

“Agora que voy sola”: Celestina, Magic, and the Disenchanted World

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“Don Antonio Moreno, a imitación de otra cabeza que vio en Madrid fabricada por un estampero, hizo ésta en su casa para entretenerse y suspender a los ignorantes.”
Cide Hamete Benengeli (*Don Quijote* II, 62).

In Act 3, scene 1 of *Henry IV*, Part I, one of Shakespeare’s best known history plays, Glendower bombastically claims that he “can call spirits from the vasty deep,” only to be met by Hotspur’s mocking retort: “Why, so can I, or so can any man. But will they come when you do call for them?” In this show of early modern skepticism regarding the human ability to conjure the Devil and his minions, Hotspur undercuts all of Glendower’s assertions of witchcraft and necromancy with decisive conviction, rationally demanding that demons materialize in order for such things to be believed. Hotspur simply has no use for hocus-pocus and, worse, for Glendower’s self-told yarns of prodigious, supernatural powers. The spirits of the “vasty deep,” of course, never do appear in *Henry IV*, proving Hotspur right. And, although he dies at Shrewsbury and Bolingbroke prevails, Shakespeare does not fail to give the lie to Glendower.

The role played by magic, necromancy, and the supernatural in *Celestina* has not enjoyed the same clarity of interpretation that it does in *Henry IV*. In fact, it remains a critical bone of contention and a source of tantalizing ambiguity, especially since, as I intend to argue, there is evidence to dispute the representation of the efficacy of the supernatural in the work, and, most importantly, evidence against Celestina’s own faith in it. Magic in *Celestina* is mostly in the eye of the beholder, and there is sufficient proof in the work to disavow its existence and effectiveness in its entirety. However, since the publication of Peter Russell’s “La magia como tema integral de *La Celestina*” (1963, and amplified in 1978), in which he indicated that Celestina’s successful seduction of Melibea for Calisto emerges from a *philocaptio* spell that the old bawd casts, numerous critics have held that the existence and effectiveness of magic is manifest in *Celestina* and that is responsible for the nefarious outcome of the plot. Since the publication of Russell’s study and its subsequent expansion, numerous critics have followed Russell’s lead, seeking to trace the presence and efficacy of magic in the work. They are notably De Armas, Rico, Deyermond, Herrero, Scholberg, Sánchez, Gifford, Finch, Cátedra, Vian Herrero, Botta, and Severin. For all their impressive erudition, however, the studies by these critics have demonstrated little in the way of literary or critical sensibility. They variously regard Rojas’s masterpiece as a quasi-documentary source for the social history of late fifteenth-century Castilian society, especially for the period coinciding with the reign of the

Catholic Monarchs. Although such studies are undeniably useful in providing a historical context for the work, they have also been partial and have detracted from the prodigious artistic achievements of *Celestina*. With their emphasis on extra-textual considerations and on historicizing things and events depicted in text, the studies by these critics have quite simply obscured *Celestina*'s literary genius and the reasons for why, in the twenty first century, the work continues to be read, animate, and rouse the imagination of its readers.

A minority of critics, among them most notably Snow (1986, 1999) and Garrosa Resina (but for others see the useful article by Vian Herrero), have sought to argue against the presence of the effectiveness of magic in the work, attributing the outcome of events to Celestina's sophisticated psychological manipulation of the characters and their own complicated mental and emotional constitution. Privileging the depth and complexity of Rojas' personages, Snow sees their psychological subtlety and scheming as the actual motor of the plot and the ultimate determinants of what transpires. Far from a *dues-ex-machina* resolution, it is the characters' susceptibility to their own faults, all masterfully manipulated by Celestina –who remains woefully blind to her own shortcomings–, that leads to the tragic fate that awaits them. To be sure, Kaspar von Barth in his early seventeenth-century Neo-Latin translation of *Celestina, Pornoboscodidasculus Latinus*, agrees and questions the efficacy of the old bawd's incantations and belief in magic, noting that Celestina's rhetorical powers far exceeded the need for the application of magic in Melibea's capitulation: “Minimum sane hic incantationes egerunt, quamquam et huius sceleris crimini anum veneficam illigarunt, quibus etiam demptis, vix quaequam puella caeteris talibus assultibus restiterit” [Celestina's incantations did not help much, except in adding one more crime to her long list, because, even without these, no young girl could have resisted such attacks] (Barth, 55). In this way, as Severin concludes, “The main lines of critical argument have been drawn between those who believe that Celestina has real power which operates in the work and those that think that her psychological manipulation of the other characters can explain all her success and that witchcraft is mere psychological ego-boosting” (9).

In light of this critical dichotomy –or perhaps because of it– I wish to explore an alternative proposition in regard to the presence and representation of magic and the supernatural in *Celestina*; one which arises from the portrayal of the coexistence of competing epistemologies in the work, and doubtless from the specific objective of drawing the reader's attention into the tense, problematical, and contumacious disposition of the world in which all the characters move and live. In order to appreciate this, we must begin by understanding that Celestina and all the other characters in the work are *sui generis*. They possess an acute sense of awareness of one another and are portrayed as subjects who see the human objects of their gaze as equally thinking subjects endowed with psychological depth, intention, feeling, motivation, and agency, multi-faceted characteristics that mark the striking modernity of their portrayal. Constituted as real-seeming participants in uninterpreted and

unmediated dialog or monolog –which heightens the illusion of their actuality– all the personages in *Celestina* are, in fact, point-of-view characters. As they speak regard, sense, and judge their interlocutors and deliberate about the things and events that happen to them and around them. Like *Celestina*, each character in the work is intricately complex and possesses heightened levels of thought and discernment, and undergoes change so as to surprise the reader at every turn, as in the striking case of Pármeno, who declares himself Calisto’s loyal servant, only to reveal later that his allegiance to his master is a cover for an unsavory personal past. Far from stereotypical, each of the characters in *Celestina* thus emerges unencumbered by textual antecedents: although they spring from recognizable literary types (*servus*, *lena*, *meretrix*, lady, and courtly lover), they all are endowed with unique imaginative attributes that lead them to be aware of and act upon the world, and us to perceive subtle distinction and even contradiction in their motives and constitution. As the characters speak directly, they strike us as singular and believable. They provoke revision, or the need for the reader not just to consider, but to reconsider their words and actions so as to unveil initially unrecognized forces and surreptitious, as well as buried, thoughts and motivations in their words and deeds, eventually altering the manner they were initially perceived. In this fashion, the reader or audience –which includes the very interlocutors of the characters in the work– remains continually engaged, and is compelled to exercise memory and judgment, returning to an action or a word uttered by one of them to give new consideration to its underlying thought or opinion.

Although inspired by a long line of literary forebears (Roman, Medieval Latin, Castilian, possibly even Muslim) the old whore *Celestina* in this way stands as her own person. Far from just another shadow of a literary go-between: she has a past, a present, and yearns for a secure future, and like no other of her literary ancestors she thinks about her reputation and understands that her identity is vested in the public perception of her professional efficacy. Beyond their traditional literary and social roles and the ability to speak about them, then, all the characters, but especially *Celestina*, possess a heightened awareness of themselves; what they underscore more than anything else is Rojas’s unprecedented ability to construct three-dimensional personalities and to plumb the depths of new, private –even secret– forms of feeling, thinking, and being. It is for this reason that all the characters often gainsay their audible public statements in mumbled asides, or pronounce risky soliloquies that bring forth hidden, dangerous thoughts, inconsistencies, contradictions, and furtive objectives whispered to themselves as they look the other way, or utter them under their breath as they hasten down the lane in solitude.

If anyone of the characters in the work is in a position to know whether *Celestina*’s magic is real or imagined, it is Pármeno, who was raised in the old bawd’s house, and whose mother, Claudina, was *Celestina*’s mentor and close companion (“Su madre y

yo, uña y carne; de ella aprendí todo lo mejor de mi oficio” [198]).¹ In Act I, Pármeno offers his first-hand knowledge of Celestina’s occupations, especially regarding the ploys and artifacts she uses to craft her rituals. There he volunteers a detailed description of the old whore’s laboratory, complete with a list of her extensive paraphernalia for casting spells, bending wills, and changing appearances, only to turn to Calisto at the end and conclude that “¿Quién te podrá dezir lo que esta vieja hazía? Y todo era burla y mentira” (113). But, as we shall see, it is Celestina herself who offers us the best example of the disavowal of the very powers that she publically advertises.

Celestina’s conjuration of the Devil at the end of Act III has served as the focal point for determining the role that magic and the supernatural play in the work. All the critics who advocate an actual part for the supernatural in *Celestina* use it as the touchstone for constructing their arguments, yet few of them have looked at how it functions contextually and from the different points of view that Celestina’s speech both takes into consideration and provokes. Shortly before Celestina addresses *Triste Plutón* of the infernal regions, Sempronio expresses his fear concerning the possible failure and consequences of the enterprise he, Celestina, and Pármeno have now embarked upon; namely, the seduction of Melibea and the despoilment of Calisto. Calling for caution and careful scrutiny, he turns to Celestina and admonishes her:

Madre, mira bien lo que hazes, porque quando el principios se yerra, no puede seguirse buen fin. Piensa en su padre; que es noble y esforçado, su madre celosa y brava, tú la misma sospecha. Melibea es única a ellos; faltándoles ella, fátales todo el bien; en pensallo tiemblo; no vayas por lana y vengas sin pluma. (143)

Rather than heed Sempronio’s practical concern, Celestina, who is known by everyone in the city and has already committed to Calisto, responds with a mixture of wounded pride and the understanding that, if there is any hope for moving forward, she must uphold her reputation, especially to Sempronio himself, who has sought her out to intercede in his master’s affair. To counter Sempronio’s troublesome wavering, Celestina chastises him for his lack of self-assurance and confidence in her: “¡Alahé, en mal hora a ti he yo menester para compañero, aun si quisieses avisar a Celestina en su officio!” (145). Yet Sempronio persists, countering with a trenchant observation concerning the gap that separates human desire from achieving its objects. He warns that one wants and what is feasible are two very different things: “No te maravilles, madre, de mi temor, pues es común condición humana que lo que mucho se dessea jamás se piensa concluydo, mayormente que en este caso temo tu pena y mía,” he says, before being pressed beyond fear by the prospect of financial gain to succumb to Celestina’s will. Unmindful now of the very uncertainties of human desire he has just

¹ Unless indicated, all quotations are from Dorothy Severin’s edition of *Celestina*.

described, his earlier call for caution is cast aside by temptation and he concludes: “Desseo provecho; querrá que este negocio oviesse buen fin, no porque saliesse mi amo de pena, mas por salir yo de lazeria” (146).

Doubtless concerned about Sempronio’s warnings of possible failure, uttered as well in the presence of her pupil Elicia, Celestina must put an end to his, Elicia’s, and her own inner doubts lest her reputation be placed on the line and their venture unravel. The result is Celestina’s less than private conjuration of the Devil. Her loud, emphatic calling forth of *Triste Plutón* and his minions at the end of Act III implicitly underscores the performative nature of the old bawd’s spell since both Elicia and Sempronio are doubtless intended to hear it, just as Sempronio had earlier heard Elicia and Crito disporting upstairs (Act II). Pronounced *viva voce* immediately upon the departure of Sempronio and Elicia, who hurry upstairs to dally but not so far away as to be out of earshot, the summons of the Devil is notable for its hyperbole and theatricality. In her invocation of the Evil One, Celestina, rather than beseech assistance like a suppliant, seeks to coerce Satan into achieving her resolve. Full of willful swagger and braggadocio, she threatens the Devil himself with nothing less than the risk of earning her undying hostility. Unless her will to seduce Melibea for Calisto is swiftly done, she exclaims, the Master of Darkness will win her eternal enmity and be exposed as a liar and hypocrite by the light of her truth:

Si no lo hazes con presto movimiento, ternásme por capital enemiga; heriré con luz tus cárceles tristes y oscuras; acusaré cruelmente tus continuas mentiras, apremiaré con mis ásperas palabras tu horrible nombre, y otra y otra vez te conjuro y, así confiando en mi mucho poder me parto para allá con mi hilado, donde creo te llevo ya envuelto. (148)

If read carefully, however, despite her overweening assertions Celestina is less than sure that the Devils is in the skein. To be sure, she only thinks he is since the expression she uses at the end of her speech, “creo te llevo ya envuelto,” implies less than certainty and conviction.

Celestina’s conjuration belongs to the epistemological and discursive realm of hypostasis and, in its verbal calques, has a clear literary antecedent that it was doubtless meant explicitly to call to mind so as to highlight both its melodramatic nature and its learned textual genealogy. Its source is Juan de Mena’s *Laberinto de Fortuna* which, though composed in 1444, had just been published by Hernán Núñez and was circulating at Salamanca in his notable edition of 1499, the same year in which *Celestina* first appeared in print. There the Witch of Valladolid gravely summons Pluto and his consort, Prosperine, to send a spirit to answer her questions through the mouth of a dead body that lies before her:

Con ronca garganta ya dize: “Conjuro,
Plutón, a ti, triste e a ti, Prosperina,

Que me enbiedes entrambos aína
 Un tal espíritu, sutil e puro,
 Que en este mal cuerpo me fable seguro.” (1970)

Mena’s witch, as is well known, performs her somber invocation of the spirits of the Underworld in a larger-than-life context, demanding Pluto’s and Prosperine’s assistance in divining the future of the Kingdom of Castile. Mena’s sorceress, like Celestina, threatens to illuminate the dark caverns of hell unless her will is done:

¿E sabes tú, triste Plutón, qué faré?
 Abriré las bocas por do te gobiernas,
 E con mis palabras tus fondas cavernas
 De luz subitánea te las feriré. (2005)

If we move beyond the mere identification of sources and begin to speculate upon how they are deployed in the text, it is easy to perceive that there is one crucial difference between the words of the Witch of Valladolid and Celestina’s pronouncements that immediately would not have been lost on Rojas’ intended audience: the Witch of Valladolid’s summons is instantly followed by breathtaking evidence of Pluto’s existence and the stunning extent of his supernatural powers, as the inanimate corpse stretched out before her begins to stir and becomes a “cuerpo ya vivo, después de finado” (2015) so as to pronounce a chilling admonition from the infernal regions to the nobles of Castile.

As the emphatic expressions and weighty cadences of Mena’s sorceress intertextually bleed through to the *Tragicomedia*, more than reverently imitated, they are laughably misappropriated, endowed with a new, sordid purpose: a call for assistance from the infernal regions in the seduction of Melibea, all with the objective of vouchsafing Celestina’s reputation and securing her financial gain. The contrast created by the obvious misappropriation of a critical episode from Mena’s momentous, prophetic work could not have been more striking, casting Celestina’s demands of the Devil into ridiculous light. In this way, Rojas situates Celestina’s braggadocio in a discursive world full of wry irony, comprised more of gaudy ornament and cliché than actual fact or efficacy.²

Fast on the heels of her conspicuous, misapplied browbeating of the Evil One for help with the seduction of Melibea and the *viva voce* proclamation of confidence in

² The scabrous lampoon of the *Laberinto* in the almost contemporary anonymous *Carajicomedia* comes immediately to mind. Mena’s text was so well known that the slightest allusion to it could be readily captured by a learned audience. Writers could easily fall into the temptation of parodying it. Celestina’s invocation of *Triste Plutón* thus serves more to call explicit attention to the reference to the *Laberinto*, rather than to avoid scrutiny from the Church by displacing the mention of the Devil toward a secure classical context, notwithstanding Russell’s observation that “Rojas no se atrevía a reproducir aquí un conjuro totalmente auténtico” (Rojas 1991, 292n70).

her powers broadcast for Sempronio's and Elicia's ears, alone and bustling along to see if she can find a way into Pleberio's house, at the beginning of Act IV Celestina begins to soliloquize about the perils of her enterprise. She recalls Sempronio's admonitions and analyzes the risks that lie ahead while shifting into a discourse marked by reason, hesitancy, and by an emphasis –she tells herself– on the need for deliberation, plus the benefits of thought and careful speculation concerning the hidden dangers that might await her. The irony of her uneasy words after her extravagant misuse of Mena, framed by hollow boasting, could not be more explicit. Now that she is alone, unheard and unobserved, she must scrutinize in solitude Sempronio's admonitions and measure carefully the feasibility and possible outcomes of what she had so melodramatically fabricated for Sempronio's and Elicia's benefit:

Agora que voy sola, quiero mirar bien lo que Sempronio ha temido deste mi camino, porque aquellas cosas que bien no son pensadas, aunque algunas veces haya buen fin, comúnmente crían desvariados efectos. Assí que la mucha especulación nunca carece de buen fruto. Que, aunque yo he dissimulado con él, podría ser que, si me sintiessen en estos pasos de parte de Melibe, que no pagasse con pena que menor fuesse que la vida; o muy amenguada quedasse, quando matar no me quisiessen, manteándome o açotándome cruelmente. Pues amargas cient monedas serían éstas. (149)

Aware of the multiple, even mortal, contingencies of her enterprise and the real possibility of its bitter outcome, she wishes now to reflect on her options so as to leave nothing to chance. Celestina feels the need to look at, to weigh and to examine, her situation closely. Rather than rely on the Devil and his putative mysterious powers, she opts first to exercise and trust her own analytical ability in discerning the outcome of her plan, so as not, on the one hand, to run the risk of being killed or beaten, or, on the other, to come up short on the prospect of securing the largest possible reward. In the flow of her words with herself, we can perceive the anatomy of a decision taking shape. Her iterations tell us that she is at a crossroads as they trace first the expression of doubt; then the ambivalence and perplexity produced by it (“¿Pues yré, o tornarme he?”); followed by the invocation of proverbial authority that affords a momentary respite from her inconvenient confrontation with the odds of failure. Provided that as she goes she remains alert to the immediate perils at hand, she seems to find a palliative to her anxiety in a proverb: “Cada camino descubre sus dañosos y hondos barrancos,” she whispers to herself. Yet, this transitory comfort is followed by the immediate concern for her reputation, the loss of Sempronio's respect and, most of all, Calisto's business: “Si no voy qué dirá Sempronio? . . . Y su amo Calisto, ¿qué dirá? ¿qué hará? ¿qué pensará?” In her search for surety, Celestina's imagination takes flight calling forth every eventuality in a torrent of introspective analysis overlaid with worry:

¡Ay, cuytada de mí, en qué lazo me he metido! Que por mostrar solícita y esforçada pongo mi persona al tablero. ¿Qué haré, cuytada, mezuina de mí, que ni el salir afuera es provechoso, ni la perseverancia careçe de peligro? ¿Pues yré, o tornarme he? ¡O dubdosa y dura perplexidad! No sé cuál escoja por más sano. En el osar, manifiesto peligro, en la covardía, denostada pérdida. ¿Adónde yrá el buey que no are? (149)

The transition from Celestina's willful coercion of the Devil to her turbulent private musing is remarkable both for its suddenness and complexity. Lapsing into logic and reason at the beginning of Act IV as she remembers Sempronio's earlier warning, she whispers to herself that "aquellas cosas que bien no son pensadas, aunque algunas vezes ayan buen fin, comúnmente crían desvariados efectos. Assí que la mucha especulación nunca carece de buen fruto" (149). Imagining that her efforts might go awry, she feels threatened by the thought of discovery, punishment, and possible death, as she thinks through the risks involved and confesses that she knows of the possibility that Calisto's commission might fail, leading her to realize that "amargas cient monedas serían éstas" (149).

Celestina undercuts the authority of her theatrical conjuring of the Devil by means of the doubt that suddenly engulfs her private thoughts. Her furtive ramblings unexpectedly reveal her lack of confidence in the very Evil One she so publicly chastised and invoked, which, of course, casts his very existence into doubt, as something false or, at the very least, as something she would like to have faith in but obviously does not with any firm conviction. As she muses to her private self, Celestina is transformed into a fleeting but significant incarnation of an insurgent skepticism and rationality; her private views unexpectedly conjure a world empty of the marvelous and of amazing events. To be sure, as she now sees it, the world she inhabits is something full of contingencies, a place ruled more by the course of nature, time, chance, and the possibility of the unforeseen rather than by breathtaking intercession and the awe-inspiring acts of the supernatural.

Through his character's misgivings, Rojas abruptly lays bare the contrived, factitious nature of the witchcraft Celestina practices and proclaims at a moment in time when belief in it, fetishes, relics, forgeries, divinatory arts, and false miracles were beginning to be scrutinized closely not just by the Church but, more importantly, by humanists and practitioners of civil law at large. If we must historicize the representation of magic in *Celestina*, it is significant that works like the *Reprobación de supersticiones y hechicerías* by Pedro Ciruelo (1470-1548) –a logician, mathematician, and theologian who was not only Rojas' contemporary but a fellow student at Salamanca– emphatically challenges belief in magic through the application of cold reason to the natural world. In the course of his analysis, all superstition, Ciruelo concludes, is based either on the desire for illicit knowledge or material gain (33). Superstitions designed for acquiring knowledge are deemed by Ciruelo to be necromancy and divination, and those aimed at financial gain are, according to him,

bogus enchantment and hollow witchcraft. Like much of early modern literature that focuses on these subjects, Ciruelo's work is most attentive to examining logically the question of causation, emphasizing reason and the laws of nature as the keys to understanding the relationship between an effect and its efficient cause, and disclaiming that things could be made to happen by conjurations of the Devil.³

In her soliloquy at the beginning of Act IV, Celestina ultimately decides to follow through with her seduction of Melibea. However, far from expressing faith and confidence in the efficacy of her magic and her earlier demand for the aid of her supernatural ally, Celestina, when alone, is beset by fear and overcome by her own misgivings. Accordingly, she exhibits a skepticism and an analytical bent of mind in her monolog that undermines the epistemology of hypostasis upon which all her conjuring depends. Her monolog shows her oscillating between the rational and the irrational, ultimately falling back (out of convenient self-deception) into the pre-modern epistemology described by Michel Foucault, which offers her the unseen omens that she desires.

Writing in *The Order of Things* regarding the forces that shape the pre-Cartesian mind, Foucault notes that analogy is central to the process for making sense of the world,

it makes possible the marvellous confrontation of resemblances across space, but it also speaks of adjacencies, of bonds and joints. Its power is immense, for the similitudes of which it treats are not the visible, substantial ones between things themselves; they need only be the more subtle resemblances of relations. (21)

Of the similitudes engendered by the pre-Cartesian mind, perhaps the most common one is hypostasis, or the fallacy of concreteness.⁴ To be sure, the text in Celestina's abrupt transition appears deliberately to set up a clear tension between the world of

³ See also Martín de Castañega's *Tratado muy sutil y bien fundado de las supersticiones y hechizarias y vanos conjuros . . . y remedio dellas* (1529) and the comparative study of Ciruelo and Castañega by Tausiet Carlés, as well as chapter 1 in Morgado García.

⁴ Hypostasis occurs when an abstraction (an idea or a hypothetical construct) is treated or represented as if it were something real, as a thing or as an event. It is particularly characteristic of the pre-modern mindset and the latter's predisposition to use tropes like allegory and prosopopoeia. In other words, it involves representing something that is not real, an idea like evil, as something real and tangible. To be sure the most common form of hypostasis involves an anthropomorphic fallacy, a subset of reification, where an idea is not only represented as a living thing, but as being intelligent and human-like, i.e., the Devil. The classic case of hypostatic anthropomorphism in Christian doctrine, however, centers not on Satan but on the presumed essential nature of Jesus, in which the divine and the human are believed to coexist in the most immediate tangible form. The use of this type of reification in argumentation is, of course, regarded as a fallacy, but it is generally used in discourse where abstractions are understood to be intended metaphorically. In this way, Celestina's skein of thread, Calisto's golden chain, and Melibea's girdle, while all sharing the properties of a string, also constitute hypostatic forms of the idea of their bound destinies.

hypostatic similitudes and reason described by Foucault, testing the fallacy of reification at several particularly critical moments, but none more critical than in this interval when Celestina conjures the Devil, followed immediately by her expression of deep reticence regarding the prospects of her plan. In her private conversation with herself, Celestina questions her actions and weighs the options and possibilities that lie ahead, undercutting all certainty in the surety of her magic, enchantments, and incantations. Suddenly, the need for a new type of understanding, with a different foundation in both scope and validity, takes precedent in Celestina's clandestine thoughts and machinations. As she utters her misgivings, we become intrusive eavesdroppers to her monologue, and unexpectedly understand that she perceives that another type of knowledge is both possible and required for the task at hand; that she seeks a surer rational order for the comprehension of the world and the way it exists before her.

Celestina's mumblings at the beginning of Act IV pose a significant discursive twist in the texture of the text, one that points to the search for some kind of pragmatic, as opposed to mythical, animistic, or supernatural knowledge. While she rambles on, Celestina sets into motion a new type of conceptualizing practice that is based on the parsing of alternatives and the inner need for coherent knowledge; a type of reasoning that rests on an awareness of contingency and depends on the careful consideration of possibilities, disproving all trust in analogies and undercutting any certainty offered by everything uncanny or metaphysical. Briefly, fleetingly, rationally, systematic discourse emerges from Celestina's publicly undisclosed thoughts to undermine her previous braggadocio and all assurance in the paranormal. For a moment, then, Celestina doubts and dwells on the contingencies that govern the disenchanting world; a world, she understands, that is ordered more by chance and the need for discovery than by evil design or hocus-pocus. In the end, however, she lapses back into the pre-modern, hypostatic mindset of similitudes to comfort herself and lay her qualms to rest. She relies upon what she feels are auspicious signs—even though they are unseen and even inexistent—, imagined auguries of her venture in order to fortify her courage and urge herself to move forward with the plan. Celestina's transitory doubt at the beginning of Act IV in this way provides just enough hesitation to instill misgivings in the reader; reservations that further undermine the certainty of any authentic pact between her and the Devil.

Celestina's private musings put the epistemological paradigm of hypostasis to the test. As she ambles down the lane, her monolog does nothing but cast suspicion upon her recent reification of evil. Beset by uncertainty, she begins to reason; but her reasoning is, in the end, aimed only at convincing herself. Moved by her greed, she looks for ways to justify pressing forward with the venture. So, throwing caution to the wind, she lapses back into a discourse of similitudes that, under the guise of affirming them, effaces the very notions of causality and difference so as to justify her determination to forge ahead.

After engaging in an imaginary encounter with Calisto and examining dialectically

the pros and cons of her dilemma, Celestina decides to be prudent and arrives at the synthesis of the argument within her private thoughts: “Quando a los extremos falta el medio, arrimarse el hombre al más sano es discreción. Más quiero offender a Pleberio que enojar a Calisto,” she concludes (150). From this point forward, her observations now fail to resolve any conceptual contradictions or the perception of the dangers in her enterprise; all her rational misgivings have been erased by this call for discretion, just as she returns to a synchronic relational discourse that relies on the perception of omens to put them out of mind: “¡Esfuerça, esfuerça, Celestina!” she calls to herself, “Todos los agujeros se adereçan favorables, o yo no sé nada desta arte: quatro hombres he topado, a los tres llaman Juanes y lo dos son cornudos. La primera palabra que oý por la calle fue de achaque de amores; nunca he tropeçado como otras vezes” (150) she whispers to herself, although as Matthew Bentley observes, “several of the supposed ‘good omens’ are merely the absence of bad ones (263): “ni me estorvan las baldas, ni siento cansacio en andar; todos me saludan. Ni perro me ha ladrado, ni ave negra he visto, tordo ni cuervo ni otras noturnas” (150). As the rational demands of the disenchanting world recede again into hypostasis and subjective conviction, Celestina manages to deceive herself by taking comfort in similitudes, secure now in the safety offered by the jumble of unfounded associations she discovers in the signs and omens she claims to perceive. The perspicacious reader or listener, safe at an ironic distance from the text, however, sees the contradictions and understands that she has lapsed again into what Levi-Strauss calls “mythical thought” (or bricolage), an ordering of the mind by the world, rather than an ordering of the world by the mind (1-33).

As Foucault and Timothy J. Reiss have contended, the logocentric tradition of analogy that governed Western thought from ancient times until the Renaissance was supplanted at the threshold of modernity by a system of conceptualization based on reason and individualized logical, rational identity. Reiss describes an epistemological transformation involving the abandonment of an analogical discourse of associative patterning in the world in favor of an order of internal thinking involving “the expression of knowledge as a reasoning practice upon the world” (30) in which the mind seeks to understand the world from the vantage point of its own autonomy. At the center of this intellectual and cultural revolution, ultimately culminating in the emergence of Cartesianism in the seventeenth century, lies, as Foucault affirms, the realization of the dissociative, conventional nature of language and a heightened awareness of difference (17). By the close of the fifteenth century, representational practices of any kind, but especially in reading and writing, provided within this new cognitive paradigm occasions to explore dissimilarities rather than to affirm the essential likenesses between all things.⁵

⁵ Throughout *Celestina*, there is a manifest alternation between an epistemology that relies on similitudes and another that depicts difference and the autonomy of the external world. The contrast between mythical time and time as measured by the mechanical clock alluded to repeatedly in *Celestina* is a notable manifestation symptomatic of this dichotomy between a world governed by unalterable logical processes and one shaped by myth and desire. All the characters in the work are caught in a

Writers like Fernando de Rojas doubtless felt the heightened awareness of difference symptomatic of modernity described by Reiss and Foucault. Rojas examined the new epistemological, ethical, and metaphysical presuppositions of modernity's rationalistic difference through an exploration of verbal dexterity, irony, and the ambiguity of truth that is portrayed in *Celestina*. Acutely conscious of difference and the new epistemological and ontological paradigms implicit in it, Rojas explores the general problem of meaning and authenticity or how intentions may be assigned to things that intrinsically do not possess them, reflecting in the context of Celestina's invocation of magic and the supernatural the broad intellectual question of language's ability to signify the truth. In her summons of the Devil, Celestina's discourse relies on how initially beliefs, fears, hopes, passions, and desires –manifestations of subjectivity– are directed at, and projected upon, the world in order to portray, interpret, and understand it, as she uncovers the intricacies and contradictions in the problem of arriving at the truth and its representation.

In Acts III and IV of *Celestina* we see the public iteration of a spell countered by the old bawd's rational reflection and the expression of doubt about her ability to conjure anything. The world of the occult –indeed what Timothy Reiss refers to as the process of “occultation,” patterning, resemblance, and myth– momentarily gives way to the need for referential, analytical discourse as we pass from animistic thought and subjective conviction to a new *episteme* based on naming, enumerating, and the desire to understand, control, and finally know. In the transition from Celestina's conjuration of *Triste Plutón* to her mumbled misgivings on the street, we transit between two classes of overlapping ways of thinking that not only inhabited the same cultural space but could be imagined to coexist in one individual person. In Celestina's monologue redolent with doubt, framed by her summons of the Devil, we witness not a sudden enlightenment, but the gradual insurgence of reason and the need for certainty into the enchanted world of myth, magic, and similitudes. Celestina's doubtful thoughts externalized through her mumblings reveal a congruency between fictional representation and newly emerging economies of thought grounded in analysis and reference. Privately, Celestina wants to know, wants to secure the factual outcome of her enterprise, as she in confidence turns her back on ancient practice, abandoning myth while privileging the knowable and the methodical. In this fashion, just as she is about to cross the threshold of Pleberio's house, Celestina in her own mind briefly crosses the threshold of modernity.

Celestina's soliloquy embodies the need to produce, recognize, and validate the truth of things. It contradicts the hedonic, prejudiced ideology of the non-theoretical that lies at the foundation of the belief in magic and her conjuration of the Devil. At the same time, in her whispers we grasp a sense of an individual subject who seeks to inhabit and command knowledge to acquire a clear grasp and understanding of the world. Medieval discursive practices and paradigms suddenly dissolve in her speech

tension between their perception of the passage of time and the inexorable clock that rings out the daily measures of their historical lives. See Fernández Rivera.

and cede to analytically consolidated, agentive language moved by an awareness of the speaking subject's desire and potential to know.

In short, there is as much evidence in *Celestina's* mind that argues against the existence and efficacy of witchcraft –at least momentarily– as there is for it in her prior invocation of the Devil. And this is just as it should be, since whether the Devil exists or not in *Celestina* should not really be the issue. The real question one should ask is why there is as much evidence for the Evil One's reality as there is against it, and for the claim to efficacy as well as for the failure of witchery and necromancy. Rojas, like Shakespeare in his magisterial plays, especially *Hamlet*, constructs a confrontation between the rational and the irrational, between the possibility of the existence of supernatural evil and a world that can discover evil only in the human heart. Did Rojas want us to believe that *Celestina* was a witch capable of guiding human destinies with the aid of talismans and amulets consecrated to the Evil One? Did Hamlet really see a ghost? Is the Prince of Denmark sane or insane? Is *Celestina* a sorceress, or is it all a bogus performance? These are the real questions that are posed by both Rojas and Shakespeare in their art. Both, I tell myself, could not but see the folly of needing to answer them, since to affirm or deny one or the other would be infinitely less effective than to entertain both possibilities. Whether Hamlet is really mad or sane, or whether *Celestina's* supernatural powers exist or do not is the real, but by artistic necessity, unanswered question; in both cases it seems simply enough to pose it, and leave it tantalizingly unresolved, while allowing readers to remain suspended between one thing and the other.

Celestina is a profoundly iconoclastic work that deliberately stages clashes between established and emergent discourses of authority, but especially those identified with both reason and thoughtlessness. Whether or not *Celestina* is a sorceress is thus not the issue. The fact that she has a reputation as a witch who is in league with the Devil is the main source of her empowerment, and the essential point of the question. It is not necessary to believe in *Celestina's* magic or for her actually to perform it. It is enough simply to suggest its power and the possibility of its existence. When we look at the consummate art of both Shakespeare and Rojas, it is clear that they could present evidence both for and against the existence of the supernatural. That is, they could use the suggestion of the existence or the non-existence of paranormal powers, not as claims to truth or as evidence of extra-literary historical realities, but as powerful artistic complements to the plots they unfold in their dramas. It is best to think that they each could have it both ways.

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