

THE USES OF THE ASIDE IN *CELESTINA*

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The aside, a fundamental device in drama from the classical theater onward, is yet another fascinating piece of the *Celestina* puzzle. Although there are many different types, the aside can be defined as follows: when two characters are on stage together, an aside is any utterance by either speaker not intended to be heard by the other and not in fact heard or properly heard by him. A variation is possible with three characters on stage together, for then any remark made by the first to the second not meant to be heard by, and not heard or heard properly by the third, is an aside.<sup>1</sup> Rojas uses this dramatic technique to bridge the gap between drama and narrative; it is particularly useful in the *novela dialogada*, and later becomes a fundamental device in the early picaresque, so closely linked to *Celestina*.

The first and most obvious function of the aside in drama is to advance the plot -- to let the audience and sometimes also a character, know something while excluding another character who is present. One common instance is that of two characters plotting against a third in his presence. It is curious, and also significant, that there is no example of an aside functioning to advance the plot in *Celestina*. I will take up Rojas' exclusion of this type of aside later.

A second function of the aside figures importantly in characterization. The character speaking reveals not only important clues to his own personality, beliefs, and relationships with the other characters, but may also reveal these same aspects for other characters present. For example, when Sempronio says, aside, in his master Calisto's presence: "No me engaño yo, que loco está este mi amo" (I, 25),<sup>2</sup> it reveals a pragmatic attitude toward his master's situation. This aside engages the reader or audience directly and we, like the observers of *Las Meninas*, are drawn into the work and participate in it.

Most asides in *Celestina* are of this type, but even the aside directed to another character prompts a closer listening or reading. For example, in Act IV *Celestina* talks to an invisible Plutón in the presence of Melibea: "Por aquí anda el diablo aparejando oportunidad, arrezando el mal a la otra. ¡Ea! ¡buen amigo, tener rezio! Agora es mi tiempo o nunca. No la dexes, llévala de aquí quien digo" (IV, 163). If this aside

reveals Celestina's continued reliance upon her pact with the devil, highlighting at the same time the hypocrisy of her words to Melibea, at another moment she reveals an unsettled confidence in her conjuration, when she apprehensively exclaims: "¡En hora mala acá vine, si me falta mi conjuro! ¡Ea pues! Bien sé a quien digo ¡Ce, hermano que se va todo a perder!" (IV, 87).

Not only is Celestina's psyche revealed through these asides, but we are also "let in" on how she views her progress towards her goals. When she says aside: "¡Más fuerte estaba Troya, y aun otras más bravas he yo amansado! Ninguna tempestad mucho dura," we sense that although Melibea seems to stand firm at first, Celestina will persist. Additionally, Lucrecia in another aside reinforces the audience's realization that her mistress is yielding to Celestina's suasions: "¡Ya, Ya, perdida es mi ama! ¡Secretamente quiere que venga Celestina? ¡Fraude ay! ¡Más le querrá dar, que lo dicho!" (IV, 93). The aside helps characterize Lucrecia by revealing what she is thinking, when she says: "No miento yo, que ¡mal va este fecho!" (IV, 93). This clarifies Lucrecia's opinion of Celestina and her fear at Melibea's involvement with the go-between. Celestina in turn, as she gains confidence, says aside, but in front of Melibea: "más será menester y más harás; y aunque no se te agradezca" (IV, 93). This help to bring to the surface Celestina's aggressive, hard-hearted determination to succeed at all costs.

Similarly, in Act VII Pármeno's thoughts and feelings and Celestina's vindictive, manipulative motivation are articulated in the asides. After Celestina praises Pármeno's mother's *brujerías*, Pármeno expresses the shame that this praise has caused him--exactly Celestina's intention: "No la madre Dios más esta vieja, que ella me da plazer con estos loores de sus palabras" (VII, 118). When Pármeno implies that Celestina's perseverance in her sins makes her more reprehensible than his mother, we are prepared for the bawd's next assault in the following aside: "Lastimástemme, don Loquillo. ¿A las verdades nos andamos? Pues espera, que yo te tocaré donde te duela" (VII, 119). A similar aside in Act IX reveals Celestina's determination to punish Melibea for criticizing her: "Tú me pagarás, doña loca, la sobra de tu yra" (IX, 153). Since up to this point Celestina has been flattering Melibea, the aside is thus our guide to what Celestina is thinking as opposed to what she is saying. Another instance of this kind of aside is seen when Celestina says to Sempronio, in answer to Calisto's praise of her: "Dile que cierre la boca y comience abrir la bolsa" (I, 46). We see suddenly Celestina's avaricious and duplicitous nature. It is through the aside that she becomes a multi-dimensional, thinking person.

This is true for other characters as well. When Calisto rewards Celestina for her services with a gold chain, Pármeno's greedy nature surfaces in an aside to Sempronio: "¡Cadenilla la llama! ¿No lo oyes, Sempronio? No estima el gasto. Pues yo te certifico no diesse mi parte por medio marco de oro, por mal que la vieja lo reparta" (XI, 163). However, an earlier aside by Pármeno reveals the power Celestina has over him, achieved through the erotic pleasure she procures for him. Pármeno begs Celestina in front of Areusa: "Madre mía, por amor de Dios, que no salga yo de aquí sin buen concierto; que me ha muerto de amores su vista. Ofrécele quanto mi padre te dexó para mí, dile que le daré quanto tengo. ¡Ea! díselo, que me parece que no me quiere mirar" (VII, 127). Pármeno will

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give anything in exchange for Areusa's favors--a reversal of certain attitudes expressed earlier, in *auto* I. He has come to seek the *loco amor* that he criticized in Calisto, and falls victim to the same procuress.

This brings us to a third important use of the aside -- to underline a didactic level in the text. A look at who delivers the asides and what is said in them clarifies this point. Many of the asides are spoken by the servants as they comment on their master's actions. Throughout the work, Sempronio and Pármemo deliver authoritative asides, reflecting the moral stated in one half of the *precipit* by Rojas: "compuesta en reprehensión de los locos enamorados, que, vencidos en su desordenado apetito, a sus amigas llaman e dizen ser su dios." For example, when Calisto calls Melibea his god, Sempronio says: "¡Algo es lo que digo! ¡A más ha de yr este hecho! ¡no basta loco, sino ereje!" (I, 25). He later reiterates his criticism of Calisto's sinful worship of Melibea by speaking directly to an imagined listener: "Oyáste qué blasfemia? ¿Viste qué ceguedad?" (I, 27). He goes on to criticize Calisto's presumption: "¡O pusilánimo! ¡O fideputa! ¡Qué Nembrot! ¡Qué magno Alexandre! Los quales no sólo del señorío del mundo, más del cielo se juzgaron ser dignos" (I, 28).

In the same scene Sempronio exclaims: "¡Qué mentiras é qué locuras dirá agora este cautivo de mí amo!" (I, 32).

When Pármemo and Sempronio are witnesses to Celestina's manipulation of Calisto, they comment aside as to what a fool their master is. When Sempronio warns Pármemo that Calisto might hear him he, Pármemo, exclaims aside: "¡Oyrá el diablo! Está colgado de la boca de la vieja, sordo y mudo y ciego, hecho personaje sin son, que aunque le diésemos higas, diría que alcáramos las manos a Dios, rogando por buen fin de sus amores" (XI, 164).

In Act X Melibea's servant Lucrecia sarcastically comments aside in reaction to Alisa's belated doubts as to the propriety of Celestina's frequent visits: "Tarde acuerda nuestra ama" (X, 161). Lucrecia's aside in Act IX reiterates another moral purpose set out in the other half of the *precipit*: "fecha en aviso de los engaños de las alcahuetas y malos y lisonjeros sirvientes," as she exclaims in the presence of Celestina and Sempronio: "¡Assí te arrastre, traydora! ¿Tú no sabes qué es? Haze la vieja falsa sus hechizos y vasse; después házese de nuevas" (IX, 151). Earlier, in Act V, in Celestina's presence, Sempronio had said, aside: "¡O lisonjera vieja! ¡O vieja llena de mal!" . . . (V, 97).

In addition to these three important features of the aside in *Celestina*, the aside also provides comic relief and underlines the masters' gullibility. For example, after Calisto ends his Petrarchan description of Melibea in Act I, proclaiming: "no ha más menester para convertir los hombres en piedras," Sempronio answers under his breath, "¡Más en asnos." (I, 32). In the love scene between Calisto and Melibea, Lucrecia's asides relieve the tension, at the same time piquing the reader's interest and leaving him more eager to return his attention to the love scene. Interrupting the lover's *devaneos*, Lucrecia says, "Mala landre me mate si más los scucho. ¿Vida es ésta? ¡Que me esté yo deshaziendo de dentera, y ella esqui-vándose porque la ruegan! Ya, ya apaziguado es el ruydo: no ovieron me-

nester despartidores. Pero también me los haría yo, si estos necios de sus criados me fablassen entre día; pero esperan que los tengo que yr a buscar" (XIX, 227). This aside also helps to reveal Lucrecia's susceptibility to the sexual desires through which Celestina manipulates all of the characters. Later in the scene Lucrecia, still eavesdropping on the love-making, comments aside, "Ya me duele a mi la cabeça descuchar y no a ellos de hablar, ni los braços de retoçar, ni las bocas de besar. ¡Andar! Ya callan; a tres me parece que va la vencida" (XIX, 227).

Having chosen a genre which excludes narrative commentary, Rojas makes expert use of the aside to reveal to the reader important contrasts between what the characters say and what they think. Thus the device is made to serve here, as it would later in the picaresque novel, to reveal hypocrisy and deviousness.

In *Celestina* one is reminded by the servants' asides how blind their masters, both Calisto and Melibea, are. In Act V Pármeno whispers to Sempronio so that Celestina and Calisto do not hear: "Aquel atento escuchar de Celestina da materia de alargar en su razón a nuestro amo. Llégate a ella, dale del pie, hagámosle de señas que no espere más, sino que se vaya. Que no hay tan loco hombre nacido, que solo mucho hable" (V, 112). This aside shows not only that Calisto is being drawn into Celestina's net but also reveals what his servants think of him and of his mad behaviour. Celestina knows, too, as she reveals in her answering aside to Sempronio, "que el caerá de su asno." Pármeno's aside to Sempronio in Calisto's presence trenchantly identifies his malaise when he exclaims of Calisto, "Allá yrás con el diablo tú y malos años! ¡Y en tal hora comieses el diacitrón como Apuleyo el veneno, que le convirtió en asno!" (VIII, 139). This aside recapitulates and reinforces the *precipit*. Calisto, because of his *loco amor*, has become an ass, but he is too blind to see it. He is unaware of the real world and does not perceive the sarcasm in comments made by his "faithful" servants. He is totally unaware of the increasing disloyalty of Pármeno and Sempronio. Through Rojas' masterful application of the aside we, the audience (readers), become aware of the increasing cynicism of the servants, while the masters remain blinded to it. For example, when Calisto sends Sempronio for food, he says: "mi fiel criado, mi buen consejero, mi leal servidor, . . . cierto tengo, según tu limpieza de servicio, quieres tanto mi vida como la tuya" (VIII, 138). Sempronio answers this ingenuous praise with an aside to Pármeno which brings us back to reality by mockingly asking Pármeno to steal extra food for their girlfriends while he is at it: "¿Créese tú, Pármeno? Bien sé que no lo jurarías. Acuérdate, si fueres por conserva, apañes un bote para aquella gitezilla, que nos va más, y a buen entendedor . . . En la bragueta cabrá" (VIII, 138-139).

Asides are used with greatest frequency in the key acts of *Celestina*. In Act I there are eleven, functioning to inform us of Calisto's reaction to his new infatuation, to show us the servants' opinion of his strange behavior, and to reveal other aspects of the personalities of all three. In Act IV, a turning point of the work, eight asides function in the characterization of Celestina, Melibea, and Lucrecia and reveal their reactions to Celestina's manipulative powers.

It is significant that thirty of the thirty-nine asides spoken are delivered by Pärmeno, Sempronio, and Lucrecia. The remaining nine are by Celestina. None of the asides is delivered by Calisto or Melibea, for the device functions almost exclusively to reveal reticence, deviousness, or duplicity of character. We are made aware of the hypocrisy in the disparity between what the servants and Celestina say and what they think. In the absence of any asides, Calisto and Melibea seem flat, one-dimensional characters by contrast. We feel no strong attraction to them nor do we react against them. The servants become significant characters largely through the use of the aside. Calisto and Melibea are not very interesting because there is no difference established between what they are thinking and what they are saying. They are transparent. There is no challenge to the reader or viewer to try to understand them, while we have still today not puzzled out the "real" Celestina. It is partly through the aside that Celestina's complexity is developed, and its function in characterization helps account for the work being called *Celestina* and not *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. The rather trite plot is not what holds the reader, but the characterization, and it is this emphasis on characterization that leads *Celestina* away from the drama toward the novel. On this point Anthony Close observes that "in Aristotle's *Poetics*, character is one of the six parts of tragedy, together with plot, diction, thought, spectacle, melody. In the modern novel, it is the essential part . . ." <sup>3</sup> The potential of the aside in characterization is used to great advantage in the creation of the picaresque and is not the least important among the techniques the genre shares with *Celestina*. The anonymous author's clever use of the aside in the characterization of Lazarillo makes the work much more dramatic than would have been the case had Lazaro simply narrated his past experiences. Key scenes are always dramatized, and it is the use of the aside in these scenes that makes Lazarillo come to life and engage the reader in his journey through his life. The asides, as in *Celestina*, function also to reinforce the moral intent of the anonymous author. Lazarillo delivers several philosophical asides; for example, in the first *Tratado*, Lazarillo reflects on his step-brother's fear of his black father: "¡Cuántos debe de haber en el mundo que huyen de otras porque no se veen a si mesmos!" (I, 11). <sup>4</sup> We see Lazarillo's spirit of resolve when he says to himself, "Verdad dice este, que me cumple avivar el ojo y avisar, pues solo soy, y pensar cómo me sepa valer" (I, 13). The aside also creates comic relief, when, for example, Lazarillo responds to the *escudero's* comment: "no hay tal cosa en el mundo para vivir mucho que poco comer," with: "Si por esa via es . . . , nunca yo moriré, que siempre he guardado esa regla por fuerza, y aun espero en mi desdicha, tenella toda mi vida" (III, 47). There are more examples (seventeen in total, sixteen in the first three *tratados*), and they function, as in *Celestina*, principally for characterization. Lazarillo's radical solitude precludes the introduction of an interlocutor with whom he can share these reactions, but they are true "interior asides," delivered as direct address. In the *Quijote*, too, the aside functions to aid characterization, as opposed to advancing the plot as it does in drama. In *Don Quijote*, after Sancho realizes that certain things he says to his master will result in punishment, he learns to tell his master what he wants to hear, and then turns to the reader to state what he truly thinks of the situation.

In conclusion, the length of *Celestina*, with a consequent emphasis upon the presentation of the complexities of character, moves it away from the normal confines of drama toward the usual province of narrative. The aside is significant in this process, and its potential would later be recognized and used to great advantage in the creation of the picaresque.



NOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Bain, *Actors and Audience. A Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Humberto López Morales, (Madrid: Cupsa, 1976). All citations are by act and page number from this edition.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Close, "Characterization and Dialogue in Cervantes's 'Comedia en Prosa,'" *Modern Language Review* 76 (1981), 356.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, ed. Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1976). All citations are from this edition, by *tratado* and page number.



(Sevilla 1517-18)

TRISTAN: "Coge, Sosia, esos sesos de esos cantos . . . ¡0 día de aziago! ¡0 arrebatado fin!"  
(Auto 19)