

A Female Voice for Action in the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*

Una voz femenina para la acción en la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*

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ABSTRACT

Although most critical attention on laments for the dead in the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* has focused on Pleberio's long lament for Melibea in Auto XXI, Elicia's lament for the loss of her lover, Sempronio, his companion, Pármeno, and her protector, Celestina, is highly significant for plot development. Her lament is a decisive event that sets in motion a plan for revenge that will ultimately lead to the deaths of Calisto and Melibea. This article demonstrates how Elicia's personal experience of loss brings about significant changes in her characterization. With the help of Areúsa, Elicia hatches a plan for vengeance on the aristocratic lovers that she despises. Building on Louise Haywood's studies of female laments for the dead, it examines Elicia's curse on Calisto and Melibea and shows how her words have real and tragic consequences. In Rojas's world, a prostitute's expression of grief is a force strong enough to topple the elites of society and fundamentally contribute to the *tragedia* embedded in his work's hybrid title.

PALABRAS CLAVE: laments, Elicia, characterization, plot development, Sempronio, Pármeno, Areúsa, Celestina, female curse, death

RESUMEN

La atención crítica sobre las lamentaciones fúnebres en la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* se ha enfocado en aquella dedicada por Pleberio a Melibea en el Auto XXI. Sin embargo, las quejas de Elicia por la pérdida de su amante Sempronio, su acompañante Pármeno y su protectora Celestina, son muy significativas para el desarrollo de la trama. Su lamento es un evento decisivo que pone en movimiento un plan de venganza el cual conducirá finalmente a las muertes de Calisto y Melibea. Este artículo demuestra cómo la experiencia de pérdida padecida por Elicia introduce cambios significativos en su caracterización. Con la ayuda de Areúsa, Elicia despliega un plan de venganza contra los amantes aristocráticos que desprecia. A partir de los estudios de Louise Haywood sobre las lamentaciones fúnebres femeninas, se examina la maldición de Elicia sobre Calisto y Melibea, y se demuestra cómo sus palabras acarrearán consecuencias reales y trágicas. En el mundo de Rojas, la expresión de duelo de una prostituta constituye una fuerza lo suficientemente fuerte como para tambalear a las élites de una sociedad y para contribuir a la *tragedia* incrustada en el título híbrido de la obra.

KEYWORDS: lamentación, Elicia, caracterización, desarrollo de la trama, Sempronio, Pármeno, Areúsa, Celestina, maldición femenina, muerte

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The *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* contains a number of laments for the dead. This is not surprising given that many of the main characters die in the course of the plot—Celestina dies from a vicious attack by Sempronio and Pármeno, Sempronio and Pármeno are executed for her murder, Calisto falls to his death from the walls of Melibea's garden, and Melibea commits suicide after her lover's death. Most critical attention about laments for the dead in the *Tragicomedia* has focused on Pleberio's lament for his daughter, Melibea, which makes up almost the entire Auto XXI. In addition, some scholars have addressed Calisto's comparatively brief lament for the deaths of three of his accomplices. Women also express grief and loss and the most notable example is Melibea's lament for Calisto included in her long, impassioned confession to her father just before she commits suicide. In Auto VII Celestina fondly remembers her former companion, Claudina, Pármeno's deceased mother. Her lament has been analyzed as an example of the importance of personages who live on in the memory of the characters and who provide insights into their lives before the events related in the *Tragicomedia*.¹ Another lament uttered by a female character that has garnered less critical attention is Elicia's expression of grief for the loss of her lover, Sempronio, his companion, Pármeno, and her protector, Celestina. However, if we examine carefully Elicia's lament it actually proves to be a pivotal point in the plot in light of the tragic events it ultimately provokes. Her lament is the starting point for the series of incidents that leads to Calisto's fall and Melibea's suicide. By contrast, the laments by male characters—Pleberio and Calisto—do not propel the plot. To no avail, Pleberio rails against life itself while Calisto quickly replaces his deceased servants and mourns little, if any, for Celestina since she has already served her purpose to win over Melibea. Elicia's expression of grief and her actions that follow have profound consequences and

¹ See Alan Deyermond's articles "Female Societies in *Celestina*" and "¿Cuántas hermanas tenía Celestina? Las funciones de los personajes invisibles", and Joseph Snow's "Celestina's Claudina."

through her Rojas gives significant power to one of the lowliest members of his created universe.

In light of the essentially fruitless laments uttered by Pleberio and Calisto it is curious that these have elicited more critical commentary than that voiced by Elicia. Notable exceptions are two articles by Louise Haywood that focus on literary laments pronounced by women in which she gives special attention to Elicia.² She identifies elements in Elicia's lament that reflect common topoi found in female expressions of grief and also points out how the lament is an example of the ironic foreshadowings that Rojas employs throughout the *Tragicomedia*. I would like to build on her valuable arguments and demonstrate how Elicia's personal experience with death brings out changes in her characterization. In Elicia's expression of grief and her conversation with Areúsa in Auto XV the reader sees a new and different facet of Elicia's character that does not appear until she suffers personal loss. Although Elicia, at other moments in the *Tragicomedia*, has shown herself to be duplicitous, envious, unconcerned about the future, and content to enjoy the pleasures of the moment, after the loss of Sempronio and Celestina, her bereavement is sincere and moves her to action. Her plan for vengeance on those she holds responsible for the tragic ends of her lover and of her protector, engineered with the help of Areúsa, is the outlet or the mechanism that allows her to assimilate loss and find a way forward. To understand her particular reactions to the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármemo, we should begin with a clear understanding of what the author of the first Auto and his continuer, Rojas, tells us about Elicia and, in particular, how she has interacted with these three characters up to the time of their deaths.

In Auto I, Sempronio arrives at Celestina's house while Elicia is with another client, Crito. Celestina invents a lie to satisfy both Crito and Sempronio, telling Elicia to hide Crito in the broom closet. Elicia tells Crito that her cousin is knocking at the door and that he must not find her in bed with a man, also a lie. As Elicia rushes to obey the *alcahueta's* instructions, Celestina keeps Sempronio occupied with exaggerated greetings and hugs. This, of course, gives Elicia time to emerge and scold Sempronio for failing to visit her for three days. In her feigned expression of anger she curses him with all kinds of misfortune and even death.³ Thus, from the very first pages of the

² "'Sola yo, la mal fadada': Secular Castilian Female-Voice Laments for the Dead" and "Models for Mourning and Magic Words in *Celestina*."

³ Severin suggests that this early allusion in the *Tragicomedia* to the death of Sempronio might have suggested to Rojas the idea of the servant's violent demise (106). Russell calls this upbraiding of Sempronio particularly ironic since he will, indeed, meet a sinister end (251).

Tragicomedia we know that Elicia is duplicitous and quick to respond to any perceived slight. The slapstick nature of the scene is obvious in Celestina's delaying tactics, the indecorous and improvised hiding away of Crito, and Elicia's show of mocked anger toward Sempronio.⁴ Certainly, in Auto I, Elicia's anger, too, can be seen as part of an improvised show, a scheme designed to deceive both Crito and Sempronio. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel elaborates on Elicia's behavior in this, the first scene in which she appears: "Con sutil equilibrio entre ficción y verdad, ella, de suyo nerviosa, se finge nerviosa y prorrumpe en maldiciones y ayes que hacen reír de gozo al enamorado, dichoso al verse objeto de tan vehementes afectos" (668). However, when Sempronio hears inexplicable footsteps upstairs, Elicia resorts to the truth as if goading Sempronio to doubt her. She tells him that the footsteps he hears are those of one of her lovers who is upstairs and when Sempronio takes the bait, Elicia with daring bravado responds: "¡Alahé, verdad es! Sube allá y verle has" (251).⁵ Celestina jumps in to dissuade Sempronio from actually going upstairs and finding Crito, and attributes Elicia's attitude to the fact that she is upset over his absence. When Sempronio continues to be curious about the noises coming from above, Celestina resorts to another clever lie. She claims that there is a young girl upstairs who had been entrusted to her by a friar. The identity of the wayward friar sparks Sempronio's curiosity and he wants to know his identity. Ever quick on her feet, Celestina tells him it is the fat superior of the monastery, a fact that launches the *alcahueta* and Sempronio into a string of scabrous jokes about the poor girl having to support the friar's weight. When Sempronio wants to see the young girl, Elicia's joins in the elaborate lie and, with her propensity to anger, blasts Sempronio for wanting to lay eyes on another woman when she is right in front of him. However, the mock scene comes swiftly to an end since Sempronio is anxious to speak with Celestina and enlist her help on Calisto's benefit. Elicia sends the two off, maintaining that she is the offended party, telling Sempronio that he can stay away for three years next time, instead of just three days. Jorge Abril-Sánchez goes so far as to say that Elicia's words and actions in Auto I reveal "su personalidad hedonista" (17).⁶ This seems like a misplaced moral label for Elicia at this

⁴ Lida de Malkiel identifies Elicia's irritability as one of her principle character traits, and establishes that of all the characters, she is the most given to anger quickly (662).

⁵ All quotes from the *Tragicomedia* are from the 2nd edition of Peter Russell's *La Celestina: Comedia o tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.

⁶ Abril-Sánchez justifies his labeling of Elicia as hedonistic as follows: "Cambia de amante sin problemas con el fin de mantener a los dos contentos aunque para ella se tenga que servir

point in the *Tragicomedia*. The scene is largely one of comic slapstick and reveals the complicity that exists between Celestina and Elicia. Elicia is a prostitute who earns a living by gaining the favor of her clients and she is ready to deceive one of her regulars, like Sempronio, if it fits her purposes. Does this necessarily mean that she is addicted to pleasure as the term “hedonistic” would imply or is she simply both practical and clever? If she wants to maintain the more or less steady attention of Sempronio, she needs to, literally, act her part, i.e., pretend that her relationship with him is special. Sempronio cannot be blind to the way that Elicia earns a living in Celestina’s home but it is one thing to be aware of this fact and quite another for him to discover his “lover” in bed with another man. Self-deception is a key ingredient in the personalities of most, if not all, of the characters in the *Tragicomedia* and Sempronio seems to participate in his own brand of self-imposed blindness with regard to Elicia. There is, however, nothing in the initial scene in which Elicia appears that augurs for any real depth of her feelings for Sempronio. She openly lies to him about being with another man, she lies to Crito about Sempronio’s identity, participates in the ruse orchestrated by Celestina to mislead Sempronio, and has nothing but harsh words and sharp insults for him. Despite these facts, we know that Sempronio harbors genuine affection for Elicia. Evidence of this is also included earlier in Auto I when Sempronio is debating with himself about the wisdom of intervening on behalf of a distraught Calisto who has just been rebuffed by Melibea. He reasons, at one point, that he should avoid any possible danger so that he can continue to see Elicia: “Aunque por ál no desease vivir sino por ver a mi Elicia, me devría guardar de peligros” (231).⁷

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The next time Elicia appears is in Auto III when Sempronio returns to Celestina’s house to tell her of Calisto’s impatience. Sempronio’s encounter with Elicia occurs just before the scene in which Celestina conjures Plutón and casts her spell on the yarn that she will take to Melibea’s home to sell. When Sempronio arrives, Elicia expresses surprise that he has returned so quickly. She teases him a bit in a kind of continuation of the upbraiding she had given him in Auto I when she scolded him for not visiting more often. In a brief conversation between Elicia and Celestina, we learn that the *alcahueta*’s house has been busy while Sempronio and Celestina were away. When Celestina asks if the young woman who had come for a rendezvous with the

del engaño” (17). Keeping multiple men “contentos” is the job of a prostitute and not an unremunerated devotion to pleasure as hedonistic implies.

⁷ Joseph Snow comments on this line, stating that “Esto indicaría que lleva ya cierto tiempo con ella como amiga y que en realidad la aprecia mucho” (“Las tres primas,” 296).

minister is still in the house, Elicia tells her that the woman has come and gone and that another received a visitor after her. Even though Celestina is no longer enjoying the glory years of her profession, this conversation implies that her brothel still sees a good deal of business and that Elicia seems to have run the household in Celestina's absence. Celestina then asks Elicia to bring her various items she will need for the conjuring. When Elicia returns, telling her that the items are not where Celestina says they are, Celestina reproaches her for implying that her memory is failing.⁸ She tells Elicia not to mock her old age and accuses her of being presumptuous just to impress Sempronio who is also present: "No infinjas porque está aquí Sempronio, ni te sobervezcas; que más me quiere a mí por consejera que a ti por amiga, aunque tú le ames mucho" (306-307). This is a loaded statement on Celestina's part. In her opinion, Sempronio places more value on Celestina since she is key to him reaping potential rewards from Calisto for his role in putting his master in touch with the *alcahueta*. Her success, in Sempronio's mind, is tied to future bonuses for him if Celestina successfully arranges for Calisto to possess Melibea. In this sense, the *alcahueta*'s assertion that, at this moment, she is more important to Sempronio than Elicia is true, but Celestina is also quick to qualify this bit of self-aggrandizement when she adds that Elicia truly loves Sempronio. The latter part of her reply softens her retort to Elicia's insinuation about her memory loss while also flattering Sempronio, her accomplice in service to Calisto. After retrieving the materials Celestina requests for her spell, Elicia retires upstairs in the company of Sempronio. It is important to note, as Lida de Malkiel observes, that Elicia does not participate in the spells cast by Celestina, just as she will not learn any of the other trades and talents at which the *alcahueta* excels (666).

Elicia does not play a role again until near the end of Auto VII when Celestina returns home after arranging for Pármemo to spend the night with Areúsa. Elicia again displays the irritability that Lida de Malkiel identifies as one of her principle character traits. Celestina knocks late at night at the locked door of her home and Elicia grumbles to herself about "este diablo de vieja"

⁸ Russell does not understand why Elicia implies that Celestina is suffering memory loss due to age. He states: "No es asunto al que se alude después en la obra, ni da la vieja indicios posteriores de tener la memoria floja" (306). I would suggest that, especially noting Celestina's reaction to Elicia's statement, that there is a bit of subtle competition between the two women for Sempronio's attention. Elicia is aware that the affair for Calisto is now Sempronio's primary occupation and she fears taking a backseat to this endeavor. This first inkling of jealousy about Sempronio's interest in his master's pursuit of Melibea will be fully on display later during the banquet scene in Auto IX when Elicia and Areúsa rail against the charms of Melibea.

who has wakened her (395). Celestina does not hear the insult and Elicia's irritation is simply a natural reaction to being disturbed. We soon learn that actually she is worried about the go-between's late arrival and she recriminates her for wandering about at night. Elicia also scolds her because the father of a girl who is about to be married has come to have Celestina "restore" her virginity—one of the many services Celestina performs for her patrons. When Celestina replies that she does not remember any such appointment, Elicia, again, accuses her of forgetfulness due to aging: "Desacordada eres, cierto. ¡O cómo caduca la memoria!" (395). She reminds Celestina that this is the same girl who she has repaired on seven previous occasions but it is only when she mentions a gold figurine that the father had left in payment that the *alcahueta* suddenly remembers her appointment with the woman. Now it is Celestina's turn to rebuke Elicia. She asks her why she did not do the job herself since she had seen Celestina perform the procedure countless times. And she reminds Elicia that when she is older and beauty fails she will need such skills to support herself. An intriguing detail in Celestina's harangue serves to flesh out the prior history of the characters. Celestina claims to have learned this skill for restoring the appearance of virginity from Elicia's grandmother and boasts that within a year she was even better at it than her teacher.⁹ Elicia tells Celestina that she hates performing this procedure and has no desire to learn how to master it.¹⁰ On this conversation, Lida de Malkiel comments that "Elicia, aunque nieta de la maestra de Celestina, defiende bravamente su autonomía" (667). She justifies her refusal to learn such a useful service as the repair of virgins to provide for herself in the future by invoking three motifs common in medieval literature: *carpe diem*, the leveling power of death, and the fact that the rich are never satisfied with what they have (Russell 396-397): "Mientras oy toviéramos de comer, no pensemos en mañana. También se muere el que mucho allega como el que pobremente vive... Aunque los ricos tienen mejor aparejo para ganar la gloria que quien poco tiene, no ay ninguno contento, no ay quien diga: 'harto tengo'" (396-397).¹¹ Frivolity and fatalism can now be added to aspects of Elicia's character to accompany the mendacity and irascibility that she has already displayed. The author of the first Auto and Rojas are

⁹ On the familial relationships between Celestina, Melibea, Areúsa, and Lucrecia, see Abril-Sánchez's "Una familia de meretrices."

¹⁰ Russell emphasizes that Elicia only rejects performing the technique of repairing virgins, but not that of working as a prostitute (396).

¹¹ Russell notes that the last motif is an addition to the *Tragicomedia* whereas in the 16-act *Comedia* only the first two topoi are present (397).

building a character that is more complex than simply “the young prostitute living in Celestina’s house.” Even though she has a roof over her head, literally, due to Celestina, she is her own person, willing to set herself apart from the maternal figure played by Celestina and certainly capable of expressing herself when she feels slighted as well as defending her own preferences and choices.

This assessment is brought out forcibly in the role that Elicia plays in the banquet scene that takes place in Celestina’s house in Auto IX. No sooner do Sempronio and Pármeno arrive than Elicia scolds them for arriving late, saying that she and Areúsa have been waiting for them for three hours. In particular she blames Sempronio for their tardiness: “Este perezoso de Sempronio habrá sido causa de la tardança, que no ha ojos por dó verme” (418). Whether Elicia is simply teasing Sempronio or truly angry with him is less important than the fact that Rojas again paints Elicia as irritable and quick to lash out. As the meal progresses and after Celestina’s long litany about the benefits of wine, Sempronio breaks the conviviality when he asks Celestina how things are progressing with “aquella graciosa y gentil Melibea” (420). Elicia’s reaction is immediate and abrupt. When she hears Sempronio refer to Melibea as “graciosa y gentil” she tells him that she finds such language repulsive to the point of making her nauseous: “¡Por mi alma, revesar quiero quanto tengo en el cuerpo de asco de oírte llamar a aquélla ‘gentil!’” (420-421). She obviously resents Melibea’s status in society and Sempronio’s praise of her provokes this sudden outburst of spleen. Elicia asserts that Melibea is no natural beauty and that if she is considered attractive it is due to her ability to pay for her appearance: “Aquella hermosura por una moneda se compra de la tienda [...] si algo tiene de hermosura es por buenos atavíos que trae” (421). The jealousy at the heart of her diatribe breaks through when she finally remarks to Sempronio “mas creo que soy tan hermosa como vuestra Melibea” (421). Areúsa chimes in and is even more cutting in her rejection of Melibea’s supposed beauty than Elicia. She claims that, like all women of noble station, Melibea’s appearance is nothing but an expensive façade:

Las riquezas las hazen a estas hermosas y ser alabadas, que no las gracias de su cuerpo. Que, assí goze de mí, unas tetas tiene, para ser donzella, como si tres vezes hoviesse parido; no parecen sino dos grandes calabaças. El vientre, no se le he visto, pero juzgando por lo otro, creo que le tiene tan floxo como vieja de cincuenta años. (422)¹²

¹² On this speech, Scarborough states: “Areúsa paints a grotesque picture, indeed, of Melibea, supplying the others at table with a mental image that erases Sempronio’s flattering description of her” (“Speaking of *Celestina*,” 222).

When Celestina tries to restore peace to the table, Elicia again asserts herself, claiming that it is impossible to eat in the company of one “que en mi cara me ha porfiado que es más gentil su andrajo de Melibea que yo” (424). Sempronio reminds her that it is she who began to make comparisons (or, rather contrasts) between Melibea and herself and that he had not implied that Melibea was more attractive than she. The feud between Elicia and Sempronio is momentarily put on hold when Celestina asks about Calisto’s state of mind. After Pármeno comments that he is impatient and desperate for news of Melibea, Celestina pronounces a monologue on the physical effects of one who is in love. Sempronio seizes on this trend in the conversation to assert that he understands the pangs of love sickness, as he has suffered them all in his desire for Elicia. His long enumeration of the trials and tribulations he has suffered for Elicia is exaggerated and, as Russell comments, totally out of both character and financial ability for someone in domestic service. Russell also proposes that Sempronio may, indeed, be infatuated with Melibea and thus usurps the kinds of love complaints that Calisto’s noble status gives him the luxury and time to suffer (426). The servant, also mimicking Calisto’s rhetoric, pronounces a long list of heroic and dangerous feats that he has pursued to win Elicia’s affections, none of which he has actually performed.¹³ Elicia is not deceived by Sempronio’s improbable and overblown litany of his sacrifices for her, telling him that she has another lover, better than he and she does not care if he never darkens her door again. Celestina finally ends the arguing, saying that Elicia’s show of anger is actually proof of her affection for Sempronio. This argument seems to hit the mark since Celestina next remarks on the fondling and friskiness of the young lovers while still seated at the table. Elicia seems to have forgotten her anger for, when the couples are interrupted by Lucrecia’s knock at the door, she proclaims that “el solaz es derramado” (428). She is obviously enjoying Sempronio’s caresses and hates to have their pleasures disrupted.

Elicia figures briefly near the end of Auto XI when Celestina returns home after telling Calisto that she has arranged for him to speak with Melibea at the doors of her home that very evening. Again, Elicia reprimands Celestina for returning home late at night but, on this occasion, she seems more genuinely concerned and not simply irritated. She warns Celestina that, wandering about in the dark, “Tropearás donde caygas, y mueras” (467).¹⁴ This remark, of course,

¹³ Calisto, likewise, does not perform any heroic gestures to win Melibea, although he claims to have done so in his opening words to her in Auto I.

¹⁴ Russell agrees that, here, Elicia’s concern does seem genuine and that Celestina’s reply about the precautions she takes are an interpolation in the *Tragicomedia* that Rojas added to show the sincerity of Elicia’s worries (467).

prefigures the death of the *alcahueta* in the following act. Elicia's concerns seem well founded, as well as ironic, for her role in Auto XII will be that of sole witness to the brutal death of Celestina at the hands of Sempronio and Pármeno.¹⁵ After returning from a long night keeping watch outside the doors of Melibea's home, the servants come to Celestina's house and demand that she share with them equal parts of the monies and gifts bestowed on her by Calisto. Celestina greedily refuses to share anything with them, claiming that they should ask Calisto for rewards rather than ask her to share what she has "honestly" earned. When the men's threats become violent, Celestina calls to Elicia to wake up and come to her aid. Celestina's last bit of defense in the face of the mounting threats is to declare herself and Elicia defenseless women without a man in the house to protect them. Celestina cannot, even at this crucial moment, avoid a bald-faced lie, saying that there is no man in the house that night because Elicia has been faithful to Sempronio alone. Celestina refuses again to relinquish a share of Calisto's gifts and taunts Pármeno by reminding him of his mother's past. When she tries to throw the men out, Sempronio draws his sword. At this point, Elicia intervenes, pleading with Pármeno to stop Sempronio whom she calls "esse desvariado" (498). Sempronio stabs Celestina and, even as she cries out for confession, Pármeno shows himself equally blood thirsty, urging Sempronio to finish her off: "Dale, dale, acábala..." (499). Elicia pronounces the pair "cruels enemigos" (499) and calls the fallen Celestina "mi madre y mi bien todo" (499). When the authorities quickly arrive, alerted by the neighbors who have heard the disturbance, Sempronio and Pármeno jump from the windows in a vain attempt to avoid justice.

I have outlined Elicia's appearances in the *Tragicomedia* prior to the demise of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno for the purpose of showing how Rojas has crafted her character up to the time of these deaths. We have seen her lie, insult Sempronio as well as Celestina, rage in a fit of jealousy and envy at Melibea, and show no interest in learning any of Celestina's useful crafts that she can take advantage of in the future. All in all, none of these appear to be qualities one associates with depth of feeling or vulnerability. However, the death of one of her lovers, Sempronio, and that of the woman under whose protection and roof she resides bring out new aspects of Elicia's

¹⁵ Part of Rojas's dramatic technique involves having eye-witnesses who tell others about the details of the violent deaths. Elicia sees Celestina murdered, Sosia and Tristán (and probably Elicia) are among the crowd at the execution of Sempronio and Pármeno by beheading, Sosia, Tristán, Melibea, and Lucrecia all witness Calisto's fatal fall from the walls of Melibea's garden, and Pleberio watches as his daughter throws herself from a high tower.

personality. It is undeniable that her grief morphs into a plan for vengeance on Melibea and Calisto who she not only holds ultimately responsible for the loss of Sempronio and Celestina, but who also represent that strata of society whom she envies and despises.¹⁶ If, as Abril-Sánchez claims, “Las rameras tenían el favor de la sociedad y eran protegidas por los caballeros que las adoraban,” (9) Elicia may have had other motives for seeking revenge on someone like Calisto. Perhaps he was the sort of *caballero* who sought out her services but certainly would not recognize her in public or even acknowledge her existence outside the brothel. This is pure assumption on my part, but it would help explain her bitter quest for what she considers justice for the deaths of her lover and Celestina.¹⁷ At first glance, the plan to destroy the lovers in an affair that Celestina had helped to arrange may seem a strange way to revenge her death. Her sometime lover, Sempronio has paid with his life for the murder of Celestina for which he and Pármeno were justifiably punished. But Elicia reasons that if the three had not become involved in the affairs of Calisto and Melibea, they would not have quarreled, greed would not have reared its ugly head, tempers would not have swelled, and tragedy could have been avoided. Elicia’s sense of loss is such that she intends to go after its source, cut off the root cause of her loss, and, in the end, reverse societal hierarchies. In other words, she, a prostitute, a member of one of the lowest rungs on the social ladder will make the rich and powerful pay for her distress by inflicting tragedy on them.

As noted, Elicia is the only eye-witness to the murder of Celestina and thus it should come as no surprise that her reaction is more visceral than those who learn of the death after the fact. In Auto XV, when Elicia arrives at the home of Areúsa to tell her the tragic news, she overhears Areúsa arguing with Centurio and mistakes the shouting for cries of grief, believing that Areúsa has already learned of the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno. While mistakenly thinking this is the case and before entering the house and

¹⁶ In speaking of female laments, Haywood points out that they often contain a curse on those a woman holds responsible for her loss. Although she proposes that “the cursing motif arises from the mourner’s powerlessness,” she too admits that “the act of cursing might also be viewed as an act of self-empowerment, as an attempt to seek revenge and to influence future events through the power of the will” (32-33).

¹⁷ Recall that Pleberio hints at his own youthful indiscretions in his diatribe against the power of love in his lament for Melibea: “Bien pensé que de tus [love’s] lazos me avía librado quando los quarenta años toqué, quando fui contento con mi conjugal compañera...” (615). Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suspect that Calisto, who we know is 23 years old (336), has had adventures with public women as did Pleberio in his youth.

learning the real reason for the uproar, she encourages her cousin to grieve: “Llore, llore, vierta lágrimas, pues no se hallan tales hombres a cada rincón” (532). She bemoans the loss of Sempronio y Pármeno (“tales hombres”) despite their culpability in Celestina’s murder and invites Areúsa to mourn with her. Although not yet speaking directly to Areúsa, she continues to address her friend in this same vein: “Messe aquellos cabellos como yo, triste, he fecho; sepa que es perder buena vida más trabajo¹⁸ que la misma muerte. ¡O cuánto más la quiero que hasta aquí, por el gran sentimiento que muestra!” (532). When Elicia does enter, Areúsa is stunned to see her dressed in mourning garb. Elicia is hardly able to speak when Areúsa pleads with her to explain what has prompted her obvious distress. She begs her to stop pulling out her hair and scratching her face, outward signs of grieving (Haywood, “Models for Mourning,” 82). Elicia tells her that Sempronio, Pármeno, and Celestina are dead. Her lament for Celestina is especially telling and speaks of her utter dependence on the *alcahueta*. She calls Celestina “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 ciudad y arrabales...” (534). The use of anaphora highlights each of the ways in which Elicia had benefitted from Celestina and emphasizes all the disadvantages that the loss of Celestina portends for her.¹⁹ On this element of Elicia’s lament, Haywood comments that “the object of her lament is another woman and the loss of the protection of a female micro-society” (“Sola yo,” 31). Elicia also tells Areúsa that she had witnessed Celestina’s gruesome murder: “Mill cuchilladas le vi dar a mis ojos; en mi regaço me la mataron” (534). Areúsa is shocked and reacts with a series of exclamations²⁰ that ends when she demands to know who had killed the *alcahueta*. In response, Elicia offers a lengthy explanation about the servants’ and Celestina’s roles in Calisto’s affair with Melibea, the *alcahueta*’s refusal to share with Sempronio and Pármeno the gold chain given her by Calisto, and the violent dispute that ended with Celestina’s murder. In her version of the events, Elicia makes several attempts to explain and even to justify the murder. She notes twice that when the servants appeared at Celestina’s home

¹⁸ Russell translates “trabajo” here as “tormento” or “dolor” (332).

¹⁹ Russell calls Elicia’s lament for Celestina “indudablemente genuino” (534).

²⁰ Russell labels Areúsa’s initial reactions as “hyperbolic” but also states that her lament “sirve para insistir de nuevo en que los miembros de las clases marginadas no son menos capaces que sus superiores sociales de sentir y de expresar un pesar auténtico ante la muerte de un amante” (534).

they were tired from spending all night on guard outside Melibea's doors,²¹ that they had arrived angry, and "los aquexava la necesidad, que priva todo amor" (536). When Areúsa asks about the fate of Sempronio and Pármeno, Elicia reports that they jumped from the windows in an attempt to escape but that they were caught and summarily beheaded. Areúsa utters some brief expressions of anguish over the loss of Pármeno but soon regains her self-control and admonishes Elicia to stop crying as it cannot restore their lovers' lives.²² Elicia, however, continues to bemoan the loss of Sempronio as well as that of Celestina, who she again calls her "madre" (537):

¡Ay, que ravio! ¡Ay mezquina, que salgo de seso! ¡Ay, que no hallo quien lo sienta como yo!²³ No hay quien pierda lo que yo pierdo [...]. ¿Adónde yré, que pierdo madre, manto y abrigo; pierdo amigo, y tal que nunca faltava de mí marido? ¡O, Celestina sabia, honrrada y autorizada, cuántas faltas me encobrias con tu buen saber! Tú trabajavas, yo holgava; tú entravas contino como abeja por casa; yo destruía,²⁴ que otra cosa no sabía hazer. (536-537)

83

Several aspects of these lines bear comment. First Elicia expresses anger ("ravio"). Next she bemoans the loss of her lover, Sempronio, who replaced any need for a husband. Finally she mourns the death of her protector, Celestina. For Celestina, now deceased, she has only praise as she enumerates her good qualities. These latter she openly contrasts with her own laziness and worthlessness. Here, Elicia is painting a realistic picture of herself as we have seen her to be frivolous and unwilling to learn any of the "mañas" that Celestina possessed. On this point, Lida de Malkiel maintains that "un fondo de verdad se refleja en la evocación en que ella misma se pinta como toda dependiente y protegida de la vieja" (675).

Immediately following these expressions of loss and regret, Elicia turns her attention to revenge. She blames Calisto and Melibea as ultimately

²¹ "como ellos viniessen cansados una mañana de acompañar a su amo toda la noche" (535) and "el enojo grande y cansancio que traían" (536).

²² On Areúsa's lament, Haywood asserts that she "is quick to dismiss the deaths, counsel acceptance and comfort Elicia [...]. Her real concern [...] is exposed by Rojas in the commercial metaphor, '*no se pueden por lágrimas comprar ni restaurar sus vidas...*'" ("Models for Mourning," 83).

²³ This focus on one's own suffering is reflected in Pleberio's lament but it also includes motifs that Haywood specifically identifies as characteristic of female laments such as anger, the extremity of one's grief, and the inclusion of a curse.

²⁴ Russell explains the meaning of "destruía" here as "malgastar" or "malbaratar la hacienda" (537).

responsible for the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno and, as Haywood explains, her accusation is expressed in terms of a curse (“Sola yo,” 32). She curses not only Calisto and Melibea but also “the garden that symbolizes their union” (Haywood, “Models for Mourning,” 85):

¡O Calisto y Melibea, causadores de tantas muertes! ¡Mal fin ayan vuestros amores, en mal sabor se conviertan vuestros dulces plazerres! Tórnese lloro vuestra gloria, trabajo vuestro descanso. Las yerbas deleytosas donde tomáys los hurtados solazes se conviertan en culebras, los cantares se os tornen lloro, los sombreros árboles del huerto se sequen con vuestra vista, sus flores olorosas se tornen de negra color. (537)

84

As Russell points out, much of Elicia’s curse transforms the elements of a traditional *locus amoenus* into a place of gloom, a dystopic reversal of the motifs commonly associated with a pleasant setting (537). This is certainly true, but it also reveals that Elicia knows details about the lovers’ rendezvous in the garden and even mentions songs of which we see evidence later in Auto XIX when Melibea and Lucrecia sing as they await Calisto’s visit.²⁵ The obvious reference to the “culebras” immediately conjures images of paradise lost,²⁶ the expulsion from the garden that Elicia desires and which culminates in the fall of Calisto from the garden walls.²⁷ Haywood notes that Elicia’s lament ends with the words of her curse on Calisto and Melibea only because, at this point, Areúsa interrupts her (“Models for Mourning,” 85). Areúsa tells Elicia to cease her wailing and look for a way to exact revenge since the deaths of their friends cannot be remedied.²⁸ Elicia seems not to grasp Areúsa’s meaning and, at this moment, all she wishes is her own death, so immense is the loss she feels: “Plugiera a Dios que fuera yo con ellos y no quedara para llorar a todos” (538). Elicia next reiterates elements from her curse, contrasting the festive visits of Calisto to Melibea’s garden with her pitiable situation. She calls Melibea “estiercol” and accuses her of being so arrogant that she would be pleased and

²⁵ In fact, Elicia’s curse is a parody of elements in the song of Auto XIX in which Melibea and Lucrecia sing of the garden, its “viciosas flores,” “dulces árboles sombreros,” under the light of the “estrellas.” (577-580).

²⁶ On the symbol of the snake in relationship to Melibea, see Ivette Martí Caloca, “Melibea: eje de la *scriptum ligata* de *La Celestina*.”

²⁷ Pleberio, in his lament, curses the world itself calling it a “prado lleno de serpientes” (611).

²⁸ Díaz Tena sees Areúsa’s attitude to the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno as “fría y resolutiva: puesto que ya no se puede hacer nada por ellos, lo mejor es seguir con sus vidas y no perder el tiempo en llantos” (92).

proud to learn that blood has been spilt in her service (538). Areúsa again interrupts and proposes to find out exactly when and how Calisto visits Melibea so that Elicia's threats of revenge can be made real. With this information Areúsa proposes to ask Centurio, a ruffian who owes her many favors, to kill Calisto. María Eugenia Díaz Tena asserts that Areúsa "se dedicará ahora a planear su venganza con desapego, odio y agilidad mental" (92). Whereas Elicia's curse could be seen in the abstract, a tangent to her own suffering, Haywood claims that Areúsa "has not understood the curse as such and that she considers human agency necessary to bring about the destruction of Calisto's and Melibea's relationship" ("Models of Mourning," 85). Elicia begins to see that her threats can, and should, lead to action. She does not hesitate to act on her cousin's advice and proposes that they get details of the nightly rendezvous from Sosia, Calisto's young stable boy. Areúsa says that she will flatter and charm him until he tells her everything they need to know to take their revenge.

85

Areúsa asks Elicia to come and live with her. She tries to encourage her cousin, telling her that she should not be alone and that she will soon find a new lover. She tells Elicia that she feels her pain and that she will be the instrument to make those responsible pay for Elicia's suffering. Elicia thanks her for her offer of a new home but expresses her intention to remain in Celestina's house. She will be there to receive the men and women who are in the habit of meeting there. Elicia is also aware that these affairs may lead to her reaping "algún provecho" (541). She adds that her own clients would not know where else to find her. On a practical note, too, Elicia says that the rent has already been paid for a year. In this scene, we see Elicia's continued reliance on Celestina, even after her death as she will continue to live in the house they had shared and prostitute herself and others there.²⁹

Areúsa and Elicia work out their plot to destroy Calisto and Melibea in Auto XVII. The act begins with a soliloquy by Elicia in which she vows to leave off mourning. Her first reasons are financial; if her clients see her dressed in black and grieving, none of them will want to visit her: "ni blanca ni presente veo entrar por mi puerta" (553-554). She wishes she had sooner heeded Areúsa who had told her that suffering will not bring the dead back to life. She questions why she is grieving so for Sempronio who, given his temperament, might have also killed her: "¿qué sé si matara a mí, como era acelerado y loco, como hizo a aquella vieja que tenía yo por madre?" (554)³⁰ She resolves to dry her eyes, put on makeup,

²⁹ Lida de Malkiel asserts that Elicia "continúa en la casa de Celestina por afecto a su recuerdo y también por los parroquianos y por el alquiler pagado" (675).

³⁰ On this point, see page 228 of Scarborough's article "Speaking of *Celestina*."

dress in her best clothes, and clean the house “por que los que passaren vean que es ya desterrado el dolor” (555). Lida de Malkiel notes that in this soliloquy Elicia “se detiene a justificar ante sí misma su cambio de opinión sobre los muertos y, por último, busca el arrimo de una nueva tutela, la de su diestra prima” (676).

Elicia returns to Areúsa’s house to see if she has yet spoken to Sosia and what she has learned from Calisto’s young servant. When Areúsa sees her cousin’s change in appearance she is glad. She even contends that perhaps Celestina’s death was good for both of them, in terms of revenue and liberty: “Por esto se dize que los muertos abren los ojos de los que biven, a unos con hazien-das, a otros con libertad, como a ti” (556). Just at that moment, Sosia knocks at Areúsa’s door. Areúsa hides Elicia behind a curtain so that she can overhear how she will flatter Sosia and get all the information they need from him.³¹ The young stable boy reacts, as one would expect, to Areúsa’s charms; she tells him that he reminds her of her long lost Pármeno and professes her affection for him. She then warns him to guard himself from danger because he knows what happened to Sempronio and Pármeno in service to Calisto. She tells him that others have told her that he now accompanies his master every night to visit Melibea in her garden and she fears for his safety on these dangerous adventures. Sosia defends himself from such gossip and declares that he has accompanied Calisto on his nocturnal visits only eight times in the last month. He also reveals that the lovers have a rendezvous planned for that very night at midnight, and if anyone says he was out with his master on other nights, they are lying. Areúsa keeps up the ruse that she is trying to separate rumor from fact. She wants Sosia to tell her the route they take to Melibea’s house so that if anyone should tell her differently, she will know that it is only idle gossip. She asks for such detail because she claims to fear for her “new lover’s” safety. Once she has all the information she needs, she swiftly dismisses Sosia. When Elicia reappears from her hiding place, Areúsa tells Elicia that she has just witnessed a master at work: “Assí sé yo tratar los tales, assí salen de mis manos los asnos, apaleados como éste; y los locos, corridos; y los discretos, espantados; y los devotos, alterados; y los castos, encendidos. Pues, prima, aprende, que otra arte es ésta que la de Celestina...” (562).³²

³¹ Russell sees in the scene of the hidden eavesdropper a classic situation from comic theater (556). It is also reminiscent of Elicia hiding her lover, Crito, when Sempronio comes to Celestina’s house in *Auto I*.

³² Díaz Tena comments on this passage: “[Areúsa] es la mujer que con su voz [...] consigue todo lo que desea y que lleva a los hombres a la perdición [...]”; este es el caso de Pármeno —al

Elicia's grief has evolved from the moment of the initial shock of witnessing the murder of Celestina and the execution of Sempronio y Pármeno. In her initial lament she expressed feelings of disorientation, abandonment, and anger at Calisto and Melibea who she holds responsible for the deaths. Her curse on the lovers also evolves and becomes a plan of action that she will execute with Areúsa's aid. If we look at this entire gamut of Elicia's reactions and actions in response to the deaths of Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno, we see them morph and expand. Her process of mourning goes beyond words or weeping and begets a concrete plan determined to destroy the happiness enjoyed by Calisto and Melibea. The development of Elicia's lament contrasts with both that of Pleberio and of Calisto. The former's soliloquy in Auto XXI is lengthy and recited in both concrete and abstract terms as he mourns his dead daughter, rages against his own fate, and finally curses the existence that fortune has dealt him. Calisto's short-lived lament for his accomplices is insincere, egoistic, and concerned only with how these deaths will reflect on him. These laments do not change the course of action in the *Tragicomedia* in contrast to Elicia's lamentation which takes on a life of its own with profound consequences. The ultimate by-products of her grief, wrath, and curses will be the death of Calisto and the suicide of Melibea.

87

Elicia's last appearance in the *Tragicomedia* is in Auto XVIII. As part of the scheme with Areúsa to enlist Centurio's help to bring about Calisto's demise, Elicia must convincingly play a part in a bit of meta-drama the women have concocted. Since we know that Areúsa is angry with Centurio, as evidenced by their argument at the beginning of Auto XV, Elicia pretends to play the role of peacemaker between the two. The two women arrive at Centurio's house and Elicia tries to induce Areúsa to embrace Centurio and mend their relationship. Areúsa refuses to do so claiming that Centurio has not done her any of the favors she had asked of him even though she had rescued him countless times from the arms of justice. She claims he is a despicable ingrate, an accusation to which he is quick to reply, saying he is willing to do whatever Areúsa may ask of him in order to return to her good graces. No dirty job is too big for him. He claims that: "Un desafío con tres juntos, y si más vinieren, que no huya, por tu amor; matar un hombre; cortar una pierna o brazo; harpar el gesto de alguna que se aya ygualado contigo: estas tales cosas, antes serán hechas que encomendadas" (565). After this pronouncement of

que seduce y aleja del camino de la virtud—, Sosia —a quien embaucará con sus palabras y seductoras insinuaciones— o Calisto —que probablemente pasó alguna vez por la cama de Areúsa y su muerte será, en parte, fruto de la venganza orquestada por ella" (87).

bravado, Elicia jumps in with praise for Centurio and asks Areúsa to forgive him since he is obviously willing to do anything, even to commit murder, for her. Areúsa agrees only on the condition that Centurio wreak vengeance on Calisto that very night. Centurio's reply is telling since he says that he does not need any details about Calisto's comings and goings: "Todo el negocio de sus amores sé, y los que por su causa ay muertos, y lo que os tocava a vosotras, por dónde va, y a qué hora, y con quiénes" (566). If Centurio knows all these details about the affair, it is absurd that Calisto and Melibea still think that their tryst is "secret" since it has become common knowledge even among the lowliest of criminals in the city. Centurio boasts of his prowess with the sword and brazenly asks what sort of death the women want to order for Calisto from among the "sietecientas y setenta species" (568) that are in his repertoire. Elicia seems to back away from the idea of killing Calisto and pretends to be frightened of Centurio's raw cruelty. Of course, this is part of the act, reacting as should a woman to such "manly" displays of primal violence. Areúsa, in turn, plays her role as the pitiless wronged party, telling Centurio to kill Calisto in any way he likes. She then admonishes Elicia for her seemingly hesitant reaction to the idea of murder, reminding her of the pain that Calisto and Melibea had caused her: "Llore Melibea como tú has hecho" (569). No more than do Areúsa and Elicia leave than we learn that Centurio has no intention of getting his hands dirty with such a dangerous deed. After the two women leave he calls them "putas atestadas de razones" (570). He talks to himself at some length about how to get out of completing the mission without any risk to himself. Finally he decides to enlist Traso el Coxo and a couple of other ruffians to simply make a ruckus in the street and scare Calisto and his servants. Russell observes that "Centurio no planea, pues, como tampoco Traso y los suyos, ningún daño a Calisto ni a los suyos..." (571). However, when Traso and his minions make some disturbances that evening that alert Tristán and Sosia to potential trouble, Calisto rushes to their aid and falls to his death from the garden wall. In the following Auto, Melibea will commit suicide in response to loss of her lover.

The plan hatched by Areúsa and Elicia to fulfill their curse on the lovers does not actually take place as they had conceived it but Calisto dies that very evening. While neither the curse nor the ensuing scheme with Centurio are the direct reasons for Calisto's fall, the women's actions—an offshoot of their loss as well as their envy of the lovers' happiness and seeming indifference to the suffering they caused others—have the effect they desired. The deaths of Calisto and Melibea, both literal downfalls, can ultimately be traced to the reaction of two prostitutes to their loss of one of their own and two of their most loyal

lovers. Elicia's lament and reaction to the death of those close to her ultimately lead to actions, actions with dire aftermaths. Her curse on those she blames for her suffering is not in vain and her lament brings about real and tragic changes in the lives of others. The voice of a prostitute, the pupil of Celestina, actually has the last word. Even though it is Pleberio's voice that we hear at the end of the *Tragicomedia*, his words reflect a reality to which Elicia has significantly contributed. The words and the actions of the prostitute destroy the social order on which Pleberio's view of the world had rested up to now. Elicia's lament is a compelling factor in the events of the *Tragicomedia* where loss, grief, and revenge are some of the consequences unleashed by unbridled desire. Rojas contends that the work is a warning about the chaos that love can cause. That chaos extends to multiple lives lost and highlights the toll death takes on those left to mourn the departed.

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