

La Celestina and the Popularization of Graphic Criminal Violence

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In a modern media environment, especially in films and television, graphic criminal violence as entertainment is the order of the day, while its antecedents stretch far back in time. In Spanish literature, *La Celestina* marks a watershed in its strikingly modern and detailed treatment of the criminal classes, and it is perhaps the first work of fiction to successfully bring the world of the *hampa* to the written page as much for entertainment as for moralization. I shall argue that the *La Celestina* is the starting point for the popularization of graphic violence, particularly in an urban setting, and that the fictionalized version of a publicly recognized phenomenon would become increasingly popular in Spain throughout the first half of the sixteenth-century. This popularization did not necessarily occur because of any particular *zeitgeist*, but instead because Fernando de Rojas was the first to discover a method of blending rhetorical techniques, both lawyerly and literary, and applying them in the depiction of characters and actions drawn from his own «street knowledge». Rojas was also aided in his innovation by his awareness of criminal justice proceedings and general knowledge —shared by anyone living in an urban setting— of criminals for whom violence was both a tool of the trade and a lurking mortal danger. The term «popularization» in my argument, as well as referring to the many «Celestinesque» imitators of Rojas's method, also connotes the popular (urban) setting for the scenes in question, as opposed to classical, historical, or Biblical antecedents that may have also inspired *La Celestina's* principal author. The work sits at a crucial point in history, drawing on previous models and modifying them in a manner that would be adopted and used even further by future authors to meet increasing popular demand.

When Fernando de Rojas explains his reasons for changing the initial title of *Comedia* to *Tragicomedia* he clearly indicates the readers' reactions to the ending and a subsequent demand for generic distinction. Beyond Rojas's explanations, modern critics have seen a more pervasive aspect of the «tragi» in the *Tragicomedia* that is present long before the final act. Rojas's discourse on discord in the prologue reveals a pessimistic tone in the work as a whole that is not merely imagined by scholars nor a simple reverse extrapolation of Pleberio's lament. All of the imagery in the prologue lends itself well to interpreting the action of the work and not merely glossing readerly disagreements. Phrases like «perpetua guerra» that form a sort of bookend for Pleberio's speech and «mundo lleno de males» both demonstrate that conflict and strife are endemic in *La Celestina* and the world it represents (Prólogo, 14; XXI, 398).¹ Over the last forty years, explanations for this pessimism range from those related to various indirect forms of moralization (Deyermond, Maravall), to a dramatization of *fortuna* (Berndt), to a coded *converso's* polemic against the anti-Semitic forces aligned against him and his family (Gilman). Most recently, the prevailing (if not pervading) pessimism, according to one critic, «exemplifies the violent sense of incoherence of the late-Gothic aesthetic» (Lawrance 101). Another explanation, not itself separate from questions of aesthetics, yet intimately tied with social reality, not to mention the plot and characters of *La Celestina*, relates to an inescapable and threatening criminal element.

One can interpret the prologue's «perpetua guerra» at the first level of metaphor as delineated by Rojas, but the discourse of predation and fighting gains a further dimension of meaning when one considers the armed servants, street fighting, ruffian subculture, and general air of danger found outside the well-to-do's walls. Pleberio's final judgment that the murderous Pármeno and Sempronio were «los más fieles compañeros» corrupted by love makes very little sense unless it is read ironically (XXI, 400). Throwing oneself off a tower for love is understandable in a tragic literary sense, but having one's throat cut or head chopped off as a result of greed-fueled homicide hardly fits into the same tragic category, and «amor» seems an unlikely culprit. Melibea and Calisto were dealing directly with violent criminals, plain and simple. From the very beginning, criminality is an integral part of the sex-and-violence aspect of *La Celestina*, and while there is certainly an overt moral warning against associating with gangsters, a more fruitful area of exploration may be found in examining why readers and/or listeners wanted more criminality, seemingly for its own sake. There is a kernel of the criminal in the work, whose growth in further iterations of the story can be explained by the audience's (whether reading or listening) desire to make sense of,

1.— All citations are from Severin's 1987 bilingual edition, unless otherwise indicated.

and to find pleasure in, the depiction of dangerous criminals. The literary exploitation of criminal violence for both pleasure and instruction is also a reflection of Rojas's own social and intellectual environments. Examining these environments is the first step in understanding the true novelty of Rojas's creation before we enter into a textual and visual analysis of *La Celestina* (really various «Celestinas») and its descendants as a way of demonstrating the lasting impact of this novelty.

Examining Rojas's portrayal of violence within a bigger social picture presents numerous problems and in the end may require a scope that is more reduced than one might wish. Even while designating Rojas as a descendant of *conversos*, we must be careful when positing any connections between violence and the law as a result of his, or his family's persecution at the hands of the Inquisition. It is certainly true that Rojas directly witnessed a certain form of anti-*converso* persecution, and could have been its target in the context of his own family's legal troubles, but this context does not necessarily prove that there is a link between religion and violence in the narration of *La Celestina*. Perhaps due to the intentionally spectacular nature of *autos-de-fe*, and the commonplace nature of medieval public executions, there exists the misconception today that the *auto* and the execution were one and the same. The historical record shows that this was not the case, as Consuelo Maqueda Abreu explains that it was the secular arm of justice that carried out the punishment and so the Inquisition «no se considere partícipe de la muerte de los herejes» (394). This justification may seem strange or poorly founded to us today, yet a medieval lawyer like Rojas would have had little difficulty in establishing a separation between religious and secular institutions and their responsibilities. Any execution, even stemming from heresy, and however spectacular and well attended, was still a secular affair. These «quemaderos públicos,» at least in the case of burnings, were inevitably performed outside of the city walls and, «no siempre son construidos por el Santo Oficio, sino que forman parte de la ciudad, como un elemento municipal más» (195). Even as anti-*converso* sentiments continued in the seventeenth-century, the positing of the *converso* question in literature did not mean that characters in a work were solely punished for their inherited religious transgression. For example, Anne Cruz explains that Pablos in Quevedo's *Buscón* is as much the «other» for being a *pícaro* (belonging to a criminal class) as he is for being a *converso*, and that «the *Buscón* novelizes the sovereign right to control life and death by exercising the author's control over his character» (126). It is therefore safer to lean towards the assertion that violence and criminality in *La Celestina* have their origins in a secular social context, Sempronio's warnings to Calisto about heresy notwithstanding.

Discarding the religious aspect does not entirely remove doubt regarding the nature or possible message about violence in the work. Assump-

tions about non-religious urban violence in medieval cities have come under question in the last decade, and we must reduce the scope of analysis even further to avoid other possible pitfalls. It is easy to say that *La Celestina* was written in a time of widespread turmoil, even when leaving aside the *converso* question, but how much violence and upheaval on a «national» level filtered down to Rojas's Salamanca, let alone into his work? While Spain during Rojas's time was certainly politically fragmented, if some outside force were to bring conflict to a particular region, there would be no guarantee that internal violence would result. If not openly at war with each other, there were certainly clashes between regions or power structures, but María Isabel del Val Valdivieso has demonstrated that, as with Medina del Campo at the end of the fifteenth century, in Salamanca rival factions would close ranks to defend the city against outside aggressors (48). In a world where internal order can be born of external conflict, it is advisable to limit the scope further when determining Rojas's social influences. This brings us to the level of the city, certainly a *locus* of violence, but where efforts to obtain a clear picture still present the investigator with certain difficulties. Fortunately, the resolution of these problems coincides neatly with a very likely vision of Rojas's immediate social surroundings.

Ricardo Córdoba de la Llave explains that, regarding medieval Castile, «la casi total carencia de una documentación auténticamente judicial» forces modern researchers to employ indirect methods of assembling crime statistics in an attempt to gain an accurate picture of urban violence (393). Even when a substantial amount of indirect evidence is gathered, in this case documents from the Registro General del Sello, the likelihood still exists for biased interpretations that assume more indictments for murder than for robbery. These interpretations stem from particular documents that are shown as lacking when compared to accounts from other sources (395). Jean Chiffolleau writes that «todos los gestos de la vida social estaban contaminados por la violencia» but Córdoba de la Llave does not agree with this generalized claim (qtd. in Córdoba 441-442). I side with the Spanish scholar by looking at more specific circumstances that are better supported by the evidence, especially when establishing a social context surrounding Fernando de Rojas and the writing of *La Celestina*. Leaving aside the sweeping view of medieval history as a brutish and bloodthirsty time, and attempting to avoid any pre-modern pre-figuring of the «Leyenda Negra,» let us instead direct our observations towards urban locations with which Rojas's was likely to be both personally and professional familiar, namely brothels, inns, taverns, and the city's plazas. After explaining his misgivings about painting a broad picture of «violencia cotidiana» based on available statistics, Córdoba de la Llave finds better use for the data when establishing the types of places where this violence was more likely to occur. He cites studies

by Teresa Vinyoles, Iñaki Bazán, and mentions without reservation how Juan Miguel Mendoza echoes their observations. This last scholar has shown that taverns, inns, and houses of ill repute were truly a refuge for «la contrasociedad,» and that, «en el interior de dichos locales abundaron las riñas y venganzas, y que los lugares más transitados y concurridos eran zonas más conflictivos» (398-399). Further evidence of the *locus* of the «contrasociedad» is found in Córdoba de la Llave's citations of Robert Muchembled's research into the violence of medieval France where, 17 out of 100 of crimes being studied were committed in the street, 12 out of 100 inside the home; and that this pales in comparison to «55 por 100 representado por los delitos cometidos en tabernas y mesones, donde numerosos homicidios se relacionaron con la bebida» (402).

In other words, we need look no further than Rojas's immediate surroundings to see the real-life inspiration for the criminal violence that became popularized through *La Celestina* and its later iterations. These surroundings would have been familiar to Rojas during the time of his life when he wrote the work. As Francisco Márquez Villanueva has pointed out, Salamantine students in Rojas's time made constant contact with prostitutes, and with them came a «diversidad de maleantes y parásitos» (*Orígenes* 126). If Rojas was indeed a «bachiller» (as expressed in *La Celestina*'s introductory acrostic) at the time of writing and if this included civil law, he also would have spent six years in Salamanca training to meet society's demand for good justice officials of all stripes, whether they end up in «juzgados y tribunales, bufetes, consejos, aullas, corregimientos, cabildos o regimientos» (Peset and Alonso Romero 32, 42). Lest we think that the author's studies were based on pure book learning, we must remember that the *mos italicus* was the fashion at the time, focusing less on the accumulation of written knowledge, and more on the «dominio de técnicas de resolución de conflictos, al adiestramiento en el arte del debate, y la argumentación jurídica, que luego serían útiles en la Universidad y en la práctica del foro» (33). Because it seems reasonable that Rojas's had contact with a «diversidad de maleantes y parásitos,» it also seems likely that he would have been especially suited to catalog and analyze the words and deeds of these people. His mind would have been made agile and his memory made capacious through constant exposure to a method which focused on the practice of law and anticipated real-world situations often involving criminals. Márquez Villanueva believes that Rojas was the first to make the *alcahueta* a universal figure, capable of surviving by herself, and I believe that Rojas would apply the same universalizing treatment to gangsters such as Sempronio, Centurio, and, for later authors, Traso, all figures that were likely based on real-world encounters («Antropología» 262). While one cannot ignore the contributions of certain literary antecedents to the formation of this new type of gangster character, the figure is much more than a simple copy of a *miles*

gloriosus or *soldado fanfarrón*, as we shall see further along in this study. At the same time, emphasizing the impact of Rojas's real-world experience with *la hampa* is not to say that he was some sort of medieval proto-anthropologist, or that his portrayals are in any way accurate or realistic. An author can portray criminals in a manner that corresponds more to an environment of collective fear, is born of the need to scapegoat (Gauvard 32) or is based on ulterior political motives (Dean 69). Independent of the cause, an official lawyerly discourse can be interwoven with literary and popular storytelling. This phenomenon roughly corresponds to, as it predates, Natalie Zemon's object of study (sixteenth-century French remission letters), where, there is no «impermeable 'official culture' imposing its criteria on 'popular culture,' but cultural exchange» (112). The commonly noted novelty of bringing together social classes in *La Celestina* also includes the placement of urban criminals, and their violent behavior, in a prominent narrative position, a technique that was to be imitated by subsequent authors.

We have now examined the social context (as much as can be safely conjectured), and how Rojas's training as a lawyer could have suited his ability to weave stories of criminal interaction through the *mos italicus*. We can also now look at how his training in rhetoric and exemplary literature provide two other possible sources for his interest in portraying criminal violence in *La Celestina*, this time in a moralizing vein. As a law student, Rojas's may not have spent his time amassing pure knowledge of the Justinian code, but he was required to sharpen his memory with the aim of perfecting his rhetoric. In his edition of *La Celestina*, Russell notes that both the initial author and Rojas sharpened their rhetorical skills by either directly reading, or adopting techniques from the famous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, erroneously attributed by medieval authors to Cicero (Russell 131).

The rhetorical style of *La Celestina* has been extensively examined, but less study has been dedicated to the role that memory plays in the lawyer-rhetorician's ability to set a scene for his audience when dealing with criminal cases. Isabella Iannuzzi agrees with Russell about the *RH*'s importance, calling its author «fundamental» for Salamantine students and adding that the *RH*, «Toma como punto de partida la libre elección de lo que el cerebro considere estimulante para almacenar y así recordar» (10-11). Both Russell and Iannuzzi also emphasize the importance of Juan Alfonso de Benavente's *Ars et doctrina studendi et docendi*, written in Salamanca in 1453, a book in which Benavente «cree apropiado recordar pormenorizadamente a sus oyentes estudiantes de derecho el contenido de los referidos párrafos de la *RH*» (Iannuzzi 9, Russell n123). While memory exercises may seem far removed from Rojas indirectly recounting his knowledge of criminal violence, one section of the «referidos párrafos,» in this case book III, 24 of the *RH*, is of particular interest in terms of «crime fiction»

We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in the memory. And we shall do so if we establish likenesses as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague, but doing something; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily. (221)

Mary Jean Carruthers also cites a non-classical medieval guide for developing memory through the use of violent images in which «The one thing that cannot be tolerated is dullness or quietude or failure to rivet the attention» (171). While Carruthers has chastised modern scholars for assuming erroneously that the cited Bradwardine's *ars memorativa* follows the *RH* tradition, the above passage from *RH* seems to fit the Bradwardine's text's message linking violence to the «art of memory» (130). Aside from engraving this violence in the minds of readers or listeners, there is also the question of pleasure. Jody Enders, drawing on classical sources to explain torture in literature, writes about a more general context where,

the pleasures of witnessing and participating in violence were routinely played out with all the power and all the theatricality with which delivery endowed them. That occurred not only in rhetorical orations but in many types of theoretical, meditational, and dramatic writings. (186)

In this way, Rojas was able to successfully express his knowledge of violent criminal people and places through the overlapping disciplines of law, rhetoric, and literature. The moral message of avoiding «lisonjeros y malos sirvientes, y falsas mujeres hechiceras» is quite clear, but literature in general, and *La Celestina*'s success in particular, cannot thrive on moralizing alone. The sheer pleasure of reading and viewing can exist alongside the satisfaction of digesting a morally healthy message. This is evident when studying Rojas's work in relation to Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*. At the time of his death, Rojas possessed the Spanish translation of *De casibus* under the title *Caída de príncipes* as part of his library (Valle Lersundi 381). It was a work that could have had as much impact in *La Celestina* as the *Decameron* and whose graphically violent na-

ture was impossible to ignore (Barrio Olano 164). *Caída de príncipes* was based on French translations, not Boccaccio's Latin original, leading us to examine the message that the French translator Laurent de Premierfait was trying to convey (Alvar Ezquerro and Lucía Megías 20, 23). Gathercole informs us that,

As negative forces triumph, almost all the protagonists of Laurent's translated stories have tragic ends. This is the warning for the nobility of fifteenth century France: human wickedness results inevitably in tragedy. Men especially the nobility who are at this period leaders of others, must be morally strong. Death in a strange form is the usual climax of a story [...] (250)

I do not wish to focus on the simple message ("do no evil"), but rather the «strange» medium that could have provided Rojas the means to effectively communicate the criminal violence present in *La Celestina*. According to Valle Lersundi (384), Rojas possessed the 1495 edition of *Caída de príncipes*. This particular edition's only woodcut is that of the Wheel of Fortune found on the frontispiece, but through the words contained within it carries over the lasting graphic nature of Laurent's text. A good example is book one, chapter IX, which tells the story of Thyestes and Atreus. The tale is particularly significant when looking at Rojas's possible technical inspiration because of its insistence on memory, as the authorial voice claims that Thyestes appears before him with a request to record a terribly sad fate before writing about Theseus (fol. 11r). After Thyestes relates his brother Atreus's treachery in detail, he goes on to explain how Atreus served up Thyestes's sons disguised as a meaty meal. Adding to the horrific deed, Atreus also,

en el lugar donde degollo mis hijos: tovo prestas copas de oro guarnidas de plas [sic] y piedras que la sangre de mis inocentes hijos mando coger y me la mando dar a beuer mezclada con vino en aquel triste ayantar. (fol. 11v)

After the meal, Thyestes is shown the decapitated heads as proof of what he has eaten and drunk. The act of eating his own children and drinking their blood is the worst of his travails, and also the most important to communicate and recall, as he explains to the author:

En una sola desaventura quiero traer a tu memoria: conviene a saber que con voluntad de comer, comí la carne de mis tristes hijos y con sediente garganta he bebido su propia sangre [...] (fol. 12r)

It appears as though Atreus had read the *Rhetorica ad Herennium's* advice on making a memorable impression, «introducing one stained with

blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking.» Dorothy Severin has written on the subject of memory in *La Celestina* itself and argues that the characters' (including Celestina's) failures to maintain mastery over memory lead them to make imprudent, and ultimately fatal, decisions (42). It is therefore also possible that there was an extra dimension of moralization in the use of criminal violence, beyond the clear message that keeping company with the late fifteenth century *hampa* can kill you. Without establishing a direct link between precise examples in either the *RH* or *De casibus* and the express content of *La Celestina*, I would still propose that Rojas gained ideas from these works about how to portray violence in a literary fashion. One could use Berndt's arguments about *La Celestina* as a dramatization of Fortune to establish a connection between Boccaccio's and Rojas's moralizing intentions, but an analysis that focuses mainly on allegory would leave out the element that made *La Celestina* so appealing: a violent criminal underworld. Given the graphic nature of the cases in *De casibus*, it is likely that the reading audience enjoyed, or at least paid particular attention to, the violent deeds of historical «criminals» as much as they heeded the lessons about ever-changing Fortune.

I believe that, along with a healthy moral message, many in Rojas's audience wanted more fictionalized criminal violence for its own sake. I base this assertion on an increase in representatives of the *hampa* over time, starting with the transition from *Comedia* to *Tragicomedia*, specifically with the addition in the «Tratado de Centurio,» namely acts XIV through XIX. These acts are gangster-laden, giving more details about the criminal underworld, and also include mention of Traso, who receives his own act in a later edition. The so-called «Auto de Traso» has been cursorily examined when answering questions of authorship, and more ably when studying matters of genre and the act's insertion in the larger work (Hook, Botta).² At the same time, relatively little attention has been paid to this increased criminal element as it relates to subsequent readers' reception and the «Celestinesque» as a genre. Taken together, the «Auto de Traso,» along with further iterations of *La Celestina* and several sixteenth-century woodcuts will be the key to understanding the audience's increased desire to see violent lawbreakers at work and at play.

Criminals in literature are nothing new of course, but the novelty of the criminals in *La Celestina* stems from their pervasive nature, their complete inseparability from the dynamics of the plot. Praised as a true blending of the high and low, *La Celestina* makes contact with the criminal inevitable. Sempronio and Pármeno are not simply irresponsible or

2.— Authorship is attributed to a certain «Sanabria», and Gilman guesses in that this might be a *converso* jurist from Almagro, roughly contemporaneous with Rojas (84). The «Auto de Traso» itself can be found in Criado de Val and Trotter's 1984 edition of *Celestina*.

greedy servants evoking classical comic types (whether slave, parasite, or *miles gloriosus*), but rather members of a very real criminal sub-culture who have climbed high enough on the social ladder to serve Calisto «de noble linaje» (Maestro 23-24). Pleberio blames «amor» for Pármemo and Sempronio's execution, but surely he knows otherwise. Even Melibea, often considered one of the more naïve characters, includes violent crime among her many worries in act XIV of the *Tragicomedia*, when Calisto appears delayed:

¿Quién sabe si él, con voluntad de venir al prometido
plazo en la forma que los tales mancebos a las tales ho-
ras suelen andar, fue topado de los alguaciles nocturnos
y sin le conocer le han acometido; el cual por se defender
los ofendió o es de ellos ofendido? (XIV, 312)

If an ostensibly innocent young woman fantasizes about street brawls, it is fair to say that both characters and readers alike saw violent criminal elements as unavoidable. It is also impossible to ignore the role that prostitution played in violent criminal behavior. While the oldest profession may have been officially sanctioned to some extent, *Celestina*, Elicia, and Areúsa operate outside the confines of the law, and *Celestina*'s facial scar reminds us that, under these circumstances, few *rameras* were without their *rufián* (Lacarra 274). Keeping in mind Márquez Villanueva's observations about students' contact with a «diversidad de maleantes y parásitos,» we see that *La Celestina*'s readership/listenership would have noted the connection between professional sex for selling pleasure and professional violence as a means of enforcing order. Given this information about student life, it is also quite possible that Rojas and his readers had some brushes with the law.³ Pervasive criminality aids in the «tragi» aspect of the *Tragicomedia* precisely because it is inevitable, it is an unstoppable force, integral to society, combined with lust, indiscretion, and leading to the terrible ends of the protagonists. Alisa and Pleberio, Calisto and Melibea, to say nothing of all the servants, know that contact with criminals is a bad idea, but they are unable to extricate themselves.

To repeat, along with its attendant moral message, the criminal element was appealing in itself, and beyond the addition of the «Tratado de Centurio,» this growing appeal is manifest in the change of wood cuts from the 1499(?) Burgos(?) edition to those from Seville, dated 1511-1514 and Valencia, 1514.⁴ In the 1499(?) Burgos(?) *Comedia*, the only woodcuts that could be construed as violent, and without a trace of criminality, are

3.— From the *Siete Partidas* onward into the seventeenth-century prohibitions, attempts were made to disarm students and prevent street fights and all-out brawls. See Rodríguez Cruz (381) and Kagan (203).

4.— I am certainly not the first to examine the relationship between text, woodcuts, and reader reception in *Celestina*. See Montero. I have put the date 1502 in quotation marks to

that of the fatally fallen Calisto in one image, and Melibea falling to the ground in another. Erna Berndt Kelley remarks for the first, «we do not see any brains on the stones» and «Such gruesome details were not illustrated in Fadrique's» edition (215). For Melibea's fall, the critic notes how the broken body is not part of the illustration (221), and explains that for murder scenes, «the illustrator obviously felt it best to leave them to the reader's imagination» (225). While Berndt Kelley concludes that the ultimate motives for including or excluding a particular image is left to speculation, she does observe that the murders will «receive attention from the printers and Woodcutters of the *Tragicomedia* editions that would follow.» In the «1502» Seville edition, the sequence of woodcut scenes is as follows: 1) The frontispiece with Calisto and Melibea meeting in the garden, and servants in the background; 2) Two scenes in one woodcut, first of Pármemo and Sempronio attacking Celestina with swords, and then injuring themselves as they escape out of a high window; 3) A scene of Calisto scaling a ladder to meet Melibea, as Tristán and Sosia await at the bottom with weapons drawn; 4) A scene of Calisto being lifted by two servants after his deadly fall; 5) A scene of Melibea falling from a tower as Pleberio looks on in horror and Alisa looks down while clasping her hands. In the Valencia edition we find 1) a frontispiece that is a street-scene tableau with Celestina making a visit to Melibea's house, Calisto waiting at the side with perhaps Sosia and Tristán; and possibly Sempronio and Pármemo speaking to Areúsa and Elicia in the far background; 2) Either Pármemo or Sempronio with his throat cut (figure 1), and the other undergoing the process, while three members of local law enforcement observe; 3) a scene very similar to the one in the previously mentioned edition, with Calisto scaling a wall; 4) a similar scene as the abovementioned edition with servants lifting a dead Calisto; 5) yet another similar scene as above with Melibea's fall. Of the ten scenes depicted in these two editions, eight contain either threats, acts, or the results of violence. Four of the ten scenes either display violent criminal attacks (with stabbing or slashing) or anticipate them (weapons are drawn). In the 1531 Burgos edition, there are only three woodcuts that display scenes of any action, and the rest are merely static portraits. One action scene is repeated, that of Calisto scaling the wall, and the servants' weapons are not drawn. The first woodcut scene is the frontispiece itself, with Calisto and Melibea flanked by one servant each, and Celestina in the background. The only other two non-portrait woodcuts after the frontispiece combine to feature Sempronio and Pármemo's attack against Celestina and their subsequent disastrous escape (see figure 2). I would argue that the printer thought it more useful, or pleasurable, to include the murder of

indicate that many of the «1502» editions were printed after the date listed. That listed year was part of a scheme to avoid date-sensitive publishing fees. See Norton (141-56).

Celestina than the fall of Calisto or Melibea. Now we shall return to the text and attempt to answer the «misterio» (Liotta 56-59) of the addition of the «Auto de Traso,» an unequivocally criminal scene in which violence is the main subject of discussion.



Figure 1.

Woodcut from 1514 Valencia edition.



Figure 2.

Woodcut from 1531 Burgos edition.

The «Auto de Traso» first appears in the 1526 Toledo edition of the *Tragicomedia*, inserted between Acts XVIII and XIX. The act's origin is the reference found at the end of the *Tragicomedia's* Act XVIII in which Centurio states:

Quiero enviar a llamar a Traso, el cojo, y a sus dos compañeros y decirles que, porque yo estoy ocupado esta noche en otro negocio, vaya a dar un repiquete de broquel a manera de levada, para ojear unos garzones, que me fue encomendado, que todo esto es pasos seguros y donde no conseguirán ningún daño, mas de hacerlos huir y volverse a dormir. (XVIII, 368)

This oblique mention of Centurio's meeting with Traso was expanded by an author named as «Sanabria» in another «comedia» and incorporated into three, possibly four, different editions (Hook 107). This amplification is summed up in the «Argumento del décimo nono auto» from 1526:

Entre Centurio y Traso, publicos rufianes, se concierta vna leuada por satisfazer Areusa y a Elicia. Ydo Centurio a ver su amiga Elicia, Traso passa palabras con Tiburcio su amiga; y entreteuiendo Terencia, tia de Tiburcio, mala y sagaz muger, entre ellos trayiciones y falsedades de vna parte y otra se inuentan, como parece en el processo deste auto. El qual fue sacado de la comedia que ordeno Sanabria. (Criado de Val and Trotter 313)

Several *Celestina* scholars have commented on the significance of the addition of this act and the character of Traso himself. The name could be derived from the «Thraso miles» character in Terence's *Eunuchus*, an

assumption that is reasonable but ultimately of minimal usefulness. For one to gain any advantage by studying classical antecedents, one must first agree to strong links between the *miles gloriosus* of Roman comedy and the fifteenth or sixteenth-century *rufián* in literary form. With Centurio as a model of comparison for Traso, we can see that this initial link is not without problems, mainly because there is no consensus that Centurio is entirely based on the classical *miles gloriosus* (Lida de Malkiel 702-703). Secondly, one must also be convinced of Terence's strong influence in Rojas, an idea that has been cogently questioned (Whinnom 143). Traso may be a character in *Eunuchus*, but Covarrubias in his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* surmises that Terence chose the name because of its relation to the Greek *δράσσω*, or «*perturbo, molestiam affero, per syncope[m] factum ex τράσσω et τ in θ mutata...y en nuestro español tarasca*» (343). The image of the «tarasca» is appropriate in light of Cherchi's observations that the mixing of the high and the low in classical and pseudo-classical names in *La Celestina* «lleva a una integración monstruosa, que crea auténtico estupor por su fuerza expresionista» (88). The fascination with criminal grotesquerie reflects a more general fascination with the social and historical grotesque of the sort exemplified by the horrific scenes depicted in *De casibus virorum illustrium* mentioned above. Lastly, a detail in Traso's name, the fact that he is dubbed «Traso el cojo,» also indicates a further digression from classical models, and anticipates the evocative ruffian onomastics found in figures like Cervantes's innkeeper Juan Palomeque el Zurdo or protagonists of seventeenth-century *jácaras*, like «el Zurdillo de la Costa» or «el Mellado de Antequera». ⁵ Because there is very little trace of classical comedy in the entire «Auto de Traso,» the addition of the piece is better understood as an augmentation of the gangster atmosphere, and a further indication that a substantial portion of *La Celestina*'s audience wanted more contemporary criminal activity than it did classical or humanistic *imitatio*. There are possible antecedents in François Villon or Rodrigo de Reynosa (White Linker), but it is the «Auto de Traso,» and subsequent inclusions of Centurio's colleagues in future versions of *La Celestina*, that reveal Spanish literatures's first dramatic magnification of the criminal underworld, well beyond a rare curiosity or a new twist on classical characters.

As Lida de Malkiel has rightly pointed out, Centurio is not truly a *fanfarrón* (703). The ruffian self-consciously admits that his name comes not from the hundred men he has killed, but rather from being pimp to a hundred women. Whether he is truly a coward or not, he has suffered, as he states in the «Auto de Traso»:

5.— See Hill, specifically *romances* LXXIII, LXXXI (for el mellado); and LVIII, LIX, LXIII, LXIV, LXXXIV, LXXXVIII (for el zurdillo).

Por el [Crudelio⁶] me he puesto en mil peligros, por su causa me dieron este rasgoncillo de oreja a oreja. La vna mano tengo puesta en la picota, y dos vezes he ya pasado carrera por la ciudad y el mercado. Cada día en desafios, corrido de las justicias, corrido de los alguaciles, corrido tambien de porquerones. Siempre ando a sombra de tejados, la capa cayda, la adarga embraçada, que broquel ya sabes que traer no puedo. Mas, si biuo, todo junto me lo pagara como el perro los palos. (314)

This candid self-pity may be contrary to Centurio's tough-guy image, but the author of the «Auto de Traso» (whoever it might be) saw fit to continue Rojas's ironic tone, and regardless of Centurio's attitude expressed in the passage above, there is no doubt that the description furthers his image as a sincerely hardened criminal. In his exchange with Traso, Centurio also mentions «Cremón el tuerto,» yet another disfigured criminal, reminding us that Centurio is not the only «Scarface» of *La Celestina*, as the titular *alcahueta* herself also sports a scar (314). Rubén Soto Rivera gives a seemingly exhaustive examination of the meanings of the scar on the basis that for *Celestina*, «una prosopopeya de la retórica es su cicatriz en la cara,» but nowhere does Soto Rivera mention Centurio's «rasgoncillo de oreja a oreja» that was added with the «Auto de Traso» in the 1526 edition (Soto Rivera 20). Breogan Asensio writes that *Celestina*'s «rasguño... es la huella que la mayoría de los críticos aceptan como prueba del pacto con el Demonio» (90). Márquez Villanueva is a notable exception as he associates the «chirlo» with the «infamia» that a husband may visit upon a disobedient wife (120). Lastly, the scar has often been a sign of masculinity's dependence on violence and certainly of gangsterism.⁷ If one considers *Celestina*'s mannish status, her scar can be just as much a sign of her toughness as it is of her victimhood.⁸ Regarding later picaresque fiction, Cruz has described the scar—in the context of the *buscón*'s «trasquilón»— as the marking of the «other,» but what do we make of a situation when two characters sport scars, another is «cojo,» and yet another «off stage» is one-eyed (134). This concentration of «others,» as it diffuses their «otherness,» sharpens the readers' fascination and enjoyment.

6.— For information on «Crudelio» see Botta (11).

7.— This is opposed to weakness as typically marked on a woman through the scar. See Lehman (70).

8.— The seventeenth century, perhaps thought to be less freewheeling than Rojas' time, features its share of *bandoleras*, but also female *valentonas* who know how to handle a knife. For the latter, see La Chispa in Calderón's *El alcalde de Zalamea* or La Catuja in Antonio Enríquez Gómez's *El valiente Campuzano*.

To further demonstrate how Centurio and Traso are strikingly modern violent protagonists, we must compare them to their contemporaries, namely any errant knight from the romances of chivalry. These books, with their continually damaged, yet unstoppable, heroes, depended upon extreme violence that by the end of the sixteenth-century had become a well-worn conceit and the object of ridicule. Thanks to the «bálsamo de Fierabrás,» even the most bashed-up and slashed-up knight would «quedar más sano que una manzana,» although he were cut in half (I.10). Cervantes satirizes this cartoonish violence, about which even the deranged and choleric Don Quixote was circumspect:

No estaba muy bien con las heridas que don Belianis daba y recibía, porque se imaginaba que, por grandes maestros que le hubiesen curado, no dejaría de tener el rostro y todo el cuerpo lleno de cicatrices y señales. (I, 1)

At the same time as Amadís and his progeny were flying off the presses, *La Celestina* and its later iterations were taking another route, and something far more gritty had begun to captivate audiences. Sosia's description of Sempronio and Pármeno's escape in act XIII provides a clear example of this grit:

¡Oh señor! que si los vieras, quebraras el corazón de dolor! El uno llevaba todos los sesos de la cabeza de fuera, sin ningún sentido; El otro quebrado entrambos brazos y la cara magullada. Todos llenos de sangre. Que saltaron de unas ventanas muy altas por huir del alguacil. Y así casi muertos les cortaron las cabezas, que creo que ya no sintieron nada. (XIII, 308)

Even the non-criminal characters are contaminated by the violence of the *hampa*, however indirectly. As Tristán and Sosia lift a fallen Calisto, something else lying on the ground in act XIX provides another graphic example:

¡Oh triste muerte y sin confesión! Coge, Sosia, esos sesos de esos cantos, júntalos con la cabeza del desdichado amo nuestro. ¡Oh día de aciago! ¡Oh arrebatado fin! XIX, 380)

Though readers/listeners are not direct witnesses to either fall, the image of scooping up brains from the pavement is inseparable from the moment that they splat upon the ground. These grotesquely spilled contents were surely included to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Melibea goes so far as to describe her lover's brains as «repartidos por las piedras y paredes» (xx, 392). Why dash out the characters' brains, when any other less graphic damage would have been sufficiently fatal? Why is Pleberio's description of Melibea as «despedazada» not enough to con-

vey the horror in the previous deaths? These graphic descriptions offer a way for the spectator to taste the spectacle of bodily destruction tied to criminal and transgressive behavior in *La Celestina*. The dashed-out brains, the chopped-off heads, Celestina's scar, Centurio's slashed face, Cremo's missing eye, Traso's limp, all detain spectators and listeners, allowing them to fixate on the most jarring aspect of criminality: violence.

It is as though Rojas were aware of the public's morbid combined fascination and repulsion as he added Tristan's question about Sempronio and Pármeno's summary execution: «¿Vístelos cierto o hablaronte?» to which Tristán responds:

Ya sin sentido iban; pero el uno con harta dificultad, como me sintió que con lloro le miraba, hincó los ojos en mí, alzando las manos al cielo, casi dando gracias a Dios y como preguntándome [qué] sentía de su morir. Y en señal de triste despedida abajó su cabeza con lágrimas en los ojos, dando bien a entender que no me había de ver más hasta el día del gran juicio. (XIII, 306)

This addition can be interpreted as an expression of Rojas's need to show his ne'er-do-well's as contrite, but the description is preceded by the statement that Pármeno and Sempronio «quedan degollados en la plaza.» Together these parts heighten the spectacle of execution, complete with the anticipatory bowing of the head, before the scene is repeated in the mind of the audience. *La Celestina* is not a work about violence *per se*, but just as the violence can be explained in terms of moralization, the consequences of *fortuna*, a calc on the mistreatment of the *conversos*, or even the medieval notion of lost honor, there is an equal amount of catharsis, or post-cathexis release, involved in the work's appeal. *La Celestina's* strikingly modern and detailed treatment of the criminal classes made it the first work of fiction to effectively fix this social «text,» one constantly read by an urban audience familiar with the *hampa*, within a fictional context that could be amplified in accordance with popular demand.

We have already seen how the images of violence and its consequences predominate in the woodcuts of the three editions of *La Celestina* mentioned above, and yet one cannot overstate the significance of this fact in determining the coordinates for the reception of Rojas's work. Clive Griffin explains that the c. 1513-1515 Sevilla edition (whose woodcuts we are unable to reproduce here), contains an image of one of the servants being led off to the gallows and, «Oddly enough, the same edition also contains that press's more traditional and appropriated block which shows the servants indeed being beheaded.» He writes: «The printer has merely slipped in an additional execution scene he happens to have by him, possibly by mistake or possibly because such spectacles were as

popular in books as they undoubtedly were in real life.» The modern editor urges us to «preserve a healthy degree of skepticism when attempting to draw conclusions from the illustrations found in the early editions,» but outside of sloppy printing practices and social context, we may also include the influence of *La Celestina*'s precedent as a transforming work of literature (79). Given the changes during the transition from *Comedia* to *Tragicomedia*, the addition of the «Auto de Traso,» and the choice of themes for previous woodcuts, it seems unlikely that the choice of an extra execution scene was simply a mistake. There must have been some reason. In the face of «healthy skepticism» and admitting that (to cite Berndt Kelley again) there may be a certain level of inevitable speculation, I still believe that the evidence suggests a reading/listening public that demanded more violent criminal spectacles in its *Celestinas*, and that the printers were happy to oblige.

To Mac E. Barrick, the frontispiece of Gaspar Gómez's de Toledo's 1536 Medina del Campo edition of *La tercera Celestina* is a bit of a mystery, as it portrays a woman hanged on the gallows (see figure 3), and «has nothing to do with the action.» According to Barrick, the most plausible explanation is simply that: «Spanish printers frequently used the same woodcut on the title pages of several different works, often when the subject of the print did not fit the matter of the book» (65). Thus Barrick implies that an execution scene does not fit the «matter» of *La tercera Celestina*. On the contrary, given what we know about previous examples, the woodcut has everything to do with what much of *La Celestina* had come to represent. Barrick is unable to identify the source of the woodcut, and while the image features no hanged Celestina, the scene represents a perfect conflation of her last two appearances in *La Tercera Celestina*. First she is tarred, feathered, flogged, and left high on a platform for public ridicule. The second time we see her, she slips, falls from a rooftop, and dies. Neither of these isolated scenes would have attracted as much attention as the sight of a hanged woman hovering over the words «Tercera parte de la tragicomedia de Celestina». Clearly, retributive violence is an essential element of the paratext of *La tercera Celestina*. The aggressive intervention of law enforcement in this work is ably and lengthily carried out by the Corregidor, who accuses and convicts, and by the *pregonero*, who carries out the punishment, causing Celestina to cry out: «¡Ay santa María! ¡No me des tan rezio, por la pasión de Jesuchristo!» (337) and «¡Ay, ansiada fue yo! No me des tan crudamente, que me abres las carnes» (338). This increase in violence expands mightily upon the perfunctory execution scene of the original *Tragicomedia*.



Figure 3.

Gaspar Gómez's de Toledo's 1536 Medina del Campo edition
 of *La tercera Celestina*

Examining Gaspar Gómez de Toledo's work demands that we look at Feliciano de Silva's continuation that started the others. In this case I am referring to *La segunda Celestina* from 1534, leaving aside *Penitencia de amor* and the *Comedia Thebayda*. In *La segunda Celestina* we find more brawling pimps than first appeared in Rojas's work. Looking back on Silva, Barrick writes about Pandulfo, the protagonist Felides's ruffian servant who «has a number of prostitutes working for him» and observes that «this apparent lack of logic did not seem to trouble the author» (26). Based on our arguments, it is quite probable that Silva found logic in Pandulfo's profession, knowing that catering to the increasing demand for literary thuggery would please his audience. As a testament to Traso el Cojo's hold on the readers' imagination, the same gangster reappears in Silva's work, although his lines of dialogue take up proportionally slightly less space. On the other hand, if we see Pandulfo as a substitute for Centurio, then criminal representation is significantly increased through the presence of this major character, albeit in a farcical manner. His cowardice and braggadocio are exaggerated and his threats are never taken serious-

ly, unlike those of Traso in his eponymous «auto». Even with a comical tone, the threat of violence lurks among the swelling ranks of the ruffians and hangers on. In Feliciano de Silva's continuation, the rogues' gallery now includes Centurio, Traso el Cojo, Albacín, Tripaenbrazo, Grajales, Montondoro, Barrada, and the suggestively named «El Pueblo». Before a full-scale brawl can take place among all these characters in Scene xxxvii, «la justicia» arrives and the criminals scatter. Lest we assume that these additional troublemakers are simply included for comic relief, we must note that *Celestina* takes their threats seriously, and when she asks the aged pimp Barbanteso for assistance, he responds:

Más me das tú a mí la muerte con tales cosas, como las escarapelas desta noche, que toda la ciudad está llena, y quieres ser tresquillada en concejo y que no lo sepan en tu casa. No para mí, prima, no, que ya no tengo edad para guardar cabras. (477)

Through the implication that the pimps are wolves, the predatory metaphor harkens back to Rojas's original imagery in the prologue to his *Tragicomedia*.

In the fourth continuation, the violent actions once solely perpetrated by criminals are now carried out by the upper class. Thus it appears that interest in the criminal classes for this particular «franchise» has faded somewhat. In Sancho de Muñón's 1542 *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselia, llamada Elicia y por otro nombre quarta obra y tercera Celestina*, it is Roselia's jealous brother Beliseno who becomes a marauder, at odds with law enforcement as much as the ruffians, and with great resolve in carrying out his threats. So forceful is his violent presence that he is responsible for the lovers' deaths in the most direct way possible. He fires an arrow that pierces both Roselia and Lisandro's hearts as they embrace. The fate of Lisandro's loyal servant Oligides at the hands of Beliseno's deadly missile-firing lackeys is to «caer en tierra asaeteado hecho pedazos, los sesos por cada parte» (174). The focus then switches back to the criminals Brumandilón and Siro, doubles for Sempronio and Pármeno, as they go to *Celestina*'s (that is, Elicia's) house where Brumandilón stabs her to death for not giving up her jewels. All of the humor from this braggart's empty threats evaporates as he shouts: «Toma! ¡Toma otra puñalada!... ¡Dios te perdone!... ¡Agora, voce!» His bloodlust is now so great that he calls to Siro when Brionea, who is *Celestina*'s niece and protégée, tries to escape: «¡Corre, corre tú tras esotra! ¡Mueran todas, pues hemos comenzado! ¡Preso por mil, preso por mil y quinientos! ¡Ásela, ásela, antes que salga fuera!» (176). They are unsuccessful in this final kill, and we last see the deadly criminals standing face to face with the Corregidor who shouts «¡Sed presos!» The criado Eubulo's lament, following in the tradition of Pleberio, mentions that the evildoers will be hanged, and this time the

execution scene is left to the audience's imagination. While Muñón's aggregate violence and criminal activity do not equal that of previous *Celestina*-inspired works, the shocking death of the lovers certainly stands out for its originality. The author's interpretation of *Celestina*'s demise features the added titillation of a double attempted murder.

When comparing the products of Rojas's literary descendants, Menéndez Pelayo wrote that the *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselia* was much clearer and better organized, imitating Rojas but with «un enlace nuevo, que basta para dar alta idea del talento dramático de quien le concibió» (101). Indeed, this work can be seen as a return to form, a perhaps overly humanistic *imitatio* that ratchets down the criminal element to pre-«auto de Traso» levels. Nevertheless, by this time, fascination with explicit criminality in literature had gained a life of its own. Twelve years after *Tragicomedia de Lisandro y Roselia*, the anonymously penned *Lazarillo de Tormes* would make underclass figures the main characters, and the first chapter would make mention of two thieves (father and stepfather) in the protagonist's family tree, both of whom face violent punishment in battle or directly at the hands of law-enforcement officials. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this article to exam the rise and fall of fictionalized criminal violence in the second half of the sixteenth century. The purpose here has been to suggest the origins of the phenomenon in Spanish literature and provide enough evidence, through a brief and limited survey of the initial *Celestina* series, to prove that these origins provided a model worthy of emulation. Along with Rojas's claim that his readers wanted more of a love story in the revisions, the «Auto de Traso» and the adoption of this character in *La segunda Celestina* reveal another sort of demand. Instead of more complicated love plots, *à la* seventeenth-century *comedias de enredo*, it was criminal behavior linked to violence that held a special fascination that continues among readers of Western, let alone Spanish, literature to this day.⁹

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RESUMEN

En la literatura española, *La Celestina* marca un hito al retratar de manera destacadamente moderna y detallada las clases criminales, y tal vez sea la primera obra de ficción que realmente tuvo éxito en cuanto a plasmar el hampa literariamente tanto para entretener como para moralizar. *La Celestina* es el punto de partida para la popularización de la violencia vívida, particularmente en un ambiente urbano, a través del aumento de interés por el fenómeno en España a lo largo de la primera mitad del siglo XVI. La formación que tenía Rojas del derecho y la retórica y su conocimiento de primera mano del hampa le facilitaron representar en la literatura el comportamiento violento de los criminales. La adición (a veces a cargo de otros) de textos llenos de «gangsters», como los «autos» de Centurio y Traso, junto con detalles de los grabados del siglo XVI, y una criminalidad en auge en las «continuaciones» de *La Celestina*, revelan un deseo creciente de parte del público de ver a más malhechores en un contexto cotidiano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Celestina*, crimen, violencia, *Caída de príncipes*, *Segunda Celestina*, *Tercera Celestina*, «Auto de Traso».

ABSTRACT

In Spanish literature, *La Celestina* marks a watershed in its strikingly modern and detailed treatment of the criminal classes, and it is perhaps the first work of fiction to successfully bring the world of the *hampa* to the written page as much for entertainment as for moralization. *La Celestina* is the starting point for the popularization of graphic violence, particularly in an urban setting, as the fictionalized version of a publicly recognized phenomenon would become increasingly popular in Spain throughout the first half of the sixteenth-century. Rojas's training in law and rhetoric, along with first-hand knowledge of the *hampa* aided in his portrayal of violent criminal behavior. The addition (sometimes by others) of gangster-laden texts, such as the «autos» of Centurio and Traso, along with details from sixteenth-century woodcuts, and increased criminality in *La Celestina*'s «sequels,» all reveal the audience's increased desire to see violent lawbreakers at work and at play.

KEY WORDS: *Celestina*, crime, violence, *Caída de príncipes*, *Segunda Celestina*, *Tercera Celestina*, «Auto de Traso».