

## THE PROBLEMATIC BEGINNING OF *CELESTINA*

Donald McGrady  
University of Virginia

The first part of *Celestina* is unusually fraught with problems, even for a work famous for its textual difficulties, puzzles and deliberate ambiguities. Among the aspects which have been debated by scholars are the date of Act I; the authorship of the *argumentos*; the falcon that appears in the summary of the first Act, but not in the text itself; the question of whether Calisto and Melibea are actually meeting here for the first time, or have already been introduced before he enters her garden; whether Melibea falls in love with Calisto at this point or afterwards; and the amount of time that elapses between scenes 1 and 2 of Act I. To these frequently-discussed questions I should like to add another which, to the best of my knowledge, has never been considered: the fact that the beginning of the piece is uncommonly abrupt, with none of the background presentation usual both in the narrative and dramatic genres. I believe that all these disparate factors are actually interrelated, and that a key to their understanding is provided by an explanation apparently never advanced before: that the manuscript known to Fernando de Rojas, and which he reproduced in the first Act of his work, was incomplete, with its initial folios missing; however, Rojas would have learned about the general contents of the lost fragment through a reader (or readers) older than himself.

### 1. The Authorship of the Summary to Act I

In a second prologue to the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, Rojas plainly states that he did not compose the plot summaries inserted at the beginning of each Act since the earliest known edition of the *Comedia*:

Que aun los impressores han dado sus punturas, poniendo rúbricas o sumarios al principio de cada auto, narrando en breve lo que dentro contenía — una cosa bien escusada según lo que los antiguos scriptores usaron. (201-02)<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the author considers that these epitomes are unnecessary, and he lodges a moderate protest against the printers' lack of respect for the integrity of his work. Nonetheless, he has accepted the intrusion, and I think that we must assume that he would have done so before the type was set up for the first edition — surely the printers would not have taken such a liberty without his consent, unenthusiastic though it may have been. Moreover, the fact that the *impressores* would have taken the trouble to write the summaries shows that they believed they had a good reason to do so: no artisan takes upon himself extra work — particularly when it lies outside his area of expertise — unless he feels that it will improve a work in which he takes pride. In short, Rojas had a disagreement with his first editors: they felt that he should append a plot summary to each Act, while he thought strongly enough that they were unnecessary that he refused to write them himself, but he did not withhold permission for the printers to do them. Rojas himself states that no precedent existed in Antiquity for these summaries, and the circumstance that they were used in books of chivalry would have influenced the printers but little. However, it seems obvious that they had compelling reasons for their insistence upon the *résumés*.

Little attention has been paid by students of *Celestina* to this question of the plot summaries. An exception is Stephen Gilman's article of some years ago,<sup>2</sup> wherein he pointed out that Rojas' disavowal of the epitomes logically would not have applied to the new Acts (XV to XIX) added in the revised *Tragicomedia* — surely, Gilman offers, Rojas must have written the summaries to these additions, to conform with the practice of the *Comedia*. To clinch this point, Gilman showed that when Rojas revised the *résumé* of Act XIV, he not only alluded to the new material he had introduced, but he actually rewrote the old *argumento*

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<sup>1</sup> Pages references are to the edition by Peter E. Russell, *Comedia o tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (Madrid: Castalia, 1991); I introduce occasional changes to restore the original text: see notes 4 and 9. When a Roman numeral precedes the page number, it specifies the Act cited.

<sup>2</sup> "The *argumentos* to *La Celestina*," *Romance Philology* 8 (1954-55): 71-78; see also *The Art of "La Celestina"* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1956): 212-16.

corresponding to the unchanged beginning of the Act. Furthermore, Gilman opined that the summaries penned by the printers tend to focus primarily on plot, whereas those executed by Rojas reflect a greater insight into the characters' states of mind. Finally, Gilman detected a difference in style between the *argumentos* written by the printers and those by Rojas: the latter composes long and rhythmic sentences, whereas the former tend to express themselves in a short and choppy syntax.

As concerns the *argumentos* to the Acts of the *Comedia* (that is, I through XIII, and XX-XXI of the *Tragicomedia*), Gilman accepts Rojas' statement that they were written by the printers, and certainly this tends to be supported by the fact that, as far as is known, the author tells the truth about other matters he treats in his preliminary remarks.<sup>3</sup> Gilman's theories about the authorship of these summaries seem to have received universal approval, even though they do not address the problem of the obvious conflict between the writer and his *impressores*.

It is only natural that there should be a considerable divergence in style between the summaries of the additions to the *Tragicomedia*, which were composed by Rojas, and those of the *Comedia*, written as they were (with one important exception, as we shall see) by the printers. Even a brief examination suffices to detect the distance that separates the dry and carefully-objective words chosen by them, whose sole purpose was to recount faithfully the plot sequences, from the exuberance and self-confidence displayed by the author, who is synthesizing his own work, not that of another. Nonetheless, at the risk of appearing to belabor the obvious, it behooves us, for our subsequent study of the authorship of a particular summary, to examine in some detail the differences between the respective styles of Rojas and his printers. Let us therefore proceed to contrast the epitomes undoubtedly penned by Rojas (those to Acts XIV through XIX) with those unquestionably done by the printers of the *Comedia* (II through XIII, plus XX-XXI). I shall then attempt to show that the summary to Act I coincides closely with the style of Fernando de Rojas.

Perhaps the most striking contrasts between the prose of Rojas and that of his printers concern their different uses of syntax and of adjectives. Rojas is master of a richly complex sentence structure, composed of compound verbs and predicates, with abundant dependent

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<sup>3</sup> I would include here Rojas' repeated statements about the moralistic purpose of his work: it seems obvious to me that to deny this is to rewrite *Celestina*.

clauses, often connected by the relative *el (lo, la, etc.) cual*. One typical example is provided by the first segment of the *argumento* of Act XIV:

Está Melibea muy affligida hablando con Lucrecia sobre la tardança de Calisto, el qual le avía hecho voto de venir en aquella noche a visitalla; lo qual cumplió, y con él vinieron Sosia y Tristán. (497-98)

This is the elegant syntax cultivated not only by classical Spanish writers, but by authors of the other Romance languages as well. Contrast its richness with the poverty of the following specimens by the printers of *Celestina*, men accustomed to setting type, not to composing masterpieces of literature:

Partida Celestina de Calisto para su casa, queda Calisto hablando con Sempronio, criado suyo. Al qual, como quien en alguna esperança puesto está, todo aguijar le parece tardança.<sup>4</sup> (II, 267)

La mañana viene. Despierta Pármeno. Despedido de Areúsa, va para casa de Calisto, su señor. (VIII, 385)

I think that we may well have here the handiwork of two different editors, one of whom tends to write simple compound sentences, usually containing two uncomplicated clauses, while the other preferentially expresses himself in child-like, one-clause sentences.<sup>5</sup> But whether we are dealing with the prose of two printers, or just one who had two noticeably differing styles, there is no confusing their amateurish writing with the polished product of a master of the language.

Another equally decisive difference between the work of the professional and the amateur writers appears in their use of the adjective. In the fifteen Act summaries done by the *impressores*, there are almost no descriptive adjectives whatsoever; only in *argumento* XIV do they describe Calisto's "*desastrada* muerte" (497), and in XXI Pleberio's

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<sup>4</sup> Here I introduce three modifications into Russell's text, returning to the *princeps*: Russell changes the original *Al* to [*El*] and *aguijar le* to *aguijarle*, and places a comma after *tardança* (where the 1499 edition lacks all punctuation).

<sup>5</sup> I would propose that the more sophisticated printer wrote the summaries to Acts II through VI, plus XXI, while the less-talented one would have been responsible for Acts VII through XIV, plus XX.

"grandísimo llanto" and "tan súbito mal" (593). It is not hard to perceive why the printers did not adorn and enrich their prose with adjectives: adjectives are subjective, expressing an author's attitude toward the nouns modified. The printers realized that the *Comedia* was a complex work, and they preferred to steer a safe course, enumerating only the bare facts, not risking a mistake in interpretation. Rojas, contrariwise, frequently expresses opinions about his characters and their actions. Thus, Melibea is "muy *affligida*" when Calisto does not appear on time for their tryst (XIV, 497), Areúsa proffers "palabras *injuriosas* a un *rufián* llamado Centurio" (XV, 519), and Areúsa uses "palabras *fictas*" to flatter Sosia into revealing details about the lovers' rendezvous (XVII, 541).

Besides employing adjectives that reveal feelings toward his characters, Rojas exercises his prerogative as creator to interject censures of his creations: hence we see the author criticizing Melibea for having thrown away her "don de la virginidad" (XVI, 531), and he likewise castigates Elicia for "caresciendo de la castimonia de Penélope" (XVII, 541). This last example illustrates another embellishment indulged in by Rojas: whereas the *impressores* utilize bland and neutral terms, Rojas will occasionally draw comparisons between his personages and Classical figures, or he reproduces a mythological allusion from his text, as when Calisto "ruega a Febo que cierre sus rayos, para haver de restaurar su desseo" (XIV, 498).<sup>6</sup> Not least of all, Rojas uses the vehicle of the *argumento* to state directly his moral purpose (which, in accord with the Horatian concept of *utile dulci*, by no means precluded the equally-important aim of entertaining the reader). We have already seen him taking Melibea and Elicia gently to task for their lack of chastity. In the case of the cowardly braggard Centurio, however, he is more direct: "Y como sea natural a éstos no hazer lo que prometen, escúsase, como en el processo parece" (XVIII, 551). Rojas' most overt moralization occurs at the end of his last *argumento*, where he severely condemns the *loco amor* of Calisto and Melibea: "porque los tales [= los amadores] este don [= la vida] resciben por galardón, y por esto han de saber desamar los amadores" (XIX, 561).

In a word, then, Rojas leaves a personal stamp upon each of his epitomes. He differs from the printers in his use of complex and elegant

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<sup>6</sup> The corresponding textual reference states: "¡O luziente Febo, date priessa a tu acostumbrado camino! ... ¡O espacioso relox, aun te vea yo arder en bivo fuego de amor!" (513). Gilman, "The *argumentos*," 78, inexplicably cites the passage from the summary as proof of Calisto's lack of ardor and his need to stimulate artificially his lax sex drive (!).

syntax, his frequent use of descriptive and opinionated adjectives, his occasional Classical allusions, and his moralizations, both attenuated and forceful. On the other hand, he is not so preoccupied as the *impressores* about scrupulously summarizing each fragment of action — this becomes evident from his almost casual phrase, cited above, "como en el processo parece." Thus, for example, Rojas does not refer to one of his most touching (and painterly) scenes — that in which Sosia describes Elicia's inconsolable grief for Celestina and Sempronio (end of Act XIV, 516 — a section comprehended under "como en el processo parece"). The printers go to the opposite extreme of registering every conversation and monologue (though not their contents), every trip to someone's house, every leave-taking. The result is a series of brief phrases endlessly repeated — sometimes verbatim — but often describing actions in themselves without interest. An instance:

[Celestina] vase para su casa (VI, 335; duplicated almost exactly at VII, 357; XI, 443; and XII, 456); Sempronio vase a casa de Celestina ... Vase Celestina a casa de Pleberio (III, 279); [Pármene] va para casa de Calisto (VIII, 385); Sempronio y Pármene van a casa de Celestina (IX, 401; repeated twice at XII, 455-56).

For comparison's sake, it is noteworthy that Rojas uses only once the expression: "[Elicia] va a casa de Areúsa" (XVII, 541). Otherwise, he either omits the action or describes it differently: "bolvieron todos a la posada" (XIV, 498).

Other phrases used repeatedly (note particularly the abuse of *hablar*, *razonar*, *mientras* and *entre sí*) by the editors include:

queda Calisto hablando con Sempronio ... Quedan entretanto Calisto y Pármene juntos razonando (II, 267); Mientras ellos están hablando (VI, 335); entre sí hablando ... entre sí razonando (IX, 401); Mientras andan ... está hablando (X, 425); Mientras ellos en esas razones están, Pármene y Sempronio entre sí hablan (XI, 443).

Queda Sempronio y Elicia en casa (III, 279); Queda Celestina en casa con Melibea (IV, 297).

Celestina, andando por el camino, habla consigo misma (IV, 297); Despedida Celestina de Melibea, va por la calle hablando consigo misma (V, 327); repeated at XI, 443); Hállanle [a Calisto] hablando consigo mismo (VIII, 385);

very similar at XIII, 487); está hablando Melibea consigo misma (X, 425).

One phrase is repeated five times with little variation, always applied to Celestina:

fázela entrar en casa (IV, 297); le mandó abrir la puerta (V, 327); Elicia le viene abrir (VII, 357, and XI, 443); Haze entrar a Celestina (X, 425).

Finally, another formulaic phrase is thrice used, always at the beginning of a sentence:

Despídense [Celestina y Melibea] de en uno (X, 425); Despídese Celestina de Calisto (XI, 443); Despídese Calisto de Melibea (XII, 456).

Curiously enough, this last phrase is the only crutch abused by the *impressores* that Rojas will repeat, indeed twice in the same *résumé*, although not in the initial position:

el qual se despide della ... En fin, despídese Elicia de Areúsa (XV, 519-20).

This one exception confirms a rule otherwise strictly followed by Rojas: he scrupulously avoids the banal phrases of the printers. Rojas was surely well aware that their summaries conveyed the impression of a play wherein the characters do little more than go to someone's house, conversing or mumbling to themselves along the way, they enter, discourse some more, and then return home, again talking to themselves or to a companion.

If Rojas so consciously avoids repeating both himself and the printers, the latter echo themselves as if this were a virtue. Even more importantly, they also echo the summary of Act I (which I have thus far assumed, for purposes of argument, was not the product of their hands), but in a different way. True, their constant emphasis upon the importance of the spoken word in *Celestina* (which simply reflects the fact that the format of the work is that of the drama) can be traced to a number of key phrases in the first *argumento*:

Calisto ... a Melibea ... començóle de *hablar* ... *Habló* con ... Sempronio ... después de *muchas razones* ... Entretanto que Sempronio *está negociando* con Celestina, Calisto *está*

*razonando* con ... Pármeno, el qual *razonamiento* ...  
 Celestina ... [a Pármeno] mucho le *dize* ... *induziéndole*  
 ...(209-10, emphasis added).

The printers also duplicate verbatim one phrase from the initial epitome: "después de muchas razones" (I, 210) in the summary to Act X (425; compare also "Pónese con ella en razones" [IV, 297], "Estando ... razonando" [IX, 401], "en essas razones están" [XI, 443]), but this is no more than a set-phrase, of the type liberally used by these non-professional writers.

The principal point remains, however, that the printers closely paraphrase, for no readily-apparent reason, a whole series of sentences from the *argumento* of Act I:

Act I	Other Acts
[Calisto] habló con un criado suyo llamado Sempronio ... (210)	queda Calisto hablando con Sempronio, criado suyo ... (II, 267)
Sempronio está negociando con Celestina ... (210)	Sempronio [solicita] a Celestina para el concebido negocio ... (II, 267)
Entretanto ... Calisto está razonando con ... Pármeno (210)	Quedan entretanto Calisto y Pármeno juntos razonando (II, 267)
Celestina ... mucho le dice [a Pármeno] induziéndole a amor y concordia de Sempronio. (210)	Celestina habla con ... Pármeno, induziéndole a concordia y amistad de Sempronio. (VII, 357)

To be sure, this is a different case from the other formulae so relentlessly repeated by the printers, for all of these four phrases focus on dialogue, rather than mere movement.

It would appear, then, that the *impressores* used the summary to Act I as a guide for the résumés they were to write. Therefore it is no accident that three of the paraphrases occur in the *argumento* of Act II, the author of which doubtless felt that he particularly needed help on his first effort. (If we accept the notion that two different printers did the summaries, with the second commencing his work at Act VII [see note



5], then we have a good explanation for the appearance of the fourth paraphrase in the summary of that Act.) In short, on the one hand, the paraphrases show that the printers were imitating (in accordance with contemporary theory) a model they admired, while on the other hand, the absence in this initial résumé of the mechanistic formulas of movement, so characteristic of the typesetters' work, also indicates strongly that it was executed by a different writer.<sup>7</sup>

Who, then, would have been the author of the summary to Act I, once the *impressores* of *Celestina* have been eliminated as possibilities? There would seem to be only two candidates: the *antiguo auctor* and Fernando de Rojas. I believe that the author of Act I of the *Comedia* can be safely discarded, for if (anticipating my conclusion for the moment) the manuscript known to Rojas lacked its initial folios, the summary would likely have been among the lost sections. Then too, as noted before, the procedure of providing résumés of the different parts of a play or narrative was not at all common, and there must have been an unusual reason for including it. One is hard pressed to imagine what that special circumstance might have been for the *antiguo auctor*. For Fernando de Rojas, on the other hand, it is quite easy to imagine, if we assume that the beginning of Act I was wanting in the codex he reproduced: he must have written the summary precisely to fill in the lacuna created by the missing folios. I believe that this lost opening would also have included background material about both Calisto and Melibea, but the principal action contained in that section had to be exactly that appearing at the start of the first summary: "Entrando Calisto una huerta empós de un falcón suyo, falló y a Melibea, de cuyo amor preso (...)."

Here, then, we have a motive for the seemingly-superfluous initial *argumento*: faced with an incomplete manuscript that he desired to reproduce faithfully, Rojas had two options — either to compose an introductory section to replace the lost one, or to write some kind of summary preserving the essential details that he had learned from older readers. (Another possibility is that Rojas himself may have invented the incident of the lost hawk to cover the gap, but it seems to me that in this

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<sup>7</sup> The summary of Act XII likewise contains a close reproduction of a sentence from the text — a type of minor plagiarism due to laziness, something not found in Rojas' epitomes. In the summary Pleberio and Alisa "preguntan a Melibea quién da patadas en su cámara" (456), while in the text, Pleberio asks "¿Quién da patadas ... en tu cámara?" (473).

case he would have proceeded to recast the introductory episode in its entirety.)

We might well ask why Rojas wrote many folios to finish the incomplete *Comedia*, but did not pen just a few to start it off. The answer is that he had no alternative as concerned the finale, since the work was in an incomplete state (although the *antiguo auctor* had shown through many subtle indications, such as the lost falcon, the ending he had in mind) — there was no point in Rojas' editing an unfinished story. However, the unknown creator *had* written the initial scenes, which some elderly readers still recalled. Most important of all, Rojas' guiding principle was to reproduce the original manuscript (which he manifestly venerated) as completely as possible. Consequently, he was at liberty to do an ending for the *Comedia* (as long as he respected the *antiguo auctor's* intentions), but he did not possess that same freedom to invent a new opening scene. Rojas' solution was perhaps the best — or only — one available to him, given his governing priorities. For the beginning of the *Comedia* he created nothing (although he surely made editorial adjustments, as we shall see later), but he informed the reader about the initial incident created by the *antiguo auctor*, and he did so at a first remove from the text (that is, with a summary), and from a position that allowed him to tell the story without radically modifying the primitive author's beginning.<sup>8</sup>

However, if Rojas was to synthesize the original writer's opening scene, balance and symmetry required that he include as well a summary of the rest of Act I, even though this latter was superfluous, since it merely repeated what was in the text. Confronted, then, by a manuscript that had neither a beginning nor an end, Rojas was faced with several possible options, none of them perfect. The solution he found for the problem of how to begin *Celestina* was a stroke of genius. But trouble apparently arose when Rojas considered it unnecessary or undesirable to write summaries for the Acts he himself had created. This obviously involved a lack of consistency, but his point of view was probably that he had invoked the expedient of the résumé to solve a particular problem, and that it need not be applied generally to the other Acts of

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<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, Rojas could have appended a preliminary note to the mutilated beginning of the *Comedia*, explaining that its opening episode was missing. But this would have presupposed an editorial intrusion within the body of the text, destroying the dramatic illusion. Moreover, this was hardly an appropriate stance for someone who had penned fifteen Acts to complete the work.

the *Comedia*. Besides, this single epitome served to set the work of the *antiguo auctor* apart from his own. The *impressores* understandably did not agree; to a printer, consistency in format is an absolute must — if Act I had to be preceded by an *argumento*, then so did all the others. Rojas doubtless expounded his own views to them, to no avail. The final compromise, probably arrived at after some debate, was that the printers would draft the other summaries themselves, since they continued to consider them so important.

It remains to be seen if the style of the first summary accords with that of Rojas in his résumés of Acts XIV to XIX. We would expect it to be similar as concerns form, but not necessarily as regards content, for here Rojas was epitomizing someone else's work, not his own, and he might not have felt as free in his expression. I believe it fair to say that this is indeed the situation in the initial *argumento*, which reads as follows:

Entrando Calisto una huerta<sup>9</sup> empós de un falcón suyo, falló y a Melibea, de cuyo amor preso, començóle de hablar. De la qual rigorosamente despedido, fue para su casa muy sangustiado. Habló con un criado suyo llamado Sempronio, el qual, después de muchas razones, le endereçó a una vieja llamada Celestina, en cuya casa tenía el mesmo criado una enamorada llamada Elicia. La qual, viniendo Sempronio a casa de Celestina con el negocio de su amo, tenía a otro consigo llamado Crito, al qual escondieron. Entretanto que Sempronio está negociando con Celestina, Calisto está razonando con otro criado suyo, por nombre Pármeno, el qual razonamiento dura fasta que llega Sempronio y Celestina a casa de Calisto. Pármeno fue conosciado de Celestina, la qual mucho le dize de los fechos y conosçimiento de su madre, induziéndole a amor y concordia de Sempronio. (209-10)

Above we concluded that the prose of the summaries unquestionably written by Rojas was easily distinguished from that of the printers in that it displayed a richly complex syntax and a more frequent use of descriptive adjectives. Additionally, one of the principal

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<sup>9</sup> Almost all modern editions, including Russell's, unnecessarily correct "*en una huerta*"; I treat this problem in "*Entrando Calisto una huerta ...*" and *Other Textual Problems in the Celestina*, *Hispanic Review* (in press).

methods employed by Rojas to string together his clauses was the liberal use of the relative *el qual*: the device occurs once in epitomes XVI and XVIII, and twice in XIV, XV, XVII and XIX. By comparison, *el qual* rarely figures in the syntactically-poor prose of the *impressores*, being used but four times in their fourteen summaries (in II, III, V and XIII).

If we compare these divergent syntactic usages with those of *résumé* I, we immediately perceive a close coincidence with Rojas' style, while it becomes apparent that the printers could not have penned this epitome. The initial *argumento* shows the same elegant, complex syntax; each sentence contains several clauses — a syntax absent in the *impressores'* summaries. Moreover, this initial epitome includes six different instances of the use of the relative *el qual*. The criterion of descriptive adjective usage is perhaps not quite so telling as that of syntax in this first *argumento*, but still it points to Rojas as the more likely author, rather than to the printers: besides the expressive "muy *sangustiado*," depicting Calisto's anguish at being rejected, the adjectival phrase "*rigorosamente despedido*" captures Melibea's apparent (though probably feigned) fury at his advances. The words *vieja* and *enamorada*, respectively applied to Celestina and Elicia, also convey value judgments. The objective evidence, then, suggests that Fernando de Rojas wrote the summary to Act I of *Celestina*. If more proof were needed, it is readily supplied by the consideration that the author of this epitome had to be someone who was aware of how the original version of the *Comedia* had begun (i.e., with the episode of the lost hawk), and who understood its meaning. It seems abundantly clear that the *impressores* could not have satisfied these requirements. Unfortunately, Rojas created much confusion by oversimplifying the truth, attributing all the *résumés* to the printers, but the available evidence certainly suggests that he himself furnished them a model, by writing the summary to Act I.

## 2. Calisto and Melibea's Abrupt Meeting

Although it has not occupied the attention of students of *Celestina*, the fact is that this work begins in an uncommonly abrupt manner:

CALISTO. — En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios.  
MELIBEA. — ¿En qué, Calisto? (211)

Not only do we have here a beginning more or less *in medias res*, but the two protagonists already know one another. What is not immediately apparent — and will never fully be clarified during the course of the play — is how long the youths have been acquainted, and how well. It

appears evident to me that this would have been explained in the "lost folios," and that the original *Comedia* certainly did not begin thus, with the reader arriving during a conversation between Calisto and Melibea. Although Horace mentioned (*Ars Poetica*, 148-50) the notion of a work starting *in medias res*, in Antiquity this concept was chiefly associated with the epic genre, and I am not aware of Classical or medieval models in either the dramatic or narrative genres that the *antiguo auctor* could have imitated.<sup>10</sup> Another revealing fact is that the unusually abrupt opening scene does not seem to have influenced either the several continuations of *Celestina* or the Golden Age *Comedia*, which adapted successfully other techniques and episodes from the late-medieval masterpiece. This might be interpreted to mean that writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suspected that the text published by Rojas lacked its initial scene, which was schematically synthesized in the first two lines of *argumento I*. Finally, the *Comedia* does not actually utilize the traditional concept of *in medias res*, for there is no subsequent presentation of events that had preceded Calisto and Melibea's meeting. Rather, we simply come in on the end of a conversation in progress between the two future lovers, without the previous action or background ever being specified, except in the summary to Act I and in the *argumento general de toda la obra*. It would appear, then, that the precipitate beginning of *Celestina* came about by accident, rather than by design.

It is fascinating to try to deduce — or conjecture — what the contents of this lost fragment of the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* would have been. I believe that we should initially have seen Calisto preparing for his hunt, perhaps aided by Sempronio — this would explain the servant's otherwise somewhat gratuitous allusion to another of Calisto's hawks: "Abatióse el girifalte y vénele endereçar en el alcándara" (I, 214). The bird lost during the hunt was a *neblí* (II, 274), so in the initial action Sempronio may have helped Calisto to decide which of the two to take on his expedition. I should also expect some clarification at the beginning about Calisto's family background, such as the rank and means of his parents (both of whom are evidently deceased), his apparent condition as an only heir, his age, and maybe some of his virtues and accomplishments, other than those enumerated in a general way by Sempronio later in this same Act (I, 229; this is the basis of the

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<sup>10</sup> Professor Antonio Stäuble, a foremost specialist in the humanistic comedy, kindly informs me that he does not know any play of that genre that begins like *Celestina*, that is, with the hero conversing with the heroine and declaring his love to her.

first sentence of the *argumento general*). It is also possible that some mention might have been made of Melibea and her family at this point.

Later I should expect to see Calisto on his hunt, catching sight of a bird (perhaps a partridge) at which he casts his *neblí*; the latter follows its prey into Melibea's enclosed garden, Calisto negotiates the wall (without the aid of the ladder which he will bring for his trysts), he espies the beautiful Melibea, whom he may already know and love (if only from afar), comments to himself about her comeliness and other virtues (which he has doubtless heard praised), including her family's nobility and wealth, she approaches, and Calisto initiates a conversation — the first words of which I doubt would have been the opening lines in the *Comedia* we know. Note that according to the final phrase of the general summary ("a la presencia de Calisto se presentó la deseada Melibea"), the maiden may have come into the garden after Calisto had scaled the wall.

Fernando de Rojas probably knew little more about the missing portion of the *Comedia* than we do today; therefore he also had to imagine what had transpired therein, and how this should affect his continuation. One of the problems he faced was Sempronio's mention of the *girifalte* (I, 214), which might be misunderstood to mean that this was Calisto's lost hawk, which would have returned home even before its master. Since it was important that the sinister augury associated with stray falcons be maintained (to foreshadow Calisto's imminent demise),<sup>11</sup> Rojas inserted in the second Act (274) a mention of the lost *neblí*.

If part of his task was to clarify problems created by the lost beginning of the *Comedia*, Rojas also created new ambiguities. For example, shortly before she commits suicide, Melibea says to her father: "Calisto ... tú bien conociste. Conociste assí mismo sus padres y claro linaje. Sus virtudes y bondad a todos eran manifiestas" (XX, 587). Here Rojas alludes indirectly to one of the problems of interpretation raised by the Act I, scene 1 exchange between Calisto and Melibea, i.e., do they already know one another, and if so, since when? According to this statement, Pleberio and Calisto were acquaintances, and Pleberio had also been acquainted with Calisto's family. This raises the possibility that the

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<sup>11</sup> See Donald McGrady, "Calisto's Lost Falcon and Its Implications for Dating Act I of the *Comedia*," in *Letters and Society in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Studies Presented to P. E. Russell on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Alan Deyermond and Jeremy Lawrance (Llangrannog: Dolphin, 1993): 93-102.

young people likewise knew each other already, although this could have been from a distance.

On the other hand, the beginning of the *argumento I* seems to imply that they meet in the garden for the first time: "Entrando Calisto una huerta ... falló y a Melibea, de cuyo amor preso ..." While this does not specifically say that they had not previously met, the natural tendency has been to assume that we have here one of the most frequent commonplaces of Courtly Love: passion at first sight. Without doubt, this detail would have been clarified in the missing first scenes of the *Comedia*, but Rojas prefers — as is his wont — to leave the matter in the realm of doubt. Perhaps we should incline to believe that Calisto does meet Melibea here for the first time, at least since they have achieved sexual maturity, simply because this was such an integral part of *amour courtois*. Nonetheless, Rojas' primary purpose in bringing up in Act XX Pleberio's acquaintance with Calisto and his family was not to introduce the problem of whether the hero knew Melibea before encountering her in the garden, but to point out that these two passion-obsessed lovers could easily have married had they so desired, and thus avoided the tragic waste of several lives, including their own. However, this detail also served to create one more small ambiguity — a goal consciously pursued by Rojas, who in the next-to-last Act plays off Melibea's statement about the relationship between Pleberio and Calisto against the opening lines of the first summary ("Calisto ... falló y a Melibea, de cuyo amor preso").

Even more important — because of its implications for another of the ambiguities in *Celestina* — is one of Melibea's final declarations to her father: "Celestina ... venida a mí, sacó mi secreto amor de mi pecho" (XX, 587). Here, just before she takes her life, Melibea recognizes something that the perceptive reader has detected since Act IV, when Celestina goes to Melibea's house and gradually discovers to her the real purpose of her visit, which is not to sell a little thread, but to communicate Calisto's illicit desires to the maiden. Melibea would have suspected immediately what Celestina was up to, for in the city she was well-known as a bawd (Lucrecia, Melibea's servant, reminds her of this [IV, 303]); nonetheless, Melibea encourages Celestina, conversing with her at length and offering to give her whatever she wants ("Di, madre, todas tus necesidades; que si yo las pudiere remediar, de muy buen grado lo haré ..." [IV, 311]), even if it is for someone else ("Pide lo que querrás, sea para quien fuere" [IV, 312]). It is only when Celestina mentions Calisto's name that Melibea reacts with fury, which quickly subsides as she continues to reassure the go-between of her good will (314-23).

Finally, she implies enough that she will give herself to Calisto ("Más haré por tu doliente, si menester fuere ..." [IV, 324]).

In other words, it seems plain enough in this passage that Melibea falls in love with Calisto in the garden, and she welcomes his efforts to seduce her, even though he employs the most disreputable of intermediaries toward this end. However, it is equally true that Rojas at the same time — commencing toward the end of Act III — develops a series of invocations of the Devil by Celestina, to aid her in delivering Melibea into Calisto's hands. It therefore seems just as factual to say that Melibea becomes enamored of Calisto because of Celestina's diabolical conjurations.<sup>12</sup> That is, Rojas deliberately sets forth two sets of truths, both equally valid, and mutually exclusive. It seems to me that Rojas constructs this ambiguity quite purposefully, perhaps as a general commentary upon the complexity of life: quite often two intelligent and objective persons will witness the same event, and yet give wholly different accounts of it.

Rojas appears to set a trap for us: will we allow ourselves to be caught in the fallacy of saying that there is only one truth as concerns when and how Melibea falls desperately in love with Calisto? If we step into Rojas' snare, then we join those divided readers described by him in his prologue to the *Tragicomedia*: "esta presente obra ha seydo instrumento de lid o contienda a sus lectores para ponerlos en diferencias, dando cada uno sentencia sobre ella a sabor de su voluntad" (200). This ambiguity about the moment of awakening of Melibea's fatal passion was largely the work of Fernando de Rojas, but the *antiguo auctor* provided the opportunity when he had the maiden first react negatively to Calisto's advances. Nonetheless, the traditional symbolism of the falcon and the enclosed garden (and perhaps also that of a partridge) indicated to the sophisticated reader that her sentiments were quite the opposite of what she pretended. Unfortunately, we shall perhaps never know what else she said to Calisto — and he to her — in the lost beginning of the *Comedia*.

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<sup>12</sup> The bibliography on this topic is quite extensive, but the best argumentation for the efficacy of the Devil's intervention are those of P. E. Russell, "La magia, tema integral de *La Celestina*," in *Temas de "La Celestina" y otros estudios del "Cid" al "Quijote"* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978):243-76, and Ana Vian Herrero, "El pensamiento mágico en *Celestina*, 'instrumento de lid o contienda'," *Celestinesca* 14.2 (Nov. 1990): 41-91. The view in favor of seeing a duality in the treatment of Celestina's magic had been cogently stated by Francisco Ruiz Ramón, *Historia del teatro español*, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Alianza, 1971), I:67-68, and by Elizabeth Sánchez, "Magic in *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 46 (1978):481-94, especially 481-85.



### 3. The Question of Time in Act I, Scenes 1 and 2

Some years ago, in an article that continues to be one of the most suggestive among the abundant studies on *Celestina*,<sup>13</sup> Martín de Riquer pointed to some troublesome passages in Calisto's second speech to Melibea. Here the gallant describes his passion as a "secreto dolor," and he states that he made a pledge to God of copious service if only he could meet her ("es mayor tal galardón [= el poder conversar con Melibea] que el servicio, sacrificio, devoción y obras pías que por este lugar alcanzar tengo yo a Dios ofrecido" [I, 211]). Clearly, Calisto has seen Melibea at a previous time, although from some distance, without being able to make her acquaintance. The question is, how long ago would he have caught a glimpse of the maiden and fallen in love with her? The solution to the problem may be suggested by the final phrase in the *argumento general*, "a la presencia de Calisto se presentó la deseada Melibea." This could be understood to mean that Calisto entered the garden in search of his hawk, he espied Melibea from afar (perhaps she was in the house), he fell in love with her (that is why she is "la deseada Melibea"), vowed to God to serve Him if he were permitted to meet the maid, and was immediately rewarded with that opportunity. (Calisto's subsequent failure to fulfill his pledge to the Divinity — instead he blasphemes abundantly and indulges in the sin of lechery — constitutes reason enough for his subsequent punishment.) This sequence of events not only resolves the double dilemma posed by the last phrase of the *argumento general* (Melibea comes into Calisto's presence, rather than vice

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<sup>13</sup> "Fernando de Rojas y el primer Acto de *La Celestina*," *Revista de Filología Española* 41 (1957): 373-95 (see 383-89). Riquer believes that Melibea's "fury" at Calisto "hace sospechar que la primitiva redacción de *La Celestina* empezaba antes y que esta escena iba precedida de otras" (388). Riquer further states: "me parece que es posible concluir que la primera escena de *La Celestina* primitiva no se desarrollaba en el huerto de Melibea, que los dos jóvenes ya se conocían, que Calisto hacía tiempo que estaba enamorado de la doncella y que la búsqueda del halcón era un tema totalmente ausente. Y que es posible, en cambio, que la escena transcurriera en una iglesia" (389). Although I disagree with most of Riquer's conclusions, he clearly deserves credit for being the first scholar to perceive that the original *Comedia* began differently from the only version that we know (Riquer assumes that Rojas changed the text). For other studies on the setting of Act I, scene 1, and the question of when Calisto and Melibea first met, see the summary by Ricardo Castells, "El sueño de Calisto y la tradición celestinesca," *Celestinesca* 14.1 (May 1990): 17-39 (especialmente 19-23).

versa, and she is already *deseada*), but it also maintains intact the very important commonplace of love at first sight.<sup>14</sup>

Another problem regarding time in Act I of the *Comedia* concerns the lapse which transpires between its first and second scenes. From studies by Stephen Gilman, Manuel J. Asensio, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel and Francisco Ruiz Ramón,<sup>15</sup> it has become clear that there are two parallel chronologies in the work (just as in *Othello*), the one consisting of three or four days, and the other of over a month. Gilman attempted to explain this difference as a function of the hybrid genre of *Celestina*, an explanation which the authors certainly did not have in mind, and which need not detain us here. Asensio, Lida de Malkiel and Ruiz Ramón, contrariwise, proposed that the longer span was invented by Rojas to avoid the inverosimilitude of Melibea's first despising Calisto and then worshipping him with abandon in so short a time. However, we have already noted that, according to one of the valid interpretations of Melibea's conduct, she fell in love with Calisto at their first meeting, and her rejection of him was feigned; therefore she undergoes no change of heart that would require an extended period of time. Furthermore, in contemporary Castilian literature, a maid smitten by love could give himself to the object of her affection in a matter of just a few hours: the mothers of Amadís de Gaula and García de Salazar consummate their passion the very night of their initial encounter with their lovers. The upshot of this is that, from a psychological viewpoint, no reason exists

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<sup>14</sup> It might seem — as urged by Riquer — that Calisto could have met and become enamored of Melibea on a previous occasion, and that only now does he have the opportunity to converse with her. However, a decisive reason against this possibility is that such action does not appear in the *argumento general*, which was surely written by the *antiguo auctor* (this seems evident from the recently-discovered Biblioteca de Palacio manuscript 1520; I treat this subject in "Two Studies on the Text of the *Celestina*," *Romance Philology* 48 (1994): 1-21. Moreover, had Rojas' informants about Act I told him that the *Comedia* began thus, he would doubtless have recorded it in his own summary to Act I. Lastly, Sempronio would have known about Calisto's being in love, but this comes to him as a complete surprise (I, 220).

<sup>15</sup> Gilman, "El tiempo y el género literario en *La Celestina*," *Revista de Filología Hispánica* 7 (1945): 147-59; Asensio, "El tiempo en *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 20 (1952): 28-43; Gilman, "A propos of 'El tiempo en *La Celestina*' by Manuel J. Asensio," *Hispanic Review* 21 (1953): 42-45; Asensio, "A Rejoinder," *Hispanic Review* 21 (1953): 45-50; Lida de Malkiel, *La originalidad artística de "La Celestina"* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1962): 173-81; Ruiz Ramón, *Historia del teatro español*, I: 59-62.

to reject the chronology whereby Melibea yields to Calisto only three days after meeting him.

This is not to deny the dual chronology of *Celestina*, which is incontestable. The point is that this double system was wholly devised by Fernando de Rojas, one of whose primary purposes was the creation of ambiguity, a *sine qua non* for a literary masterpiece. Thus we see that the beginning of Act II constitutes, on the one hand, a direct continuation of Act I, since Calisto asks Sempronio's opinion about his gift of 100 gold coins to Celestina (given at the end of Act I), and he sends the servant to escort the bawd home (II, 270). But while Sempronio is still on his way to Celestina's house, Pármemo reminds Calisto that "perderse el otro día [= yesterday, or several days ago] el neblí fue causa de tu entrada en la huerta de Melibea ..." (II, 274). In other words, in the space of a single page Rojas has created two separate and contradictory methods of computing time, the one corresponding to the development of the dramatic action, and the other figuring in odd references in the dialogue. Asensio, Lida de Malkiel and Ruiz Ramón were probably on the right track when they linked this dual time system to the evolution of Melibea's passion. However, the three-day sequence corresponds to the interpretation whereby Melibea falls in love with Calisto from the time of their initial meeting, while the month-long period fits the hypothesis that she actually does despise him at first, but gradually succumbs to the malefic power of Celestina's conjurations.

It is possible that the chronology of the work of the *antiguo auctor* may have suggested to Fernando de Rojas the idea of a dual system, despite the fact that Act I contains only a single notion of time. Rojas could well have taken inspiration for his double depiction of temporality from two events presented in the second half of Act I. After Sempronio informs his master that he knows a go-between who can procure Melibea for him (I, 233-34), Calisto thrusts aside his lethargy. Desiring an immediate solution for his passion, he sends Sempronio off in search of Celestina. When the two of them return quickly and knock at the door, Calisto commands Pármemo to open it as soon as possible ("¡Corre, corre, abre!" [I, 239]), but then the desperate lover inexplicably stops to listen attentively to Pármemo's extraordinarily long condemnation of Celestina, who all the while is eavesdropping outside (I, 239-50). Immediately after he greets Celestina, Calisto goes off to find his purse, leaving Celestina and Pármemo to discourse at great length during what should be a very brief time (I, 252-65). These uncommon and unexplained decelerations in time, precisely at a point when rapid action could be expected, quite possibly suggested to Rojas the concept of a dual time scheme.

My main point here, nonetheless, is that the *antiguo auctor*, while introducing an unusual deceleration of time in the second half of Act I, had presented only a normal sequence of events in the first half. All the evidence indicates that scene 1, wherein Calisto converses with Melibea, is directly followed by scene 2, which shows him arriving home in a foul temper, as a result of Melibea's rejection, and ill-humoredly calling for Sempronio (I, 213). This servant justifies his absence from the *sala* by stating that he had gone outside because the *girifalte* had flown off its perch — surely this is a reference to an earlier scene, in which Calisto would have chosen the other bird for his outing. In other words, this allusion to a hawk in all probability ties in with action that took place shortly before. Calisto then dismisses his valet and goes to bed to bemoan his misfortune; Sempronio, unaware of the cause of his master's sudden turn in humor, laments "¡O desventura! ¡O súbito mal! ¿Cuál fue tan contrario acontecimiento que así *tan presto* robó el alegría deste hombre ...?" (I, 216; emphasis added). Sempronio's observance of the celerity of Calisto's change proves that he had seen him in good spirits only a short time earlier, probably only a half-hour or so, when he departed for the hunt. The only interval separating scenes 1 and 2, then, is the short time that it takes Calisto to walk home from Melibea's garden.

#### 4. Summary

In short, I believe that the manuscript of the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* used by Fernando de Rojas was truncated at both ends (although that apparently read by García de Salazar contained the initial episode of the lost falcon<sup>16</sup>). Rojas decided to write a continuation of the piece, but he thought it unnecessary to compose a beginning; instead he briefly epitomized the missing action in the *argumento I*, in which he also summarized the rest of the plot of Act I. It seems improbable that the codex handled by Rojas would have begun precisely with the first words of the *Comedia* as we know it. More likely, the missing folios would have made the manuscript start with an incomplete section; Rojas (or perhaps an earlier reader) eliminated this useless material down to the point where a more or less smooth beginning was possible. Thus Rojas' idea of starting in the middle of a conversation was one more of his brilliant creative insights, but it was born of necessity. Unlike his

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<sup>16</sup> For complete details, see "Calisto's Lost Falcon" (cited in note 11); a summary may be found in "The Hunter Loses His Falcon: Notes on a Motif from *Cligés* to *La Celestina* and Lope de Vega," *Romania* 107 (1986 [1988]): 145-82 (at 176-80).

*impressores*, Rojas did not consider it desirable to synthesize the Acts penned by himself, and thus the printers ended up doing it themselves. But later on the author composed the résumés to the new Acts inserted in the *Tragicomedia*, for the sake of consistency of format.

For his knowledge of the opening of Act I, Rojas would have relied upon the recollection of older readers. (The apparent imitation of the *antiguo auctor's* initial episode by García de Salazar would seem to date the *Comedia* sometime before 1476, and possibly as early as 1450.<sup>17</sup>) Rojas was careful to preserve the incident of the stray hawk in his *argumento I*, well aware of its double symbolism of seduction and approaching death. It seems clear that Calisto and Melibea meet personally for the first time in her garden (although they doubtless knew each other by name<sup>18</sup>), and that she falls in love with him at this point — her "fury" is merely a disguise for her real sentiments. After her rebuff, Calisto goes straight home; thus scene 2 follows scene 1 by just a few minutes. In his continuation, however, Rojas introduced a double time sequence, to correspond to the ambiguity — also invented by him — about the efficacy of Celestina's conjurations in the seduction of Melibea.

It seems to me that the notion of an incomplete *Comedia* manuscript enables us to understand more clearly many of the problems posed by the outset of a masterwork initiated by one genius who desired to remain anonymous, and finished by another whose profound vision of humankind convinced him that few people and few events are simple, and that the best way to portray them is through ambiguity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See once more "Calisto's Lost Falcon" and "The Hunter Loses His Falcon," 176-80.

<sup>18</sup> Both Sempronio (I, 220) and Celestina (I, 238) know who Melibea is, without any explanations.

<sup>19</sup> I am deeply grateful to Professors Keith Whinnom, Alan Deyermond and Joseph Snow for reading and commenting upon this study in typescript, and to Professor Antonio Stäuble, who kindly provided materials and expertise upon the humanistic comedy. This article (as well as "Calisto's Lost Falcon") was originally completed in 1986; I have revised it and updated the bibliography and notes where appropriate.



Escenario creado por el escenógrafo Burmann para la Celestina  
Teatro Español de Madrid