards expediency. Thus Gaspár Gómez de Toledo attempts to set the record straight by closing the book on Celestina's phony resurrection.

One of the stories of the *celestinesca* that most struggles to put the horror of death centerstage again is Sancho de Muñón's *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselia* (1542). In this *celestina*, Roselia's brother, Beliseno, murders her and her lover, Lisandro, during their last encounter in her garden. However, this *venganza de honor*, a noteworthy antecedent of so many simi-

lar endings in Golden Age *comedias*, is troubling. Beliseno's brutal wrath efficiently manages to impose itself over the bitterness of the couple's untimely demise. The specter of *honra* reigns triumphant over death and its victims. Beliseno's wrath is so disproportionate that it draws attention to itself rather than to the protagonists' alleged transgression. It is, as Pierre Heugas puts it: «un massacre auquel n'échappent ni les amants, ni la suivante, ni les valets de Lisandro. Il fait un étrange contraste avec la scène d'amour au raffinement très allusif» (169). Paradoxically, the carnage that the righteous brother unleashes highlights the tenderness of the lovers' last minutes of life. The latter die together, in the same instant, as they embrace. In a perverse twist, Beliseno makes sure that he is the one to avenge his family's honor: «Dexá a mí los dos, que esta saeta los enclavará a ambos como están!» (165). Unwittingly perhaps, the offended brother creates through this sadistic murder a fleeting *tableau vivant* of eternal love.

The above is not the only textual situation that shows how Sancho de Muñón deals with the problem of death in the genre. Earlier, the male lead's confidante in *Lisandro y Roselia*, Oligides, has this to say regarding this matter:

OLI.— Habrás de saber que Celestina la vieja verdaderamente murió, y la mataron Sempronio y Pármeneo por la partición de las cien monedas y la cadenilla que le dio Calixto. Y esto ser verdad lo afirman hoy día los vecinos que se hallaron presentes a su muerte y entierro... No, que verdad fue haber esa Celestina [the one created by Feliciano de Silva and Gaspar Gómez de Toledo], pero no era la barbuda, sino una muy amiga y compañera desta, que tomó el apellido de su comadre, como agora estotra. (...) Sábetes que esto es lo que pasa; lo demás son ficciones». (23-4)

Attempting to set himself as a respectful and authoritative emulator of Fernando de Rojas, Muñón is driven to apply reason, logic, and doctrine to discredit the hoax of Celestina's survival, resurrection, and second death. In one fell swoop, mourning, death, and melancholy all disappear since, as Oligides clearly says, «[E]sto es lo que pasa; lo demás son ficciones».

In yet another celestinesque metafictional twist, Oligides points to the very fiction that begets him as *the real* in opposition to all the other preceding imitations of Rojas's text, which are false and unworthy of consideration. For him, reality as opposed to fictions or lies is *lo que pasa* and that is the only thing that truly matters. The original Celestina would have agreed, in her own way. She who knew so many things so well explains her credo to Pármeneo in the first act of the *Tragicomedia* thusly:

CEL.— Sin prudencia hablas que de ninguna cosa es alegre
posesión sin compañía, no te retrayas ni amargues,

que la natura huye lo triste y apetece lo delectable. El deleyte es con los amigos en las cosas sensuales, y especial en recontar las cosas de amores y comunicarlas: «Esto hize, esto otro me dixo, tal donaire passamos, de tal manera la tomé, assí la besé, assí me mordió, assí la abracé, assí se allegó. ¡O qué habla, o qué gracia, o qué juegos, o qué besos! Vamos allá, bolvamos acá, ande la música, pintemos los motes, cantemos canciones, invenciones, justemos; ¿qué cimera sacaremos o qué letra? Ya va a la missa, mañana saldrá, rondemos su calle, mira su carta, vamos de noche, tenme el escala, aguarda a la puerta. ¿Cómo te fué? Cata el cornudo; sola la dexa. Dale otra vuelta, tornemos allá». Y para esto, Pármeno, ¿ay deleite sin compañía? Alahé, alahé, la que las sabe las tañe. Este es el deleyte, que lo ál, mejor lo hazen los asnos en el prado. (126)

Celestina's praise of the dialogical pleasures of the present goes hand in hand with Oligides exaltation of the text that begets him. *Lo que pasa* is *el deleite*. The rest, like the crude mechanics of animal sex, is much less relevant. Celestinesque characters always tend to value their own stories, their dialogue with each other, over material, moral, and social precedents or limitations.

It is in the above vein that Sebastián Fernández's hilarious *Tragedia Policiana* chooses to cope with Rojas's dismal legacy of doom. Set in a time preceding that of the *Tragicomedia*, *Policiana* tells the story of Claudina, Celestina's former partner in crime and Pármeno's mother. Readers familiar with this character surely will remember Celestina's plaint as she thinks of Claudina, their friendship, and her death:

CEL.— Su madre y yo, uña y carne. Della aprendí todo lo mejor que sé de mi officio. Juntas comiémos, juntas durmiémos, juntas aviéamos nuestros solazes, nuestros plazerés, nuestros consejos y conciertos. En casa y fuera, como dos hermanas. Nunca blanca gané en que no toviésse su mitad. Pero no bivia yo engañanada, si mi fortuna quisiera que ella me durara. ¡O muerte, muerte, a cuántos privas de agradable compañía, a cuántos desconsuela tu enojosa visitación! Por uno, que comes con tiempo, cortas mil en agraz. Que siendo ella biva, no fueran estos mis passos desacompañados. Buen siglo aya, que leal amiga y buena compañera me fue (142)

It is against this background of lamentation that *Policiana* sets forth its approach to dealing with the materiality of death. This «prequel» of *La*

Celestina, revitalizes the bond of affection between these two imposing characters. Fernández's crone is a kind and generous *alcahueta*, a «leal amiga y buena compañera». This, however, does not detract one bit from her performance of the *puta vieja* role. She is still a bawdy old hag, skillful in matters of *tercería*, and she certainly loves material gain. Still, Claudina is capable of sacrificing her best interests to help others.⁸

However, as all readers know, the crone must die. *Celestina*'s rise is contingent on the passing away of her best friend. The way in which this event happens, the scenes depicting her murder, her agony, and her last words constitute a radical revision of Rojas's order of death in time and space. Claudina has to die, but how to justify that death in moral or ethical terms is problematic. Lacking any of *Celestina*'s hateful characteristics it is difficult—if not impossible—to perform a sanitizing operation of this sort. This is, however, what Theophilón, the father of Philomena, the female lead, foolishly aims to do. From the start Theophilón appears as a «viejo caduco» whose only sport is controlling his daughter.⁹ «Dios no come palabras» (21a), Philomena's maid says mockingly about his late blooming fanatical obsession with virtue now that he is old and gray. Still, perhaps on account of this hypocritical streak, Theophilón ends up decreeing Claudina's death:

THEO.— Pues la conclusion de mi platica sea que yo estoy sentido de la nueua conuersacion de aquella vieja con mi muger e hija, e la he mandado que no entre en mi casa so pena de perder la vida. Cumple... mireys cautelosamente los passos de mi hija e andeys en acechança con esta vieja falsificada, e donde quiera que la pudieredes auer, viniendo a mi casa pública o secretamente, le acabeys la vida a palos (47b)

As we said earlier, Claudina's murder cannot be justified easily in moral terms. Even her killers know this and resent carrying out her death sentence, as Pámphilo declares after the event:

8. Thus she helps out Cornelia and Orosia, prostitutes whose pimps planned to commit to the public brothel (29ab). She also understands the central problem of women who, regardless of social class, can hardly escape censure be it for one thing or its opposite (23a). Moreover she is open about her dealings and is well aware that it is she who bears responsibility for her actions (28b). The soliloquy in which she decides remain in the company of her daughter rather than sending her away to earn her living exemplifies the strange virtue of this sweet old hag (50a).

9. Dorotea, Philomena's maid and a rather virtuous one at that, has this to say about her master:

DOR.— Por mi salud, el ánima le daua el negocio en que entendiamos. Bien predica la raposa las gallinas. En mi ánima estos viejos no son sino un terrón de molestia; como veen que se les acava la candela, acuerdan de dar a Dios las heces de su vida loca, haziendo

PAM.— Siluerio e yo nos hallamos la noche passada a la puerta falsa con la vieja Claudina, e la hezimos tan buen tractamiento, que la embiamos a çenar al otro mundo. Y esto se hizo no tanto por la culpa que en ella hallamos quanto por cumplir lo que tú nos mandaste. (58b)

Pamphilo's account reveals an unsuspected and daring Biblical intertext. These two appear now as avatars of Pontius Pilate: «[H]e went out to the Jews again, and told them, 'I find no crime in him'» (John 18:38). Much like the Roman procurator gives in to pressure and orders Christ's execution, Pámphilo and Siluerio attest to Claudina's innocence even as they carry out the orders imparted by their master. For an instant, this old *alcahueta* reaches a Christ-like status. She, who even demons and devils fear, according to the original *Celestina* in Rojas's text, attains here a substantial measure of saintliness.¹⁰

In the end we come back to Pleberio's anguished words at the beginning of his *planctus*: «¡O gentes que venís a mi dolor, o amigos y señores, ayudadme a sentir mi pena!» (337). Whereas Rojas leaves Melibea's father to face death and mourning alone, Claudina's next of kin are luckier. Their loved one dies in her bed, surrounded by family and friends. Moreover, they receive the full support of a most resourceful and enduring personality:

de perro del hortelano. Pues andate ay con tus sermones, que Dios no come palabras, e si piensas hazer sancta a tu hija Philomena, más vale una traspuesta que dos assomadas. (21a)

The most elaborate definition of the overzealous father is found in Lope de Vega's *El cuerdo en su casa*. Fed up with her father in law's excessive control, Antona has this to say:

ANT.— Nunca he visto viejo, / a quien años sobren, / que a sus mocedades / la cabeza torne. / Con su helada sangre / y el humor que corre, / viendo que en la vida / ya comen los postres, / de todo se enfadan, / porque no conocen / lo que hay del que sale / al sol que se pone... / Ya de vuestra edad (perdonad que nombre / animal tan feo) [los hombres] / parecís lechones: / que todo es gruñir, / los días y noches, y hacer sepulturas / con hocicos torpes. / No son de provecho / hasta que les corten / el cuello y les saquen / lo guardado a golpes. (550b-551a)

Theophilon is this type of *viejo caduco*, a *durus pater* that fits the mold of what Silvia puts forth in Lope's *El piadoso veneciano*:

SIL.— ¡Voto al sol, que no habían / de pasar los zagales de treinta años! / Luego que canas crían, / son de tratar y de sufrir extraños. / ¡Lindo humor se os ha hecho / después que tenéis barbas en el pecho! (551a)

10. As *Celestina* explains to Pármeno, his mother inspired the deepest fears in the netherworld: «¿Qué más quieres, sino que los mismos diablos la habían miedo? Atemorizados y espantados los tenía con las crueles voces que les daba. Así era [ella] de ellos conocida, como tú en tu casa. Tumbando venían unos sobre otros a su llamado. No le osaban decir mentira, según la fuerza con que los apremiaba.» (123).

CEL.— Hijas de mi alma, no desmayeys, tornad en vosotras, aparejad de dar sepultura al cuerpo de mi madre, que aunque la pérdida fue grande, biuiendo os Celestina no biuireys desamparadas (...) que mientras yo biuiere y tú [Parmenia] de mi compañía holgares, no te faltaré ni echarás [de] menos a tu madre. (56b-57a)

Thus, in this fashion we also go back to Celestina's wisdom, the *Thebaida's* lesson in friendship, Feliciano de Silva's denial of death, and Oligides emphasis in *lo que pasa*. As the epigraph of this article reads: «Por esto se dize que los muertos abren los ojos de los que biven...» (*Celestina* 308). It would seem that life—that is, human companionship and solidarity—is the only realistic response to the ghastly «laberinto de errores» (338) that Pleberio discovers in the end, alone inside the walls of his very own household. It is in this fashion that individual texts of the *celestinesca* triumph over death even as they waver between fidelity to their seminal precursor and innovation.

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RESUMEN

Entre los diferentes tipos de libros de entretenimiento populares del Siglo de Oro, la familia de textos compuestos a imitación de *La Celestina* de Fernando de Rojas (1499) se nos presenta como una verdadera muestra de muerte, luto y melancolía. Al igual que en el texto que inicia la serie, los personajes de la celestinesca sufren terribles muertes con una frecuencia pasmosa. Los amantes mueren, los sirvientes se asesinan entre sí y la sed de venganza reina mientras que parientes y amigos sufren desconsoladamente. Sin duda, un aire de profunda melancolía permea estos textos. A pesar de lo cual, los textos de la celestinesca procuran diferenciarse del original de Rojas así como entre ellos. Este artículo muestra cómo estas obras intentan ofrecer alternativas al cerrado laberinto de errores, muerte, desolación y melancolía que *La Celestina* propugna.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, celestinesca, *Comedia Thebaida*, Feliciano de Silva, *Segunda comedia de Celestina*, Sancho de Muñón, *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselía*, Sebastián Fernández, *Tragedia Policiana*.

ABSTRACT

Of all the types of prose fiction popular throughout the Spanish Golden Age the family of texts composed as continuations and/or derivations of Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499), stands out as a veritable museum of death, dying, mourning, and melancholia. As prescribed by Rojas's foundational text, all too frequently the characters of the *celestinesca* meet cruel ends. Lovers die, servants murder each other, revenge is exacted, relatives stand alone grieving, and, as sure as old age often prefigures death, an air of melancholy is common to these texts. Yet, the texts of the *celestinesca* consistently aim to stand out on their own. This article aims to explore the tangled web of death and dying, mourning and melancholy present in the works of the *celestinesca*. It shows the extent to which Rojas's followers attempted to open ways out of his dreadful «laberinto de errores».

KEY WORDS: Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, celestinesca, *Comedia Thebaida*, Feliciano de Silva, *Segunda comedia de Celestina*, Sancho de Muñón, *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselía*, Sebastián Fernández, *Tragedia Policiana*



