

**LOVE AND CHASTITY  
IN TWO EARLY ENGLISH VERSIONS OF  
*LA CELESTINA***

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*La Celestina* was first published as a comedy in 1499 and as a tragicomedy in 1500<sup>1</sup> and had a very fast and fruitful translation into other languages. It was well known and much quoted, either as an immoral or as a great book. In this movement of fervour for the work of Fernando the Rojas, a play that merges several tendencies (the moralist of the interlude and that of the Humanist Comedy) appears in England in about 1525: *Calisto and Melebea* printed by John Rastell.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first known edition of the comedia was published in Burgos in 1499 as an anonymous work under the title *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*. The work was reedited and subject to modification (ed. of Salamanca, Toledo, Sevilla ... ) until it reached its definitive form as a tragicomedy in 1502. This final redaction consisted of twenty-one acts, five more than the comedia. These new five acts are interpolated between acts fourteen and fifteen and it is here that the meeting between Calisto and Melibea, which brings about the tragedy, takes place.

<sup>2</sup> John Rastell combined his law career (he was an utter barrister) with a printing business. In about 1525 he published three plays: *Calisto and Melebea*, *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Four Elements* in one volume entitled *The Nature of the Four Elements*. It was thought that the anonymous interlude *Calisto and Melebea* was translated from Italian (Menéndez Pelayo, Underhills, Chambers) and also that the translator worked with an early English version (Reed). W. Allen was the first scholar who said that the interlude was an adaptation from Spanish. This hypothesis is held by G. Ungerer (1972), who compares the English to the French and Italian versions and finds many different passages in the former that follow the original closely. A new theory was put forward by W.

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*Calisto and Melebea* maintains the attitude of glorifying life and earthy pleasures of the Spanish original, taken from the Humanistic Comedy; therefore, the “Carpe Diem” or “Colligo virgo rosas” topics are present along with the moralistic and didactic current of the interlude and the unhappy ending turns into a merry one. The idea of translating was different in the sixteenth century, the translator was not bound to the original; moreover, he could improve on it. In addition to this, the change in the way of translating the tragicomedy is not surprising, since most early Tudor plays state that they are interludes or written in the “manner of an interlude” and the theme was not new in English literature either, for the love clerk, the pretended virtuous girl and the bawd were stereotypes in the English interlude.<sup>1</sup>

The other version we are going to deal with is *The Bawd of Madrid*, rendered by Captain John Stevens<sup>2</sup> and published in 1707. Despite proclaiming so in The Preface of the book, Stevens was not the first to translate *La Celestina* -J. Mabbe had already translated it in 1631-.

Both Rastell and Stevens’ works, as many other pieces of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are a recreation rather than a translation as both adapted the Spanish Tragicomedy to the English reader of their respective times. *La Celestina* shows a world in crisis, that of the Spain of the late fifteenth Century, and faithfully reflects the Spanish society of the epoch: there was the problem of the three castes (Christian, Jewish and Converts) living together and by no means peacefully, the convention of Courtly love and the presence of witches and witchcraft. All this material should have been adapted to help its introduction in England.

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Fehse, who proved that the English and Italian versions had to do with the same Spanish original. Thus, concludes Ungerer, Rastell worked on a Spanish copy that was surely brought to England from Italy.

<sup>1</sup> See R. Axton (1979): *Three Rastell Plays: Four Elements, Calisto and Melibea, Gentleness and Nobility*, D. S. Brewer, Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>2</sup> Captain John Stevens (d. 1725) was an important translator of the epoch. He translated mainly from Spanish and Portuguese, but also from Italian, French, Latin ... In 1707 he issued a collection of four works: *The Spanish Jilt, The Bawd of Madrid, The Comical Scoundrel or Estevanillo Gonzalez* and *An Evening’s Intrigue*, all of them translated from Spanish under the general title of *The Spanish Libertines*.

*The Bawd of Madrid*, says the translator in the Preface, “ ... goes in Spanish by the Name *Celestina* (...) being in the nature of a play, and therefore call'd a tragicomedy but has too many Acts, so that it would never appear in its Natural Dress, which prevail'd me to alter the method, retaining still the wole intrigue (...) but only making a Tale of it”.<sup>1</sup> Captain Stevens's main objective is to delight the reader because it is a piece “full of Diversion, being a continual Interchange of Variety, and surprising accidents”.

These Stories, whether true or false, may well deserve the same use to be made of them, since they have a far Greater Share of Wit in them, and must afford much more Satisfaction. (Preface, p. 2)

There are two characteristics is Stevens' process of translation of the four works that come under the title *The Spanish Libertines*: first, the selection of the merry matter in the work rendered and, second, the fact that Stevens englishes and embellishes the work by means of addition and change in order to attract the readers' attention. Therefore, although following the horatian principle, Stevens seems to put special emphasis on the “delectare” and consequently turns the tragicomedy into a tale, leading his readers to the intrigues and surprising accidents by stressing certain aspects (i.e. meanness, sexual features ... ) and situations. On the contrary, the Interlude emphasizes the “prodesse” and *Calisto and Melebea* is

A new commodye in Englysh in maner of an enterlude. Al ryght elygant and full of craft of rethoryk, wherein is shewd and dyscrybyd as well the bewte and good propertes of women, as their vycys and evyll condicions, with a morall conclusion and exhortacyon to vertew.<sup>2</sup>

and accordingly, it centres on the character of Melibea, her passion, her love and her repentance of that passion and love.

In both works Rojas' structure in twenty-one acts disappears completely. *The Bawd of Madrid* is structured in nine chapters, preceded by

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<sup>1</sup> J. Stevens (1707), *The Bawd of Madrid*, in *The Spanish Libertines*, S. Bunchley, London: 67-160. The Preface, pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> J. Rastell, *Calisto and Melebea*, in R. Axton, *Three Rastell Plays*, op. cit.: 69-96, p. 70. From now on the quotations will be referred to by their verse number.

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as many other brief summaries and the Interlude has not any structure at all; it consists of a series of 1087 verses without divisions, and only follows acts I, II and IV of the original providing a new “happy” ending. Rastell is interested in the layout of the action and the characters (Acts I and II) and in act IV, because Melebea should fall into Celestina’s net, it is a structural element. After that, he chooses a new ending in accordance with his moral intentions.

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The Spanish tragicomedy starts “in media res” with the meeting between Calisto and Melibea. Calisto is too forward in his proposals provoking Melibea’s anger. In such a situation, Calisto hires the services of a bawd to help him conquer Melibea. Both English versions, the Interlude and the Tale, add a passage before this meeting by way of an introduction. In the Interlude we can see a Melebea aware of her beauty and sanguineous complexion, which makes her have a special disposition towards love:

I know that nature hath gyvyn me bewte,  
With sanguynous compleccyon, favour and fayrenes;  
(vv. 15-16)

She is also conscious of Calisto’s merits and intentions and wonders whether to consent or not:

I deny not but Calisto is of grete worthynes, (...)  
Shall I accomplysh hys carnal desyre?  
(vv. 19, 27)

which is a considerable advance over the tragicomedy, for not only makes it clear there has been a previous contact between Calisto and Melebea, but she reveals her thoughts about Calisto as well:

O, his saynges and sutes so importune (...)  
O, hys lamentacyons and exclamacyons on Fortune  
With similytude maner as one that shuld dy!.  
(vv. 22, 24-25)

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Thus, through her speech, we can imagine an upsetting love-begging Calisto pursuing an increasingly-tiring Melebea. But Melebea has made up her mind and resolved not to consent to his desire:

Nay, nay, he shall never that day see  
Hys voluptuous appetyte consentyd by me.  
(vv. 35-36)

In Captain Stevens' version, Chapter II begins by introducing the "nobleman Calisto", the "beautiful and modest Melibea" and Calisto's falling in love, giving a close account of it that is not in the original:

Calisto (...) fell desperately in Love with the Beautiful Melibea (...) Melibea was Modest and so closely observ'd of her Parents, that there was little hope of making any Amorous Overtures to her (...) Calisto (...) frequently Walk'd her Street by Day, and Serenaded her Windows by Night (..) He had spent some Months in this Exercise without being ever able to compass the signifying of his passion to her ... (p. 73)

As in the interlude, Calisto behaves as the lover he is and seeks to communicate with his lady, either striving after a meeting during the day or by means of a song at night.

Here we have two different and new introductory approaches to the very first meeting of the Tragicomedy: in the Interlude we learn about Melibea's attitude and intentions and Calisto's wooing; in Captain Stevens' version, about Calisto's wooing and the difficulty in contacting Melibea. Both are a step forward regarding the Spanish Tragicomedy which omits the lover's courting and, after the first meeting, he directly hires the services of a bawd.

As a narrator, Stevens provides another introduction to this first meeting:

"Seeking to divert his Melancholly thoughts, he left the Town one Evening to Walk in the many Delightful Gardens there are about it. In one of these, when he least expected it, he met the Charming Melibea, whom Fortune had conducted thither to pass away some few Hours in those Solitary Pleasant Walks. The unexpected sight of the Object on

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which he had fix'd his Heart, had such a violent Effect upon him that it ty'd up his Tongue for a while, and he was forc'd to withdraw a few Steps to recover himself from the Surprize. Violent were the Strugglings in his Breast between Fear or Joy; Fear left his first Addressess should be Scornfully rejected, and Joy that he had now the Opportunity, at least of making his Passsion known. Having settled the Storm that distracted his Mind, and Submissively approaching the Lady, after the usual first Salutes, he began to Praise the Power and Goodness of God (...). (pp. 73-74)

We can see a disturbed Calisto at the sole sight of Melibea in this first meeting that Stevens, like in the Interlude, places in a garden of the town. In the Tragicomedy, we read in Act II,<sup>1</sup> the meeting occurs in Melibea's vegetable garden of her house. In the Interlude, Melebea is certain that Calisto will go to the garden -such is his pursuit- should he know Melibea was there:

Wyst he know that I were present here,  
I assure you shortely he wold seke me,  
And without dout he doth now inquire  
Wether I am gone or where I shuld be.  
(vv. 36-39)

and gets disturbed when Calisto enters:

Se! is he not now come? I report me!  
Alas, of thys man I can never be ryd!  
Wold to Cryst I wyst where I myght be hyd.  
(vv. 40-42)

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<sup>1</sup> "Señor, porque perderse el otro día el neblí fue causa de tu entrada en la huerta de Melibea a le buscar." F. de Rojas, (1980) *La Celestina*, (ed. Bruno Mario Damiani), Ed. Cátedra, Madrid, p. 96. M. de Riquer places this first meeting not in Melibea's garden but in the church. See M. de Riquer (1957) "Fernando de Rojas y el primer acto de 'La Celestina'", *RFE*, 41: 373-395. The unchained and out-of control hawks makes us think of an also out-of-control lover. On the other hand, the fact that Calisto lost his hawk ("neblí") simbolizes he is a bad hunter and therefore a bad lover and it is, at the same time, an omen of the unhappy ending of the story.

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After these introductions, both translators render the very beginning of the Spanish tragicomedy closely: Rastell is faithful to the dialogues and Stevens renders it in free indirect speech:

Calisto: En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios.

Melibea: ¿En qué, Calisto?

Calisto: En dar poder a natura que de tan perfecta hermosura te dotase, y hacer

a mi inmérito (...) (p. 53)

Calisto: By you feyre Melebea may be sene

The grace, the gyftes, the gretnes of God.

Melebea: Where in?

Calisto: In takyng effect of dame Naturys strene,

Nor yerthly, but angellyke of lykelyhode,

In bewte so passyng the kinde of womanhood.

O God, I myght in your presens be able

To manyfest my dolours incomperable!

(vv. 43-49)

After the usual first Salutes, he began to Praise the Power and Goodness of God. Melibea, not conceiving what Motive induc'd him to fall into that sudden Rapture, desir'd to know what he had seen that might produce such Flights of seeming Zeal and Devotion. Madam, answer'd Calisto, what greater Sign of immense Power than that he has made Nature capable of forming a Creature so Bright, so Beautiful, and so absolutely Perfect as your self; and what greater Token of Goodness than to grant (...) (p. 74)

But by praising only Melibea's beauty when he was supposed to also praise her character and virtue, Calisto, writes M. June Hall (1972, p. 76), "slips easily into the character of Andreas' (Capellanus) simple lover who is, Andreas implies, something of a fool". Calisto has showed his intentions and clearly bypassed the period of *fenhedor*, the first of the four stages of courtly love.<sup>1</sup> Melibea gets angry with her clumsy lover and her furious

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<sup>1</sup> I. e. *Fenhedor* or silent adorer; *precador* or beseecher (the interview or colloquy with the lady takes place at this step, but the lover should keep himself within the limits of discretion); *entendedor* or lover accepted (interchanging of pledges) and finally, *Drutz* or lover accepted in bed.

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reaction ranges between the moral point of view of the Interlude, where she is offended because Calisto induces her to sin, to the misuse of the courtly love code in Stevens' Tale, like the Tragicomedy:<sup>1</sup>

I have foule skorn of the, I tell the trew,  
Or any humayn creature with me shuld begyn  
Any communycacyon perteynyng to syn.  
(vv. 68-70)

... for the return I shall make will be suitable to the base  
Presumption of your Designs, manifested by your Audacious  
Expressions (...) I shall ever Blush to think that I could enter into your  
thoughts to make known so Vile a Passion to me. (p. 75)

In this desperate situation, Calisto, induced by his servant Sempronio, will hire the services of a bawd but "it was a mortal sin if the lover sought out bawds or sorcerers in order to satisfy his lustful desires",<sup>2</sup> as well as contravening the courtly love code.

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<sup>1</sup> Calisto does not address Melibea as the lady she is and he fails to praise her gentleness and virtue. According to Andreas Capellanus (1987, *De amore. Tratado sobre el Amor*, Festín de Esopo. Quaderns Crema, Barcelona), a noble man should address a noble woman in the following way: ... *Tanta deprehenditur in vobis nobilitas tantaque vos curialitas exornare dignoscitur, quod omnia, quae meo resident cordi dicenda, vestrae probitatis aspectu credo mihi licere sine reprehensionis timore narrare (...)* *Quantum igitur fidelis vobis existam quantaque vobis devotione astringar, sermone narrare non possem.* (p. 133) ... = Tanta nobleza se desprende de vos y tanta cortesía se digna a realzaros que creo poder, en vista de vuestra integridad moral, revelaros sin temor a ser censurado todo lo que guardo en mi corazón (...) No puedo expresar con palabras hasta qué punto os soy fiel y con cuánta devoción estoy unido a vos. (p. 134) For further reading on this theme see O. H. Green (1953) "La furia de Melibea" in *Clavileño*, 4, XX: 1-3; A. D. Deyermond (1961) "The Text-Book mishanded: Andreas Capellanus and the Opening Scene of 'La Celestina'" in *Neophilologus*, 45: 218-221; M. June Hall (1972): *Love's Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calisto and the Parody of the Courtly Lover*, Tamesis Books Ltd, London.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Azpilcueta (1567): *Manual de confesores y penitentes*, ed. Barcelona, p. 167. Cited by O. H. Green (1963): *Spain and the Western Tradition. The Castilian Mind in the Literature from 'El Cid' to Calderon*, Vol. 1, the University of Wisconsin press, Madison, p. 116.



By means of the bawd Celestina, more meetings took place, although none of them is rendered in the Interlude. In Captain Stevens' version, following the Tragicomedy, the two lovers had physical contact at their third meeting, although Melibea begs Calisto to be content with external contact, but

The way not to be deny'd, had been to put it out of his Power to refuse. To deliver herself up; to say she was his own; to give an opportunity; to fire his Blood; and then to sue for Moderation; for Abstinence; for Modesty; was like laying Meat before the Hungry; Drink before the Thirsty; and Treasure before the Covetous; and then bidding them not to Eat; not to Drink; not to Touch; or not to Covet. (p. 145)

in translation of

Calisto: ¿Para qué, señora? ¿Para que no esté queda mi pasión?  
¿Para penar de nuevo? ¿Para tornar el juego de comienzo? Perdona,  
señora, a mis desvergonzadas manos (...) (p. 243)

Stevens is more explicit than the original and the images he provides are much clearer than Calisto's rhetorical questions. At the end, she consented and

... receiv'd him with all the Tenderness of a Passionate Lover, and he flew to her Embraces with all the Eagerness of a Lustful Ravisher. It was then no time for Dalliance; the long Sigh'd for Opportunity was come, Nature prompted, and the opposition was small. Vertue was before fled, and only a little seeming Bashfulness remain'd in her Place. (p. 145)

In the Tragicomedy there are two lovers, Melibea and Calisto; they love each other and want to satisfy their desire, but they are on equal terms of sharing both love and desire as love and sex go together.<sup>1</sup> In Stevens'

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<sup>1</sup> Melibea is not an innocent woman in a conventional way; on the contrary, she is a resolute and passionate one who knows what love is and is eager to try it. By welcoming Celestina, despite her reputation, Melibea knows about Calisto's dishonest intentions. Celestina does not seduce an innocent Melibea, she simply

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version, love and desire have been split apart and love is portrayed by Melibea, who offers “the tenderness of a passionate lover”, and desire by Calisto, who has “all the eagerness of a lustful ravisher”. In Rojas’ work, “When enjoyment was over”, Melibea, after complaining for the loss of her chastity, asks Calisto to leave her for the moment and to return the following day. By contrast, the English translation always emphasizes Calisto’s desire:

When Enjoyment was over, and the Fire of Love allay’d (...) Calisto,  
on his side, having, for the present, satisfy’d his Appetite, observ’d the  
Night was far advanc’d, and took his Leave, promising to return the next  
Night. (p. 146)

When they say good-bye, their thoughts are also different, as the following lines show:

Melibea retir’d to her Chamber, and Calisto return’d Home, full of  
Joy and Rapture, for having Enjoy’d so Delicate a Creature; and being  
now in a Method of possessing her as often as he pleas’d. (p. 146)

In this English version of *La Celestina*, Calisto seems much more interested in enjoying Melibea than in her love; he is a lustful and lecherous man who only wants to satisfy his desire, and as A. Capellanus said, he who has such an excessive passion cannot love truly.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Calisto is far from being the courtly or the virtuous lover Melibea demands; he is full of passion instead of love and that is what he confesses to Melibea:

... in this Happy Place, where I have the opportunity of acquainting  
you with that Passion which has so long consum’d and wasted me  
without hope of Relief. (p. 74)

“passion” is in translation of “secreto dolor” (hidden pain)

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makes things easier for her. See I. T. Snow (1988): “Estado actual de los estudios celestinescos”, *Insula*, 497: 18; J. L. Alborg (1979): *Historia de la Literatura Española*, Vol. 1, Ed. Gredos, Madrid, p. 575.

<sup>1</sup> “Non solet amare quem nimia voluptatis abundantia vexat.” (A. Capellanus, *op. cit.* p. 116.)

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... y en tan conveniente lugar, que mi secreto dolor manifestarte  
pudiese. (p. 54)

Calisto, we can see, shows himself to be eager to satisfy his sexual  
lust rather than fulfil Melibea's desires. Captain Stevens' translation  
provides several examples of this attitude:

... Calisto, tho' he saw no prospect of obtaining his desire, lost no  
Heart ... (p. 73)

Calisto, pleas'd with his past Nights Reception by Melibea, and the  
hopes of a better that Night (...) Slept undisturb'd. (p. 142)

... the eagerness of a Lustful Ravisher ... (p. 145)

... having, for the present, satisfy'd his Appetite ... (p. 146)

... and being now in a Method of possessing her as often as he  
pleas'd

(p. 146)

as June Hall (1972, p. 101) says, "his love lacks the power to ennoble him.  
And desire, rather than being refined as it grows stronger, tends to become  
coarser".

Melibea's attitude towards love is also different in the Tale, the  
Interlude and the Tragicomedy. In Captain Stevens' translation, Melibea is  
a little sceptical and surprised at Calisto's love utterance:

Do you place so great a Happiness, reply'd Melibea, in this Accident  
of meeting me here? (p. 74)

stressing the idea that their first meeting is just by chance and that she does  
not know about Calisto's love. On the contrary, in the interlude Melibea is  
tired of Calisto and his love chase:

Alas, of thys man I can never be ryd! (v. 41)

The first Melibea would like a courtly lover; the other is afraid of  
this kind of love and fears for her virtue. The former puts special emphasis

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on love; the latter, on chastity.<sup>1</sup> This Melebea is so worried about her chastity and virtue that she never lets herself really fall in love with Calisto; She hesitates and fights an inner battle:

Shall I accomplysh hys carnall desyre? (v. 27)

Both of them promise a great reward if their lover acts in terms of love and chastity respectively; love is seen as an art or as the origin of virtue; but Calisto breaks both courtly love and chastity codes and Melibea categorically rejects him. Melebea's virtue prevails this time in the Interlude; nevertheless, we should keep in mind that Melebea has a sanguineous complexion and a tendency towards love, which means that her virtue is menaced when Celestina visits her. It is her father, Danio, that will save her from the perils of love by telling a dream<sup>2</sup> that will deter her from falling into the pleasures of love and will make her preserve her chastity.

Danio's speech therefore arrives on time in the Interlude:

O dere fader, that lesson I have kept trew  
Whych preservyd me. For though I dyd consent  
In mynd, yet had he never hys intent.  
(vv. 1008-1010)

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<sup>1</sup> "Since the force of sexuality was so compelling for both man and woman, it would be hard for chaste love to be just a bit carnal (...) What preserved friendly love was virtue, aided by God's grace". J. F. Benton, "Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love", in F. X. Benton (1972): *The Meaning of Courtly Love. Papers of the 1st annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*, State University of NY at Binghamton, (March 17-18 1967), Albany: 19-42, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> The dream is as follows: Danio is walking along a garden and sees two different places: "a hote bath, holsome and pleasyng" (v. 943) and "a pyt of foule stynkyng water" (v. 946). Danio keeps walking along the good way of "grace and virtue" and meets a "a foule rough bych" on his way. When he is on the verge of falling into the "stynkyng water", he wakes up. Melibea understands and interprets the dream: she was on the way of grace and virtue when she met Celestina and turned to the evil way. When she was on the point of falling into the pit of crazy love and desire, her father told her the dream that would save her from those perils.

not Melibea's mother in the Spanish Tragicomedy and Stevens' version, as this latter work states:

When her Mother came in (...) Charging Melibea ever to avoid her (Celestina) for the future as the most dangerous Plague (...) The Mischief was now done, and it was Locking the Stable Door when the Steed was stolen. (p. 123)

In Stevens' translation, Melibea, through love, falls into desire as the narrator emphasizes:

This was the sly Discourse the Deceitful Old Bawd us'd to ensnare the Innocent Melibea, whose Natural Modesty, and Vertuous Education, at first blew her into a Flame; but we see how soon it was quell'd by the False Arts of that Insinuating Procurer. (p. 90).

... Melibea, who was full of Anguish and Trouble; Vertue making its last Efforts, and Love driving it from all its Intrenchments one after another. (p. 119)

Love had now taken Possession of her Heart. (p. 119)

... So ready is Innocence it self to find Excuses, when love begins to take Place. (p. 132)

Despite this, Melibea never speaks freely about love pleasures as she does in the tragicomedy, up to her final speech, where she changes abstract for concrete terms:

... y así contentarle he en la muerte, pues no tuve tiempo en la vida. (p. 292)

... so I may accompany him in the Grave, since I could not in the Marriage-Bed. (p. 159)

In conclusion, the character of Melibea holds three different attitudes towards love: in the Spanish Tragicomedy Melibea and Calisto are on equal terms of sharing both love and desire; in the Interlude, Melibea retorts with chastity to Calisto's desire, chastity prevails over love and its pleasures; and in Stevens' Tale, Melibea, through love, falls into desire.

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These three different attitudes are in line with their respective authors' main objective: Rojas warns noble young lovers against the perils of crazy love and bad servants; the poet of the Interlude makes an exhortation to young ladies to virtue and Captain Stevens seeks to delight and enjoy the reader.

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