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EL PLEBERICO CORAÇON: MELIBEA'S HEART?

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We now have a "suitable"--in the sense that it fits with a known classical *exemplum*--if not "correct"--in the sense that it corresponds to what the Antiguo Auctor or Rojas actually wrote--reading of Calisto's troublesome outburst, "¡O piedad de Seleuco, inspira en el plebérico coraçón, porque sin esperança de salud no embíe el espíritu perdido con el desastrado Píramo y de la desdichada Tisbe!"[1] A suitable reading, however, does not help to clarify the most perplexing part of the phrase: "inspíra en el plebérico coraçón."[2] This segment of the obviously garbled passage was never seriously placed in textual doubt, from the 1499 Burgos edition on through the various metamorphoses of *La Celestina*. But what does it mean? Ruiz Ramón states that "cualquiera que haya sido la actitud de la crítica ante estas dos palabras ["plebérico coraçón"], siempre se ha solido dar por sentado, sin plantearse graves problemas de interpretación, que Calisto se refiere en ellas, según los más, al corazón de Melibea, hija de Pleberio."[3]

I think, rather, that the phrase does indeed raise grave problems. There is no rhetorical device that I know of which, without further elaboration on the substitution, would allow us to understand the heart of Melibea by a reference to the heart of Pleberio, particularly when the latter is supported by an example of fatherly compassion. Even given the likelihood that (1) Rojas could not, with or without the help of his literary *cenáculo*, decipher the passage; (2) was not familiar with the *exemplum* from either of the two likely sources;[4] and (3) had to invent or improvise an adjective to go with "coraçon," if that much was legible--why such a strange linguistic and stylistic procedure? Much less troublesome for his future readers and critics if Rojas had provided us with something simple and obvious, such as "colérico corazón," which would have fit the tone of his meeting with Melibea very nicely, although as Whinnom surmises, "We do not need to suppose that the word before 'coraçón' bore even a superficial resemblance to 'Plebérico' ..."[5] If, that is, Rojas filled in illegible or dubious passages of the *Auto* according to an *a priori* plot structure of his own making. But again, why "plebérico" if the author means something like "Melibeico," and forced neologism or *culteranismo* is the desired effect?

It appears to me that we are wandering away from and avoiding a legitimate and inescapable textual problem if we read for "plebérico coraçón" anything other than "el corazón de Pleberio." Calisto, at this point in the development of the plot, wants something to happen, something similar to the "change of heart" of Seleuco. It is true that "Pleberio is Rojas' creation,"[6] as we know him in *La Celestina,* but it is not necessarily true that Pleberio did not exist in the plans of the Antiguo Auctor. Apart from the "Argumento de toda obra," which may or may not be the work of Rojas, we know absolutely nothing of Melibea's family situation in the *Auto.* There is nothing in the text to rule out the possibility, as Marciales observes, that Pleberio may have been initially conceived as Melibea's husband![7]

I suggest that "plebérico coraçón" was legible in the ms. of the *Auto,* that the Antiguo Auctor had some specific scheme in mind for his own subsequent development of the reference, that Rojas was perhaps as puzzled by the adjective as at least some of his readers are today, but that in consonance with his training in the law and his respect for a unique literary document, he transcribed as faithfully as possible every line between "En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios" and the opening speech of Act II. It is farfetched to maintain that Rojas would devise so murky and inept an adjective, referring to Pleberio and meaning Melibea, simply to inject, for the first and only time in the *Auto,* a reference to a figure still without circumstances or dimensions; a figure he planned to create as a part of his continuation. Rojas, as Gilman saw, was firmly guided in all of his revisions and interpolations by "the quest for clarity."[8] How can we maintain in view of the large number of examples of this quest and its achievement in the modifications of the *Comedia,* that so fastidious an author would choose to improvise confusion in this case? It seems evident that "plebérico coraçón" is a "correct" reading in the sense used above and that the two words, by the very fact that they are enigmatic, provide further and important evidence in the mosaic of proof for the thesis of dual authorship of the *Comedia,* although not at all for the reasons that seem convincing to Whinnom.

As a purely linguistic formula, however, "plebérico coraçón" is not alien to Rojas' style. The device of pre-positioning an adjective formed from a proper noun is used twice in the *Comedia.*[9] In the *conjuro* (Act III, p. 73), Celestina calls upon Pluto, "señor de los sulfúreos fuegos que los hervientes *etnicos montes* manan ..." (italics mine). Act VI contains a reference to the *Eneid,* in which Calisto says, "No trabajara tanto Venus para traer a su fijo el amor de Elisa, haziendo tomar a Cupido *ascánica forma* para le engañar" (p. 106, my italics).[10] The fact that the stylistic possibility of this usage exists for Rojas and is documented in the *Comedia* does not authorize the conclusion that Rojas manipulated or altered the received text to fit his own envisioned continuation, any more than his later development of the figure of Pleberio should lead us to believe that he was the author of the *Auto* (Ruiz Ramón's thesis) or that he reconstructed a defective passage in such a weak and unclear fashion (Whinnom's reply).

NOTES

[1] Quotations from *La Celestina* are taken from the edition of Humberto López Morales (Madrid: Cupsa Editorial, 1976) LCDB s28. This reference is to pp. 21-22. His notes 7 and 8 to this passage are particularly concise and clear in the treatment of textual problems at this point.

[2] A number of interesting points concerning the implications of these few lines of text are discussed in the minor polemic sustained by Francisco Ruiz Ramón, "Nota sobre la autoría del Acto I de *LC*," *HR* 42 (1974), 431-35 (LCDB 412), and Keith Whinnom, "'El Plebérico corazón' and the authorship of Act I of *Celestina*," *HR* 45 (1977), 195-99 (LCDB s59).

[3] Ruiz Ramón, 433.

[4] Valerius Maximus or Leonardo Bruni; López Morales' notes 7 and 8, pp. 21-22, give details on these sources. They are also referred to by Gilman, LCDB 53, p. 333, note 136, and Berndt, LCDB 39, p. 29, note 27.

[5] Whinnom, 198.

[6] Whinnom, 196. See also LCDB s257.

[7] Miguel Marciales, *Carta al Profesor Stephen Gilman*, LCDB S6, p. VI: "Sobre aquel *Esbozo* [the *Auto*] de Cota, sin cambiar un ápice del texto, cabe hacer a Melibea casada con Pleberio y construir una *Fiameta* o una *Historia de los dos amantes*." Marciales uses this rather alarming notion to point out how little we know of relationships in the *Auto* which are developed fully in the *Comedia*; how great was the extent of Rojas' creation of character and situation; and how persistent is the tendency among critics to interpret *La Celestina* by reading the work backwards, from Act XXI (or XVI) to the *Auto*. His point is well taken. Ruiz Ramón's article presents a striking example of *lectura en marcha atrás* on page 433, where he says, "cada crítico al leer la obra *y llegar a ese pasaje* sabía que existía un personaje, padre de Melibea, que se llamaba Pleberio, porque así constaba en el 'Argumento de toda la obra,' en la lista de *dramatis personae*, y porque, en efecto, *con tal nombre se le llamaba en el Acto III y con tal nombre aparecia en el Acto XV de la Comedia*." My italics.

[8] This phrase is the title of Section 3, Chapter 2 of Stephen Gilman's *The Art of La Celestina*, LCDB 52.1

[9] I exclude from my count the relatively common "probática piscina," Act I, 51, and "tusca Adeleta," Act VI, 105, where "tusca" is merely a Latinized variant on "toscana" and should not be capitalized as it is in the Severin edition. The pre-positioning of unusual adjectives is frequent: e.g. "ebúrneo peine," Act VI, 113, possibly derived from Mena, and "serpentino azeyte," Act V, 95. While the effect is striking, the usage does not require special comment in this context.

[10] Virgil, *Eneid,* I, vv, 661-64. The Latin text does not form an adjective of the name: "pro dulci Ascanio ..."

Argument der dreyzehenden Wirckung.

Alst erwacht was Calixtus redt er mitt jm selbst dar, nach Tristanico rüffend / doch sich wider zů rů leget/ Tristanico stölt sich vnder die hausthür der kummen sach Sosiã waynēd/begeret zů wissen die vrsach seines vnmůts/Sosia erzölt jm den todt Sempronij vñ Par, meni/gond/nach dem bayd solich geschicht Calixto zů verkünden/ der ain vast grosse kalg darūb erzaygt.

Argumento e ilustración del auto XIII de LC. De la traducción alemana de C. Wirsung (1520). El prendimiento de Sempronio y Pármeno en la plaza.