

Nomadic Objects and Migrating Meanings: Beds of Signification in *Celestina**

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“The artifact is less a text to be read than a story to be told.”
Rita Wright

Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* is all about language. His characters seem to share a linguistic fetish: in his fictional world emotions and events do not seem to be completely real or bear existence until they are communicated. In this text, feelings and events exist only when they are mediated through language. Let us remember *Celestina*'s own words in this regard: “El deleyte es con los amigos en las cosas sensuales, y en especial en recontar las cosas de amores y comunicarlas” (126);¹ and Pármeno's observation that “el plazer no comunicado no es plazer”(212). In fact, as George Shipley reminds us, Rojas' characters depend, habitually and delusively, “on rhetoric to give satisfying verbal form to ideas rarely (and then only briefly) realized in their objective experience” (143). These characters, and by extension their feelings, seem to suffer the curse of language: they cannot exist outside communication.²

In this regard, Rojas' use of the material world indicates that he is enhancing the signifying potential of his text by supplementing the linguistic with the material. Act XVII of *Celestina*, for instance, opens with Elicia's determination to end her mourning for Sempronio. Motivated by a lack of revenue which threatens her survival as a prostitute, Elicia rationalizes her decision by means of a highly pragmatic discourse in which the emotional meets the economic. She manifests both the negative financial consequences of death as well as her own materialistic inclinations when she complains about being in mourning for Sempronio's death: “Mal me va con este luto; poco se visita mi casa, poco se pasea mi calle ... y lo que peor siento, que ni blanca ni presente veo entrar por mi puerta” (307). Discouraged by the decline in business, Elicia decides to come out of mourning by activating a narrative that rests on her household possessions rather than her body in order to make public her private decision:

anden pues mi espejo y alcohol, que tengo dañados estos ojos; anden mis tocas blancas, mis gorgueras labradas, mis ropas de plazer; quiero adereçar lexía para estos cabellos que perdían ya la ruvia color. Y esto hecho, contaré mis gallinas, haré mi cama, porque la limpieza alegra el coraçon; barreré mi puerta y regaré la calle por que los que passaren vean que es ya desterrado el dolor. (308)

The materiality pervading this scene illustrates the status of “physical artifacts of private life” as communicative vehicles (Duby x). Rojas uses the objects that Elicia owns as emotional and tangible markers not by focusing on their materiality, but rather by using them to convey something intangible: feelings. This celebration of material ownership and consumption illustrates one example of the mechanisms of compensation that Stephen Gilman mentions

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¹ All references to *Celestina* come from Dorothy S. Severin's 1998 edition.

² In Rojas' fictional world even inanimate objects enjoy the gift of speech: “Qué quieres más,” Pármeno tells Calisto, “sino, que, si una piedra topa con otra, luego suena «¡puta vieja!»” (109).

regarding the lack of attention given to objects in *Celestina*: “Rojas ... often seems to compensate for this lack of description of things by their use in calculated structural play” (107); that is, Rojas clearly privileges the use of things as active narrative agents over an ornamental condition conveyed by mechanical description.

It is at the crossroads between the linguistic and the material that this essay examines how Rojas uses the material world to enhance the process of reading of his text thus favoring the proliferation of meanings. Rojas’ use of objects in *Celestina* suggests an awareness of the discursive potential of objects as contributors to the narrative structure of his work.³ However, of all the objects that inhabit the material world in *Celestina* only one merits Rojas’ full attention: the bed. Rojas dedicates a surprising amount of detail to the beds of Areúsa and Centurio, privileging their materiality through in-depth descriptions of both household objects within the narrative structure in Acts VII and XVIII. Additionally, although it is not described at all, Calisto’s bed also highlights the communicative potential of objects as illustrated in Act I. These three beds function as rhetorical devices capable of building narrative frames operating both literally and metaphorically within the overarching theme of Eros/Thanatos that prevails both within *Celestina* as well as outside this work.

Drawing on hypertext theory, semiotics and material culture, the bed in *Celestina* can be read as a nomadic object that travels from character to character and context to context acquiring new meanings and subsequently producing new significations. In *Celestina*, however, beds do not acquire meaning merely by migrating. Rather it is also meaning, as a transient element, that charges these beds with a wide range of significations. That is, in Rojas’ text beds both produce meaning and serve as hyperlinks to other beds in *Celestina* and other contemporary works that shaped the collective imaginary of these household objects as represented in the literature of the time. Through these apparently static objects *Celestina* is constructed as a sort of hypertext, that is, a text that originates in nonsequential writing, a text “composed of a block of words (or images) linked ... by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality” (Landow 3). In Rojas’ fictional world beds therefore act both as bearers and producers of meaning, which in turn behaves as an unstable, mutable, and dynamic function. These objects lay out various pathways before the reader, who is guided towards performing what Jerome McGann has called a radial reading which “involves decoding one or more of the contexts that interpenetrate the scripted and physical text” (119). In this way, *Celestina* operates as an early modern hypertext through which readers can travel both inside and outside the individual work through the hyperlinks provided by the beds.

Semiotics also informs my approach to the material world of *Celestina* insofar as this discipline is concerned with ordinary objects as signs that simultaneously coalesce and defer meaning.⁴ The beds of Calisto, Areúsa and Centurio become paradigms, that is, individual signs capable of generating a discursive practice that enables them to contribute to the creation of meaning within the vast narrative arena of *Celestina*. Along these lines, Celestinesque beds can be read as signs defined as “*everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social

³ In this regard, characters in *Celestina* share the narrative space with a number of objects from diverse fields that play a significant role throughout the text: blankets, sheets, lutes, vihuelas, doublets, smocks, hats, cloaks, pearls, chains, hammers, shovels, brooms, bowls, game boards, keys, locks, doors, coins, pieces of clothes, pieces of string, distaffs, pins, table, table clothes, sawing needles, mirrors, shoes, shoe laces, and clocks, among many other objects from the material world.

⁴ I am drawing upon Umberto Eco’s definition of sign: “everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it” (*A Theory of Semiotics* 7).

convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*" (Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* 16). From this perspective, the meaning of these three beds lies in the multiple intersections between their literal and symbolic significations within a semiotic system in which denotation, connotation, and ideology converge to generate meaning.⁵ Viewing these beds as semiotic objects illuminates how meanings can be made, unmade, shifted, reinterpreted and revised through divergent uses of the same sign.

Understood as a framing and discursive medium involved in social practice, material culture, as Christopher Tilley notes, "can be regarded as a kind of text, a silent form of writing and discourse; quite literally, a channel of reified and objectified expression" (189). It is from this viewpoint that the theoretical framework of material culture can be useful to interrogate the connections between the bed and the production of meaning in *Celestina*. As Roland Barthes has indicated "even objects will become speech, if they mean something" (*Mythologies* 111). In this particular case the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio serve as the mouthpieces of the unconscious of Rojas' text and its characters, a textual unconscious "effectively constituted by and correlated with that which the text represses" (Strohm 165). In this regard, these three household objects give voice to silenced or repressed discourses in *Celestina*.

It is from this triple perspective that this essay examines the relationship between objects and the creation of meaning in *Celestina*. More specifically, this essay interrogates the duality of beds as repositories of meaning along with their status as producers of significations that illuminate characters' motivations and interactions in *Celestina*.⁶ In this text, beds embody the tale to be told in a latent state and constitute its main organizing principle: the story originates in the object but it is the interaction with a specific character which opens a narrative path through which readers can pursue meaning. This essay proposes, then, looking both at beds themselves (signifiers) and through them (signifieds) as situational devices, that is, to examine these household items for what they are and for what they symbolize in function of the specific dramatic space in which they appear and the characters who interact with them. This approach interrogates the capacity of material things to signify, to craft their own material story and open new narrative paths through the vast universe of *Celestina*, thus complementing other discourses—religious, social, political, and economical—with which they share their textual space.

Rojas' use of the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio opens a new level of textual signification, which "must include attention to what it represses, to the gaps, traces, and other derivatives of a textual unconscious" (Strohm 165). The three beds featured in *Celestina* serve as paths to pursue meaning beyond the textual boundaries of Rojas' work. In fact, these three household objects serve as the materialization of characters' hidden motivations, the author's

⁵ In semiotic systems, Barthes notes, there are different levels of meaning. The first is that of denotation, based on the Saussurian relationship between signifier (sign-vehicle) and a signified (meaning). The second focuses on connotation, which consists of the addition to the denotative sign of different signifieds which are produced as a reader decodes a text. The combination of these two levels produces the third level of meaning: ideology, understood as the unavoidable function of the sign to persuade as well as to refer to the governing values of a specific time and period. For more on these three orders of meaning, see Barthes' discussion in "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, 109-159.

⁶ In his "La función temática de los objetos inanimados en *La Celestina*," Raúl Muñoz discusses the transgression of objects beyond their use as decorative elements of the physical space. For Muñoz, who restricts his analysis to architectural elements, objects serve as "obstáculos o barreras simbólicas al amor sensual y a la engañosa naturaleza humana. Estas cosas adquieren personalidad y llegan a convertirse en impedimentos que arruinan las maquinaciones y planes de los personajes y eventualmente contribuyen a darle forma espacial al destino del hombre" (432). Rather than seeing them as barriers, my approach to objects rests on their capacity as communicative bridges among characters, texts, and contexts in *Celestina*.

subconscious, and the text's unconscious. Additionally, this emphasis on the communicative capacity of objects opens up for examination a dynamic process that catapults the act of reading into modernity as it calls for an active reader who engages in the process of interpretation in an ongoing quest for meaning through material narratives.

What is a Material Narrative?

Both the conscious and unconscious levels of *Celestina* reflect the social and economic changes occurring in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th Century. At that time, Castile was experiencing a transformation towards modernity impelled by an increase in international trade, new notions of luxury, and a redefined sense of taste operating as explicit or implied signs of personal identity. Embedded in a strong sense of what Carroll B. Johnson has coined “materialist practices” in the context of Cervantes' works, this historical juncture allows objects to acquire a new value both as commodities and signifying vehicles. In fact, as Umberto Eco indicates,

it is possible to consider the exchange of commodities as a semiotic phenomenon not because the exchange of goods implies a physical exchange, but because in the exchange the *use value* of the goods is transformed into their *exchange value* –and therefore a process of signification or *symbolization* takes place, this later being perfected by the appearance of money, which *stands for something* else. (*A Theory of Semiotics* 24-25)

Celestina both reflects and participates in this commercial atmosphere of exchange and material prodigality. In Rojas' text the material world is imbued with the economic vision of characters motivated by self-interest. Objects in *Celestina* are instilled with diverse mercantile activities that impregnate the actions of the characters and allow a double classification of these narratives as both material, as they focus on objects, and materialistic, since these objects are inserted into a commercial discourse. This materialistic attitude is reflected in the fact that on several occasions Calisto gives his servants and Celestina items of clothing and jewelry as payments in return for services rendered. In fact, this is one of Celestina's golden rules because, as Pármeno warns Sempronio, “ya verás como no quiere [Celestina] pedir dinero, porque es divisible” (177), which emphasizes the supremacy of the value of objects over that of money in Rojas' work.⁷ For most characters in *Celestina*, actions are motivated by an individualistic principle leading to the gaining of an economic, material, or sexual profit. Each object Celestina trades with, and each task she undertakes, is directed towards the idea of her own ‘provecho’, the individual profit of a commercial enterprise.

Rojas' text highlights material possessions as a way to differentiate their owners. In fact, *Celestina* emphasizes the idea of possession and objects to an extent that it makes it possible to talk about a discourse of ‘owning’ rather than of ‘being’ as a means to personify Rojas' characters, whose nature is based on what they have rather than on what they are. In other words, they are what they own. As emphasis on objects grows in society, Rojas exploits the discursive capacity of things thus adding a new level of signification to his work, that of material

⁷ In this regard, the fact that objects served as currency was a common practice of the times and a sign of a society whose monetary stability was still in the making. As Miguel Ángel Ladero has noted, although Castile had a similar economic situation to the rest of Europe, its case was especially aggravated. At that time, the kingdom was suffering from a growing need for currency as the gold and silver that started to come in from America was redirected to other parts of Europe. This constant draining of raw materials used for the coinage of currency led the kings to adopt different financial measures in the first quarter of the 16th century. Therefore, the Crown constantly appealed to an economic policy that entailed “que se utilizasen mercancías castellanas, y no moneda, como contravalor de las importaciones traídas por mercaderes del extranjero” (Ladero 377).

narratives: a process of telling a story triggered by elements that belong to the material world, more specifically household objects used as tools of persuasion and communication among characters, as well as among authors, texts, and readers.

Ian Hodder's work on material culture rests heavily on the discursive framework associated with objects. According to him, a narrative can be described as "an account which relates events into a sequence with a beginning, a middle and an end" that makes use of rhetorical devices in order to persuade readers (Hodder 165). Building upon Hayden White's concept of narrative—a story characterized by plot, argument and ideology—Hodder argues for the application of these literary procedures to material culture in order to examine the ways in which objects produce meaning within a specific context. One of the types of signification that these material narratives produce is the metaphorical, which is "characteristic of the first phase of a new narrative. It is representational and substitutive, triumphantly bringing in new ideas but with a lot of local variety" (Hodder 166). From this perspective, the narratives triggered by the beds of Calisto, Areúsa and Centurio are characterized by the fact that the objects which activate them transgress what is often dismissed as a merely decorative function, that is, background material which supports but does not participate in the action. In this regard, these Celestinesque objects serve as physical entities viewed in terms of their potential as vehicles of signifying practices in which materiality converges with the production of meaning.

The beds of Areúsa and Centurio, for instance, formulate their significations by means of rhetorical figures. This communicative pattern manifests the active participation of the material world in the production of significations as "objects are never simply visual things, but are indications ... as to how we should respond" (Richardson 174). Both objects' messages and viewers' responses are mediated by the very materiality of the things they interact with by means of metaphors, symbolism, metonymy, synecdoche, intratextuality, and intertextuality. Literary tropes indicate ways to read not only objects themselves, but also the characters and contexts with which they interact. Narrative strategy thus converges with materiality to transform the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio into textual artifacts, instilling in material items the capacity to produce signification beyond the literal. Viewing these three beds as the repository of material narratives entails the possibility of recovering meanings within a larger context as rhetorical figures allow these mundane objects to serve as bridges both within their own text as well as among other works.

Material Narratives of the Celestinesque Bed

I. Calisto's Bed

The symbolism of the bed has been variously interpreted as involving one or more of the following: regeneration, love, death, birth, a link between the conscious and the unconscious, sleep, vulnerability, and the sexual. According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, the bed is defined as "el lecho que sirve para dormir, para descansar, o para curarse uno cuando está enfermo. Es siempre cuadrilonga, y se hace de varias maneras, como de pilares labrados, de bancos y unas tablas encima, de cordeles enredados en un bastidor de madera, y todas son levantadas del suelo, por causa de la humedad" ("Cama"). Within the domestic space the bed occupied a central position among other pieces of furniture that could be found in an affluent house. As Juana Hidalgo Ogáyar observes,

por lo que respecta al mobiliario, ya sabemos que en esa época no era muy numeroso y se repartía, especialmente, en torno al dormitorio, la recámara según los inventarios, donde

la cama de colgaduras con dosel, cortinajes y colcha de brocado destacaba por su gran riqueza y se convertía, con frecuencia, en el mueble más importante.⁸ (83-84)

These symbolic associations and descriptions converge in the literary representation of the bed in *Celestina*, a text in which this household object is mentioned sixteen times. Except for two occasions in which Celestina uses the bed in a generic way, the other fourteen times all references to beds are made in connection to a specific character: Calisto (three times), Areúsa (four times), Elicia (four times), Pármemo y Sempronio (one time), Tristán and Sosia (one time), and Centurio (one time).

The material narrative of the bed irrupts with force in Act I. After being ‘infected’ by Melibea’s love, Calisto returns home to ‘die.’ Upon arriving he exhorts Sempronio: “¡Ansí los diablos te ganen!, ansí por infortunio arrebatado perezcas, o perpetuo intolerable tormento consigas, el qual en grado incomparablemente a la penosa y desastrada muerte que spero traspasa. ¡Anda, anda, malvado!, abre la cámara y endereça la cama!” (88). He continues enacting his own death by commanding his servant, “Cierra la ventana y dexa la tiniebla acompañar al triste y al desdichado la ceguedad. Mis pensamientos tristes no son dignos de luz. ¡O bienaventurada muerte aquella que desseada a los afligidos viene!” (88). Calisto is staging his own deathbed scene: following the guidelines of courtly lovers and the *Ars Moriendi*, he is literally preparing himself to die of love, as if he were acting out his own secular last rites.⁹ This is the first time that the bed, which serves as a material marker invoking the relationship between Eros and Tanatos, is mentioned in *Celestina*. This bed, then, becomes a tangible boundary between reality and fantasy, life and death, and sanity and insanity.

There is no need for Rojas to go into the details of the ritual that the protagonist is reproducing, which suggests that his model of readership is one that relies on the readers’ abilities to make connections between literary traditions. Rojas is, in fact, prefiguring what Umberto Eco defines as a “model reader.” To make a text communicative, Eco notes, “the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them” (*The Role of the Reader* 7).

Rojas’ contemporaries would have immediately recognized the subtext of the *Ars Moriendi* thus realizing that the author is characterizing Calisto as a secular *Moriens* who is dying of love. After all, as Paul Strohm argues, texts work by “accommodating full renderings of their immediate cultural circumstances and other less intelligible impulses” (212). Rojas is, of course, mocking the discourse of courtly love as he is subverting the tradition of the *Ars Moriendi*. For his contemporary readers, the staging of Calisto’s demise would have evoked the deathbed scene imagined by Diego de San Pedro for Leriano in his *Cárcel de amor*, which, as critics have

⁸ In fact, as Phillippe Contamine notes, “medieval men and women, acutely aware of living in an impoverished world in which every object had value, seem to have been fascinated by household furnishings ... It was not enough that a house should be well constructed; it also needed to be ‘well equipped.’ Of all the objects mentioned, the bed occurs most often and most prominently” (489).

⁹ For the link between courtly love and deathbed scenes see Michael Gerli’s “Leriano’s Libation: Notes on the Cancionero Lyric, *Ars Moriendi*, and the Probable Debt to Boccaccio.” *MLN* 96 (1981): 414-420. For more information about the influence of the *Ars Moriendi* on the literary production of the time, see, among others, Francisco Gago Jover’s. “El *Ars moriendi* y su influencia en las muertes literarias”. *Two Generations: A Tribute to Lloyd A. Kasten (1905-1999)*. Ed. Francisco Gago Jover, 119-134. New York: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 2002.

shown, is one of Rojas' parodic targets.¹⁰ Calisto's bed, then, opens a textual corridor that favors intertextuality, that is, the germination of meaning is based on a pre-existing network of discourses and texts. After all, as Julia Kristeva reminds us, no text is read independently of the reader's experiences of other texts: "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (66). Rojas is, in fact, offering his readers alternate versions of *Cárcel de amor* and the *Ars moriendi* in such a way that the passage devoted to Calisto's deathbed scene may itself be seen as "the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that that 'subtext' is not immediately present as such, ... but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact" (Jameson 81).

Rojas is, thus, violating tradition without completely breaking away from it as, albeit with a tone of parody, he is building upon the importance of the function of bed in the ritual prescribed by the *Ars Moriendi*, the didactic text that provided the model for Leriano's deathbed scene which closes *Cárcel de amor*. The discourse proposed by these religious manuals arises from a deathbed scene in which *Moriens* awaits his demise lying in bed surrounded by family, friends and the professionals of death. Despite this multitude, the dying man is alone and his waiting is not as passive as it might seem. While *Moriens* is in the process of carrying out the expected rituals in order to die well, there is something happening that disturbs the apparent simplicity of the ceremony which, as Phillippe Ariès has shown, cannot be seen by those who are clustered around him: "It is a spectacle reserved for the dying man alone and one which he contemplates with a bit of anxiety and a great deal of indifference. Supernatural beings have invaded his chamber and cluster about the bed of the recumbent figure" (*Western Attitudes Toward Death* 34).

In this tradition, the bed becomes the ceremonial space for the tug of war between the demons and the angels who try to win *Moriens*' soul by bringing their wares to his bed. This mundane piece of furniture is the center of a micro-universe in which life coexists with the supernatural in a personalized ritual presided by *Moriens*. It is significant that this ceremony takes place in one's own bed as this location serves as a physical threshold evoking the shift between day and night, light and darkness, vigil and sleep: life and death. The bed is constructed as the material limit, as the in-between space in which celestial and infernal creatures perform a theatrical battle in which the forces of Good and Evil try to outbid each other for *Moriens*' soul. More worldly tasks also converge around the bed: wills are dictated, a doctor examines the patient, relatives cluster, a priest performs the last rites, and ultimately, *Moriens* expires and completes the transaction of his soul on his own terms and turf. As an object, then, the bed not only participates in the imaginary discourse of death but also invokes the heightened commercial atmosphere of the time that taints the business of salvation as well.¹¹

In the case of Rojas' particular *Moriens* an additional feature enriches the significations that emerge from his bed. It is curious to note that, as Calisto prepares to die of love, his first concern revolves around the state and position of his bed: "endereça la cama," he says to

¹⁰ For more information on this aspect, see, among others, the works by Eugene Lacarra's "La parodia de la ficción sentimental en la *Celestina*," *Celestinesca* 13.1 (1989): 11-29; Dorothy Severin's *Tragicomedy and Novelistic Discourse in Celestina*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; or Yolanda Iglesias' *Una nueva mirada a la parodia de la novela sentimental en La Celestina*. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2009.

¹¹ Phillippe Ariès establishes a direct link between the mercantile and the religious aspects of salvation on the grounds of the symbolic function of the *liber vitae*, a book that contained at once "the history of an individual, his biography, and a book of accounts, or records, with two columns, one for the evil and the other one for the good. The new bookkeeping spirit of businessmen who were beginning to discover their own world ... was applied to the content of a life as well as to merchandise or money" (*The Hour of Our Death* 104).

Sempronio.¹² In clear contrast to Calisto's emotional disarray, this command evokes the idea of order and organization with respect to the domestic environment, a behavior that reflects a new conception of daily life and a new way of organizing objects in relation to space. As Philippe Ariès observes, the function, design and relationship with daily objects begin to change at the dawn of modernity. Beds were carried from one place to another and occupied a special place in the house, in fact, "the bed was moved from the center of the room toward the wall, creating a ruelle, or space between bed and wall" ("Introduction" 7).

By choosing the location of his bed inside his room, Calisto is revealing something about his personality: this household possession differentiates him as the new distribution of furniture indicates an intention to personalize this ritual. Using household objects to produce signification is one of the aspects that frames *Celestina* as a modern text. Rojas is not circumscribing to characters the capacity to generate meaning, rather he is transferring this skill to the material world as well. As Phillippe Contamine notes "we learn a great deal about how the occupant or occupants of a house lived from the distribution and identification of its rooms" (466). In Calisto's case, the repositioning of his bed evokes the psychological state of tension emerging from his previous encounter with Melibea. Within this context, relocating his bed can very well be interpreted as a sign of his anxiety regarding his exchange with the young woman.¹³

The mention of the bed in this opening scene serves as a sort of symbolic hyperlink, that is, Calisto's bed is creating meaning by means of intertextuality as the signification of this piece of furniture is shaped and enhanced by its relation to two other texts: *Cárcel de amor* and the *Ars Moriendi*. By referring the reader to the world of the *Ars moriendi*, Calisto's bed, then, has served as an external hyperlink to Leriano's deathbed scene in Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor*. Author, readers, and text have cooperated, then, to create meaning as a result of a process in which the relationship between a signifier and potential signifieds has been established in reference to the system of signifying practices within a larger cultural field thus unveiling a master narrative. This is because, as Fredric Jameson observes, "such master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them" (34).

From this perspective, Rojas' "model reader" resorts to intertextual frames performing an interpretative move that Umberto Eco defines as "inferential walks." This interpretative process takes place when the reader is encouraged by previously encountered narrative situations (intertextual frames) to activate a certain reading. To identify these frames, Eco argues, "the reader has to 'walk,' so to speak, outside the text in order to gather intertextual support" (*The Role of the Reader* 32). Thus, the collective imaginary of *Celestina*'s readers immediately charges Calisto's bed with the religious and literary meaning that is precisely what is being subverted by Rojas. It becomes clear then that meaning is not unilaterally transmitted to the reader. Rather, it is the reader who actively contributes to the process of signification by decoding Calisto's bed within an interplay of codes and conventions encoded in this household object. This material narrative is thus creating meaning organized around two axes of signification: a *horizontal axis* connecting Rojas and the readers of *Celestina* and a *vertical axis*

¹² This sentence acquires an ironic tone when we remember that just a few moments earlier Sempronio had told Calisto that he was coming back from another room because "abatiose el girifalte, e vinele enderezar en el alcandara" (88).

¹³ For more about the connection between male anxiety and symbols, see Barbara Weissberger's *Isabel Rules. Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. In Chapter 2 Weissberger analyzes the heraldic emblem of the Catholic Kings as an example of the contemporary attitudes toward queenship that ranged from the propagandistic image of the queen to an anxious masculinity that sought to portray her as a threat to patriarchy.

connecting *Celestina* with other texts.¹⁴ The meanings that emerge from Calisto's bed are produced, then, by a collaborative process among the object, the reader, the writer, and the context. Meaning is actively created by means of an interplay in which literary creation meets social codes and cultural conventions yielding to a process which manifests that, as Julia Kristeva has noted, "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it" (qtd. in Culler 105).

Calisto's bed thus inaugurates a discursive path on which time and space converge, revealing the existence of a perpetual narrative that reminds us of the nature of literature as an ongoing system of interconnected texts and contexts. Rather than inhabiting a series of discrete, isolated texts in which all meaning can be encapsulated, signification overflows textual and temporal boundaries and therefore must be best pursued through the amalgam of fields of signification bounded by the contexts of its readers. From this perspective, Calisto's bed functions as a collective narrative signified, that is, a paradigm of the "persistent dimension of literary and cultural texts precisely because they reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality" (Jameson 34).

II. Areúsa's Bed

The material narrative of the bed emerges again in Act VII to position Areúsa within the dramatic space of *Celestina* through her relation of ownership with her most prized household possession. The young prostitute's bed—one of the two that Rojas describes in detail—is charged with transgression and multiplicity of meanings as this object participates simultaneously in the mercantile, erotic, materialistic, and medical discourses that pervade *Celestina*. Areúsa's bed adds another level to the process in which characters are differentiated in Rojas' text as this household object extends as well as idealizes Areúsa's profession as an exclusive prostitute, a courtesan and not a whore.¹⁵ If Calisto is characterized as a pathetic *Moriens* who is dying of love in his bed, Areúsa is constructed as a valuable commodity, thus bringing together the erotic and the commercial: as Rojas' description suggests, Areúsa's bed is the space for making a living through the commerce of language and the body.

The mercantile aspect ascribed to this bed is introduced through *Celestina*'s description in Act VII. During this whole scene, focalization belongs to the go-between. In her view, the bed is the space for commercial deal-making, not only of bodies but also of words. In this specific passage, *Celestina* aims to persuade Areúsa to sleep with Pármeno. As a way to approach her protégée who at that moment is undressing to go to sleep, the old bawd insists on conducting her business in the young woman's bed. *Celestina*'s response to Areúsa's announcement that she is going to get dressed because she is cold could not be more revealing: "No harás, por mi vida, sino éntrate en la cama, que desde allí hablaremos" (201). *Celestina* is literally positioning Areúsa as an individual within the physical space of her bed which, through ownership, makes the young woman what she is. At the same time, the old bawd is constructing this bed as an object with a special capacity to mediate between people who engage in a negotiation: she is

¹⁴ I am borrowing here from Julia Kristeva's concept of the three dimensions of textual space: writing subject, addressee, and exterior texts. According to Kristeva, the word status is defined "horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)" (66).

¹⁵ From the beginning Areúsa is presented as a highly valuable commercial object with a limited circulation which singles her out as an exclusive commodity. As Igor Kopytoff points out, "another way to singularize objects is through restricted commodification, in which some things are confined to a very narrow sphere of exchanges" (74).

reformulating the meaning of this bed by encoding this object into an erotic discourse, thus expanding its context of signification.

From this moment on, Celestina appears to be carried away in a sort of linguistic frenzy that initially targets Areúsa's bed and not her body. The very materiality of this household possession directly contributes to the young woman's individualization as, just like its owner, her bed becomes a unique and valuable item through Celestina's eyes: "¡Ay, cómo huele toda la ropa en bulléndote! ¡Aosadas, que está todo a punto; siempre me pagué de tus cosas y hechos, de tu limpieza y atavío; fresca que estás! ¡Bendígate Dios, qué savanas y colcha, qué almohadas y qué blancura! Tal sea mi vejez qual todo me parece perla de oro" (201-202). This description of Areúsa's fragrant and sumptuous bed matches her own value as a high-end prostitute at the same time as she becomes defined by the object she possesses. The interplay established between Areúsa and her bed transforms this household item into a semiotic object whose nature lies at the intersection of the two coordinates proposed by Roland Barthes: that of the symbolic, and that of classification. First, as Barthes has noted, the metaphorical depth of a given object positions it as "at least the signifier of a signified." (*The Semiotic Challenge* 183). In this case, as a signifier Areúsa's bed symbolically stands for something that differs from its literal signified as this domestic good serves as a metaphor for its owner. Additionally, the coordinate of classification highlights the fact that "we do not live without having within ourselves, more or less consciously, a certain classification of objects, which is imposed upon us or suggested by our society" (Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* 184). In Celestina's particular view, Areúsa's bed, and by extension its owner, have been classified according to their material value. The material narrative originated in her very own bed differentiates Areúsa as a valuable commodity to be traded with, "an item with use value that also has exchange value" (Kopytoff 64).

In this narrative, vision meets smell and interacts with touch to create an image charged with erotic pleasure in which the materiality of the object intermingles with the physicality of Areúsa's body. Under Celestina's gaze, Areúsa's bed has been transformed into an erotic object, thus unleashing the narrative of the fetish.¹⁶ In her description, Celestina has created a dynamic model of pleasure that transcends and blurs boundaries between human and object, flesh and cloth. The scopoc drive yields to language, and in turn, language escalates into physicality, all of which seems to coalesce in Celestina's words when, referring to Areúsa, she encourages Pármeno: "Retóçala en esta cama" (207). In Celestina's eyes, Areúsa's bed has become the locus through and in which the old woman is articulating her own desire, thus creating the apparent contradiction that defines the fetish: the bed stands for Areúsa but is not Areúsa, and yet both woman and object seem to be an extension of each other. In this description the expression "perla de oro" acts as a catalyst of this process of individualization as it turns both the bed and the prostitute into rare and valuable objects: by means of the description of her bed, Areúsa has become a signifier of luxury as well. She stands out as a highly valued commodity, which characterizes her as a sumptuous and sensual object capable of inspiring admiration.¹⁷

According to Carmen Parrilla, "Celestina aparenta maravillarse no sólo de la belleza de la ramera sino del ámbito o del entorno que le corresponde. Bien sabemos que en tal situación lo

¹⁶ For more on desire and visual pleasure, see Chapter 4 in Michael Gerli's *Celestina and the Ends of Desire*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

¹⁷ The senses play a significant role in connection to Areúsa. Regarding the young woman's influence on Sosia, Carmen Parrilla notes: "Areúsa es objeto de admiración de Sosia, por su hermosura, su oficio, así como por el valor mercantil adjunto a su trato ... Sosia experimenta una cómica transformación del lenguaje, lo que ni impide que, alentado por los sentidos –vista y olfato principalmente–, el joven declare haber estado a punto de pasar de la admiración a la posesión" (Parrilla 19).

que Celestina se propone es excitar al muchacho con su admiración hiperbólica y sensorial” (19). Whether feigned or not, what is important here is that through her own bed, Areúsa is associated with feelings of awe and admiration which are reconfirmed by the infatuated Pármene, who qualifies the high-status prostitute as: “Maravillosa cosa” (124). As shown above, Celestina’s description of Areúsa’s bed clearly awakens a feeling of wonder that emanates from and is transferred to this mundane piece of furniture. In addition, Celestina herself seems to confirm the sense of wonder that Areúsa herself provokes when she addresses the young prostitute saying: “Pues no te estés assentada, acuéstate y métete debaxo de la ropa, que pareces serena” (201).¹⁸ As Caroline Walker Bynum notes, the Middle Ages understood wonder (*admiratio*) “as a cognitive, non-appropriative, perspectival, and particular. It was not merely a physiological response; wonder was recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered” (3).¹⁹ It is at this point that Celestina’s sense of awe and fetishism for Areúsa’s bed converge into its materiality, triggering erotic desire. Thus Celestina’s sensual admiration is anchored in a material thing, turning Areúsa’s bed –and the young prostitute by extension– into a rare and extraordinary object which triggers feelings of wonder and astonishment in the eyes of the viewer.

The importance of the material narrative of Areúsa’s bed can be also approached from the standpoint of material culture. Referring to monuments, Ian Hodder points out their “the dramatic potential ... to create feelings of awe or surprise” (165). From this perspective, the dramatic force of Areúsa’s bed rests on Celestina’s focalization of the object itself. Celestina’s description of this common household object as one that emits a sort of “aura” endows the young woman’s bed with the status of a sumptuous and unique object as “authenticity is not reproducible” (Benjamin, note 2 245). The process of Areúsa’s individualization is, then, located in the relation of possession as she is perceived as a unique product, one which emerges from the exclusive interaction between a certain object and a specific individual that cannot be reproduced in an identical way. The potential of Areúsa’s bed as a signifying artifact also resides, then, in itself as the material locus of its own significations, which extend to the young woman herself as its owner.

In this regard, as Diego Catalán indicates in the context of traditional ballads, the image of an impeccable and sumptuous bed is used as a sign of “lo muy deseable que es la moza rondada” (468-469). And indeed the “moza” in question, Areúsa, could not be more desirable as after looking admiringly at the young prostitute’s striking body, Celestina individualizes her as a fresh and valuable commodity that has no competitor in the market:

¡Bendígate Dios, y el señor Sant Miguel Ángel: y qué gorda e fresca que estás; qué pechos y qué gentileza! Por hermosa te tenía hasta agora, viendo lo que todos podían ver. Pero agora te digo que no ay en la cibdad tres cuerpos tales como el tuyo: en quanto yo

¹⁸ For more on the link between the real and the marvelous in *Celestina*, see George A. Shipley’s “Bestiary References in Fernando de Roja’s *La Celestina* (1499): the Ironic Undermining of Authority.” *La Corónica* 2.2 (1975): 22-33.

¹⁹ As Bynum notes, when discussed in a literary context and within the discourse of *admirari* (to wonder at), wonder has three characteristics: “it is a response to facticity; it is a response to the singular; it is deeply perspectival” (13). In terms of the components that constitute the wonder-response, this scholar examines the semantic fields attached to ‘wonder’ and the ‘wonderful’ to conclude that the wonder-reaction “ranges from the terror and disgust to solemn astonishment and playful delight” (Bynum 15). Celestina’s feeling of wonder clearly corresponds to the latter. For more on the wonder-response as a cultural construction of experience, see also Walker Bynum’s “Miracles and Marvels: The Limits of Alterity.” *Vita Religiosa im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag*, 799-817. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999.

conozco; no parece que hayas quinze años. ¡O quién fuera hombre, e tanta parte alcanzara de ti para gozar tal vista! Por dios, pecado ganas en no dar parte destas gracias a todos los que bien te quieren. Que no te las dio Dios para que pasasen en balde por la frescor de tu juventud debaxo de seys dobles de paño y lienço. (202)

Fueled by feelings of awe triggered by the vision of a wonderful and ‘unusual’ body, Celestina’s reaction reveals an additional function of the marvelous: “to serve as compensation for the banality and predictability of everyday life” (Le Goff 32). Under Celestina’s gaze Areúsa’s extraordinary body seems to fulfill this function for the old bawd. Furthermore, if in the medieval West the *mirabilia* aimed to create a world that was a “sort of an inverted mirror image of the real world” (Le Goff 32), it becomes clear that for Celestina Areúsa’s body triggers the discourse of referentiality in the manner of a reversed visual echo. As Celestina’s own words suggest, her old body contrasts with Areúsa’s youthful one: “Tal sea mi vejez qual todo me parece perla de oro” (201-202). After all, as Caroline Walker Bynum reminds us, “only that which is really different from the knower can trigger wonder” (3).

Celestina’s gaze moves, then, from the materiality of the bed to the physicality of Areúsa’s body thus bringing the discourse of people and things to converge and compete without cancelling each other out. Rather, they mutually emphasize each other’s identities: Areúsa’s bed is a reflection of herself and vice versa, as both object and person inform each other’s identities.²⁰ In this sense, the framing of human relations highlights the fact that in *Celestina* “las relaciones entre humanos están presentadas en base a unos valores que cosifican a los hombres al contemplarlos como objetos de una operación mercantil centrada únicamente en la consecución de un beneficio económico” (Sánchez 65). Along these lines, then, the lavish aesthetics of the bed underscore its owner’s beauty and vice versa: the bed is, and at the same time is not, Areúsa. In this regard, material things are charged with significance and, as Stephen Gilman has noted, have “an implication of structural importance, which is frequently lost in the realistic novel or in other such imitations of existence in the world ... they [things] are no longer just ‘things’; rather they have been absorbed into living structure of each situation” (107). However, it is precisely because these material things are ‘things’ that they can interact with the situation in which they appear by means of their own narrative, which feeds on the idea of ownership.

The proliferation of meanings of Areúsa’s bed continues as Rojas emphasizes the color white as part of Celestina’s description of the sheets, pillows, and comforter. As Stephen Gilman has argued, in *Celestina* colors “rather than describe the object, subject it to a categorical evaluation” (108), which by metonymy is extended to its owner. The color white plays an important role in the characterization of Areúsa as “the word ‘blancura’ refers at once to the color of her sheets and to a vivid awareness of quality” (Gilman 108).²¹ In this regard, we need to read the symbolism of the color white that characterizes both Areúsa and her bed from a parodic point of view, which is further reinforced when Celestina extols Areúsa’s “limpieza y atavío” (201).²² As

²⁰ According to Ángel Sánchez, “el paso de una sociedad feudal a otra mercantil crea un trastrueque en el sistema de valores, el cual afecta las conciencias de los personajes; y lo hace hasta el punto en que aparecen algunas relaciones humanas equiparadas a las que pudieran darse entre el hombre y los bienes o servicios” (63).

²¹ Areúsa is associated with the color white not only by Celestina’s gaze but also by Sosia’s imagination when he describes the young woman as having “unas manos como la nieve, que quando las sacava de rato en rato de un guante parecía que se derramava azahar por casa” (319).

²² This emphasis on associating Areúsa with cleanliness seems open an internal path that the reader can recognize in Act IX when, in her diatribe against Melibea, Areúsa affirms that the noble young woman “todo el año se está encerrada con mudas de mil suziedades” (226). The emphasis on Areúsa’s “limpieza y atavío” seems to echo ironically these “mil suziedades” as a way to contrast these two women.

the young woman tells Celestina “ha quatro horas que muero de la madre” (202). Menstrual blood is thus invoked as part of the environment of Areúsa’s bed, establishing a contrast between this object and its owner in terms of positive and negative sensory and emotional aspects: Areúsa looks good but does not feel right, whereas the bed looks good but will not “feel” right after her business with Pármemo is concluded.

In medieval culture, blood has a profound and polyvalent significance. It could variously serve as a sign of life or death, a marker of status or shame, and a signifier of holiness or culpability. In this regard, the signification of Areúsa’s bed also emerges in terms of what Gerald Prince has defined as the “disnarrated,” a rhetorical device that expresses events that did not or do not happen and is used to evoke imaginary or desired worlds or to express unjustified beliefs, false assumptions, failures, and lies (3). The relationship between the color white –which connects with “limpieza”– and the explicit allusion to blood raises the possibility that Rojas might be using Areúsa’s bed to make a wry comment on “limpieza de sangre”.²³ This associative relationship between the literary text and its social context defines an alternative channel of signification that lies beyond the pages of the text, an alternative that, as Jay Bolter indicates, “constitutes subversive texts-behind-the-text” (22).²⁴ Areúsa’s bed, then, serves as the discursive path that allows for a reading that reveals “the rejected or unstated materials at the text’s boundaries to be part of its total meaning” (Strohm xiv). In *Celestina* the pursuit of meaning requires an equally subversive reading process which, as Paul Strohm observes, would not be necessary if

texts were never evasive, never silent about their own suppressions and omissions, never misleading or forgetful about their own sources and origins, always fully candid and articulate about themselves and their own prehistory and the circumstances of their composition, always able to ‘close’ themselves by specifying their own objectives and unifying principles. Yet texts are rarely candid in any of these ways. (xii)

In this sense, Areúsa’s bed becomes an incriminating object as the unconscious of Rojas’ text is thus once again revealed through the decoding of a narrative *in absentia* embedded in a material entity. This apparently insignificant piece of furniture makes possible a reading that has been successful “in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of [a] fundamental history” that enriches the reception of *Celestina* with an additional meaning of signification (Jameson 20).

As with Calisto’s bed, as presented by Rojas, that of Areúsa also opens an additional avenue of signification by means of intertextuality. Here this household object serves as a hyperlink that converts synchronic reading into a diachronic process leading readers to the world of the ballads

²³ In this regard, Manuel Da Costa Fontes points out that the association of “limpieza” with Elicia and Areúsa is incongruous, hypocritical and ironic. According to the critic these associations are “not enough in themselves to prove that Fernando de Rojas has deliberately set out to ridicule the idea of ‘limpieza de sangre’” (32). He further explains that

Since cleanliness is most commendable on the part of everyone, including prostitutes (if not more so, given the nature of their commerce), it is certainly possible to read these passages as mere praise for saintly virtue. It could also be argued that the fashion in which ‘limpieza’ has been used so far has nothing to do with ‘limpieza de sangre,’ that Rojas’ frequent ironical attribution of that quality to what is most unclean constitutes an integral part of his art for, taken as a whole, *La Celestina* is a gigantic antithesis in itself. (27-28)

In any case, it seems plausible to assert that the connection between Rojas’ use of the semantic field of “blanco” and the concept of “limpieza de sangre” would exist in the literary imagination of the time.

²⁴ For more on *Celestina* as a subversive text, see Chapter 5 in Antonio Pérez-Romero’s *The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing*. Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2005.

in which the material narrative of the bed as a lavish object appears as a recurring theme.²⁵ The ballad of *Tarquino y Lucrecia* serves as notable example of this motif, which becomes increasingly elaborate in its successive versions. From the succinct “quando en su casa lo vido / como a rey le aposentaba” with which the text illustrates the way in which the king is welcomed, a more ornate bed is found in Eastern versions of the ballad: “le metió gallina en cena, / cama de oro en que se echara”. However, the most detailed description of the bed is found in Mauresque versions of this ballad:²⁶

Púsole silleta de oro con sus cruces esmaltadas,
 púsole mesa de gozne con los sus clavos de plata,
 púsole a comer gallina, muchos pavones y pavas,
 púsole a comer pan blanco y a beber vino sin agua;
 púsole catre de oro, las tablas de fina plata,
 púsole cinco almadragues, sábanas de fina Holanda,
 púsole cinco almohadas, cobertor de fina grana. (Catalán 467-468)

These examples speak to the importance of the bed as a privileged household possession capable of producing a social and aesthetic commentary on the value of its owners, thus differentiating them from others.²⁷ Along these lines, the path of associations that Areúsa's bed opens continues deep into the world of the ballads as illustrated by the “Romance de Espinelo,” in which the bed expresses its own discourse along with other discourses present in the text. As an intertext, in this ballad the bed serves as a narrative hinge joining yet separating the morbid aspect attributed to Calisto's bed and the erotic characterization of Areúsa's. The “Romance de Espinelo” comprises a deathbed scene in which the main character, Espinelo, tells the dramatic story of his life to his lover Mataleona. At his death, Espinelo, who was a twin, recalls how his

²⁵ When reflecting upon the links that *Celestina* establishes with other textual traditions, it is worth noting the importance of oral transmission ascribed to both Rojas' text and the ballads, thus highlighting the immediacy and versatility of these narrative channels at the moment of reception.

²⁶ In the same way, the image of a sumptuous bed is also used in modern oral tradition ballads such as the one entitled “La Codoñera”: “¡Oh quien pudiera heredar la cama que ella dormía! / Los pilones eran de oro, las tablas de plata fina, / los colchones de plumaje de pavos y cardelinas, / la manta que ella se cubre / bordada con sedas finas; / en la cabecera tiene el galán que más estima, / recostado en bufete y sentado en una silla, / con una pluma en la mano que de pavo parecía” (Catalán 468).

²⁷ In portraying the connection between the value of an object and that of its owner, the boundaries between literature and reality are blurred. As last wills and inventories of the time illustrate, there was a strong indication that beds served as material markers of the social identity of the individual who owned them. For instance, Doña Mencía de Mendoza had “una riquísima cama de oro, cubierta con un dosel formado con veinte cuadrados labrados en oro y sedas de colores, de la que se dice que era de la reina, y que pensamos que o bien fuera un regalo de la Reina María de Francia (hermana del Rey de Inglaterra Enrique VIII y 3.^a esposa del Rey de Francia Luis XII) a Doña Mencía, o, lo más probable, que la Marquesa del Zenete la adquiriera tras el fallecimiento de dicha Reina en 1533” (Hidalgo 84). Likewise, the empress Isabel of Portugal owned “una cama de campo con seis pilares y pies cubiertos de nácar de colores que es obra de la Yndia y tiene algunas piedras engastadas en los pilares” (Redondo 1553). The high social position of this particular owner was underscored by the fact that this bed was “la obra de mayor envergadura procedente del Lejano Oriente que se encontraba entre los bienes de la Emperatriz ... Existe la posibilidad de que aún viniera de más lejos y que fuera una obra coreana. Su rareza dificultó su tasación, pues en un principio no se encontró a nadie que pudiera hacer una justa valoración” (Redondo 1553). I would like to thank Frank Domínguez for directing me towards this specific reference.

For more on noble beds, see also Juana Hidalgo Ogáyar's “Doña Mencía de Mendoza y su residencia en el castillo de Jadraque” *Archivo Español de Arte* 310 (2005): 184-190; for the description of the bed owned by Princess Margarite, wife to Prince Juan, son to the Catholic Kings, see José Ferrandis' *Datos documentales para la historia del arte español: Inventarios reales (Juan II a Juana la Loca)*. Vol. III, 25-26. Madrid: CSIC, 1943.

existence has been marked by the popular belief in which double birth implies promiscuity on the part of the mother (García de Enterría, note 94 264).

The material narrative of the bed begins to function from the opening lines of the ballad:

Muy malo estaba Espinelo,
 en una cama yacía,
 los bancos eran de oro,
 las tablas de plata fina,
 los colchones en que duerme
 eran de holanda muy rica,
 las sábanas que le cubren
 en el agua no se veían,
 la colcha que encima tiene,
 sembrada de perlería; (García de Enterría 262)

It is surprising that after establishing the name and tragic state of the protagonist, and despite the curiosity that the reader might feel towards this newly introduced character, the story abandons him and focuses on the sumptuous bed in which he is dying. An object from the material world displaces the human character in what seems to function as a digression inside the text. This is the heart of the significance of the material narrative of the bed: as with Areúsa's, in this ballad the bed takes the place of its owner to communicate his high social status to the reader. This discursive turn suggests a relationship between the value of the bed as an object and the identity of its owner inserted in a domestic space: the house, and more specifically the bedroom.

Material value and personal identity converge, then, in the narrativization of the bed in Espinelo's deathbed scene, which helps to construct the protagonist's identity embodied in the lavish object, just as with Areúsa's bed. By a process of metonymy, Espinelo's individuality parallels and is emphasized by that of the bed as a unique object that retains its "aura" as an authentic and individual entity. The bed, then, manifests its potential as a communicative vehicle by means of a narrative that speaks of its owner as an individual and irreplaceable human being. In fact, very much along the lines of Areúsa's bed, this household object takes Espinelo's place in order to craft a material epitaph for the deceased-to-be: 'what I am is what he is/was.'

As Areúsa's bed illustrates, the relationship of possession between objects and their owners is used by Rojas as the material site for the emergence of multiple significations. This household object is viewed as the "vehicle of multiple, mutating interpretations, uses and fetishisations. These manipulations, though constantly changing and shifting, are organised by certain pre-understandings or hermeneutic perspectives that are the standpoints from which the world is perceived, interpreted, and acted upon" (Buchli 186). The various discourses that converge in Areúsa's bed differentiate the individual by means of an everyday object that can successfully shape human relations, thus creating a story about both the object itself and its owner. Additionally, the young prostitute's bed serves as a physical marker outlining alternative narrative itineraries which not only transform the object into a metaphor but also connect *Celestina* with other literary traditions. From this point of view, Areúsa's bed becomes the locus for patterns of signification and proliferation of meanings as it produces a model of hypertextual reading, a process in which reading is experienced as "nonlinear, or, more properly, as multilinear or multisenquential" (Landow 4).

III. Centurio's Bed

Following the narrative paths opened by the literary representation of Calisto's bed in Act I, and further highlighted by Areúsa's in Act VII, a third bed claims prominence as an instrumental element in the narrative grid of *Celestina*. In Act XVIII, Elicia and Areúsa attempt to convince Centurio to murder Calisto in order to avenge the deaths of Celestina, Pármeno and Sempronio. A mercenary familiar with death by means of a "repertorio en que ay sietecientas y setenta species de muertes" (316), as he brags, Centurio pretends to accept this business although his braggadocio is cast in a rudimentary frame of cowardice and laziness. It is the very mercenary who positions himself as a despicable individual by means of his bed. As if through a cinematographic technique, Centurio describes the state of poverty he lives in by moving from a pan shot to a close-up focused on his bed:

en una casa bivo qual ves, que rodará el majadero por toda ella sin que tropiece. Las alhajas que tengo es el axuar de la frontera; un jarro desbocado, un assador sin punta; la cama en que me acuesto está armada sobre aros de broqueles, un rimero de malla rota por colchones, una talega de dados por almohada, que quiera dar collación, no tengo que empeñar sino esta capa harpada que traygo acuestas. (314)

Centurio's description generates meaning precisely by the lack of objects inside his house and the shoddy condition of the few he owns, with special emphasis on his bed. The emptiness of the mercenary's house contrasts with the conspicuous celebration of materiality that we encounter in Elicia's enumeration of her household possessions in Act XVII. Centurio's lack of furnishings echoes the fact that "a lo largo de la Edad Media, y durante la primera mitad del siglo XVI, los muebles en las casas hispánicas eran escasos y poco apreciados, debido a la gran influencia de las costumbres musulmanas, tan arraigadas en nuestro país" (Martín Molinero 303). With the exception of a jug and a grill, the poverty of his material possessions highlights his bed as the object that dominates Centurio's description by means of its detailed depiction.²⁸ As Lisa Jardine points out, there were "comparatively few items of furniture even in an affluent Renaissance home—chests for storage, tables and a few chairs and settees. All might be highly decorated, and the most lavishly decorated item was likely to be the family bed" (16).²⁹

Beds thus served as a material social commentary on the status of their owners. Far from being the lavish household object portrayed in the ballads, Centurio's makeshift bed differentiates him as a person whose moral worth resembles the quality of materials used to build it: he positions himself as an untrustworthy individual whose integrity is as weak and unreliable as his bed. The value of his unclean and deteriorated bed is transferred to his own value as a person, an individual living in the utmost material abjection, as his bed was the primary piece of furniture and "not to own a cot or straw mattress was a sign of abject poverty" (De la Roncière

²⁸ This lack of material possessions is echoed in Centurio's use of the phrase "axuar de la frontera." The *Diccionario de Autoridades* helps us make sense of Centurio's assertion. Among several definitions it is particularly interesting that "Otros dan distinta explicación a este refrán, y sienten que alude al axuar del soldado que está en frontera, el qual se reduce por lo regular a semejantes trastos" ("axuar de la frontera"). If objects then speak of their owners, Centurio himself is, in fact, nomadic also: he is the "axuar de la frontera." In addition, it is worth noting that this sentence opens up an internal hyperlink through which we travel back to Act III where Sempronio alludes to the last frontier when he says "ganada es Granada" (141).

²⁹ The appearance of beds was further embellished by incorporating a canopy. This type of aesthetic alteration emerges in the 15th century, at times reaching excess. In this regard, Phillippe Contamine notes that "many beds were equipped with canopy, *dossiel* or headboard, and three *custodes* or curtains hung from iron rods. Twill, serge, silk, woven tapestries, and fur-lined cloth were all used" (492). In the xilographies that accompany the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*, printed in Burgos by Fadrique de Basilea in 1499, we find a depiction of Calisto's bed in which this household item is embellished with a canopy.

184). Therefore, the presence or the absence of this household possession, as well as the state of its components, establishes a material narrative which characterizes its owner. In the case of Centurio, the relation of ownership between object and owner characterizes him as a man worthy of scorn. His bed, then, is charged with semiotic illocutionary force as this household object stands for its owner. As Umberto Eco proposes, it is from this kind of substitution that semiotic meaning emerges as “when something actually presented to the perception of the addressee *stands for* something else, there is *signification*” (*A Theory of Semiotics* 8).

Centurio’s bed is a hybrid object whose narrative is clearly based on the multiplicity of genres that it embodies. As a perpetual signifying device, this bed calls for a multiple reading; that is, the kind of reading whose aim is “to resist the temptation to close off possible courses of action,” and “to keep open multiple explanations for the same event or character” (Bolter 142-43). In Centurio’s description of his own bed, the reader finds that shields, which usually connote war and defense against danger, fail to evoke a sense of protection: they are conspicuous by their absence as they have been reduced to their empty frames. This pathetic image serves as an internal hyperlink that takes the reader back to the end of Act XII when Sempronio, trying to convince Celestina to share the profits of their common business, tells her: “Traygo, señora, todas las armas despedaçadas: el broquel sin aro: la spada como sierra: el caxquete abollado en la capilla” (269).³⁰ The bag of dice that serves as a pillow evokes the idea of chance and luck suggesting, as he later explains to Elicia and Areúsa, that he has risked his life many times. This idea links back to another textual moment which relates risking one’s life and gambling: the game board.³¹

The material narrative of Centurio’s bed thus indicates that meaning is established by association inside the literary text as “one word echoes another; one sentence or paragraph recalls others earlier in the text and looks forward to still others. A writer cannot help but write associatively: even if he or she begins with and remains faithful to an outline, the result is always a network of verbal elements” (Bolter 22). Centurio’s bed, then, serves as a metaphor with an emblematic value whose signification is established both by its own qualities and by its owner’s personal characteristics: his bed functions as a status symbol for Centurio. The metaphoric signification of this household item as a unit emerges when it is read in connection to the fragmentary and provisional nature emanating from the very materials that compose this bed and the collusion of several discourses that converge in it: the narrative is more solid than the objects that support it. Additionally, this bed serves as a hyperlink that leads the reader not only through the internal narrative corridors of *Celestina*, but also through the external paths that join this text with other works both from the past and the future.³²

³⁰ The association between a character and a shield that we see in Centurio’s characterization occurs earlier in the text as well. In a conversation between Sempronio and Pármeneo, the former asserts: “¿Qué te parece, Sempronio, cómo el necio de nuestro amo pensava tomarme por broquel para el encuentro del primer peligro?” (257).

³¹ This mage is mentioned in seven more instances and is usually associated with Celestina who often employs game metaphors such as “¿con qué pagarás a la vieja que hoy ha puesto su vida al tablero por tu seruício?” (176).

³² In the external milieu of early modern texts, the pathetic description of Centurio’s bed serves as a forerunner and external hyperlink that takes us forward to the fictional world of *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*. In “Tractado tercero” we find the following description of Lázaro’s new master’s bed:

-Mozo, párate allí, y verás cómo hacemos esta cama, para que la sepas hacer de aquí adelante.

-Púseme de un cabo y él de otro, y hecimos la negra cama, en la cual no había mucho que hacer, porque ella tenía sobre unos bancos un cañizo, sobre el cual estaba tendida la ropa, que, por no estar muy continuada a lavarse, no parecía colchón, aunque servía dél, con harta menos lana que era menester. Aquél tendimos, habiendo cuenta de ablandalle, lo cual era imposible, porque de lo duro mal se puede hacer blando. El diablo del enjalma maldita la cosa tenía dentro de sí, que, puesto sobre el cañizo, todas las cañas

As the material narratives of Areúsa's and Centurio's beds indicate, in *Celestina* these household objects bind possession to individuality and identity. Charged with semiotic force, these beds themselves differentiate Centurio and Areúsa as individuals. Both the sumptuous bed and the makeshift cot reflect the social condition and personal value of their owners: whereas Centurio is an individual "venido a menos," Areúsa is a prostitute "venida a más." The contrast provided by the narrative of the bed in *Celestina* manifests that the process of individualization of a given character works in different social settings at the same time as it indicates the importance of the bed as a signifier for the individual: the material world, then, reconfirms and gives voice to what characters are.

The descriptive technique of the beds of Areúsa and Centurio is similar in the sense that each component of the bed –sheets, pillows, and comforter in Areúsa's; shields, bag of dice, and broken pieces of metal mesh in Centurio's– embodies its own discursive connotations, both as single elements and in conjunction with the object they combine to form. Each part contributes to the general narrative of the bed which singles out both possessions and their owners by means of their value as objects and individuals. Areúsa's bed is portrayed as a unity of forms and shapes in which all the parts are harmoniously integrated thus creating a unique piece serving as a metaphor for an exquisitely constructed individual. On the contrary, the lack of material harmony, the provisional condition of Centurio's bed, the broken mattress, and the pillow made of dice manifest not only the lack of value of this object but also the untrustworthiness of its owner.³³ Thus, Centurio is discursivized as a lowly and immoral person whose identity is embodied by his bed. On one hand, *Celestina*'s description of Areúsa's bed as a pristine and harmonious household object imbues it with stereotypically feminine characteristics that provoke admiration in the viewer. In contrast, Centurio's bed stands for a chaotic and brutish object usually associated with a man who exudes abjection. If gender is socially constructed, it seems to be also clearly inscribed in this artifact of the material world.³⁴

Conclusions

The literary representation of beds in *Celestina* opens up ways to reflect upon reading at the dawn of modernity in the Iberian Peninsula as a dynamic process that reformulates both the narrative potential of objects and the role of readers in the creation of meaning. As used by

se señalaban, y parecían a lo propio entrecuesto de flaquísimo puerco. Y sobre aquel hambriento colchón, un alfámar del mismo jaez, del cual el color yo no pude alcanzar. (134)

Rojas sets a precedent for using the bed as a way to highlight the lowly condition of the character who owns it: if Centurio's bed is used to convey his despicable nature, this other bed in *El Lazarillo* is exactly what his owner is, a mere object "venido a menos".

³³This tension between material harmony and chaos refers readers back to Act I when Calisto asks Sempronio to straighten up his bed. It also opens another hyperlink that takes the reader to the *Ars Moriendi*. The material narrative of the bed also operates in this text by changing its physical appearance and its function as an object from one scene to another. In "Tentación contra la fe," we can see how one of the demons lifts up the sheets of the bed in order to conceal the presence of celestial figures at the head of the bed. This action suggests that the unmaking of the material harmony of the bed symbolizes the disturbance of *Moriens'* soul by the demon. This interpretation finds support in the next scene, "Inspiración a la fe," in which the physical integrity of the bed has been completely restored as a way to symbolize the unity and spiritual harmony of the celestial forces, which seems to be reinforced by the addition of a canopy, a structural change that confers a sacred touch.

³⁴For more information on the connections between gender distinctions in the language of clothing in early modern Europe, see Grant McCracken's "The Voice of Gender in the World of Goods: Beau Brummell and the Cunning of Present Gender Symbolism". *The Material Culture of Gender: The Gender of Material Culture*, eds. Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, 443-457. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997.

Rojas, the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio function as semiotic paradigms which confirm that texts operate simultaneously on two levels, “accommodating full renderings of their immediate cultural circumstances and revealing intelligible impulses of characters” (Strohm 212). The material narratives of the beds in *Celestina* highlight the fact that texts are not isolated, self-sufficient units that can exist on their own; rather they always exist in intimate dialogue with other texts and with the cultural fabric of the milieu in which they are created. In this regard, Rojas serves as the forerunner of a very modern message as he is drawing our attention to the ability of an object from the material world to generate meanings and establish connections among literary traditions and the external world. Rojas’ use of the bed manifests how his text is capable of producing a multiplicity of meanings by transcending barriers of time and genre by means of the material world. In *Celestina*, beds serve as semiotic devices for readers who travel both inside and outside Rojas’ text using these objects as signposts for diverging narrative paths. These household objects function as discursive bridges across which readers travel within Rojas’ text, to other contemporary works, and to the cultural and social events of the extratextual world. These beds blur the boundaries not only among texts and literary traditions but also between literature and life.

From this perspective, the bed becomes a nomadic object that travels through the textual time and space of early modernity emphasizing a particular model of readership in *Celestina*. Within Rojas’ use of the bed lies an indication as to how we should read his text: as a literary artifact in which language and materiality work together to favor a reading process in which the generation of meaning is more a product of multiplicity rather than ambiguity.³⁵ It is in this sense that the bed serves as a hyperlink that, by highlighting what has been left unsaid, favors multiplicity as “the connections of a hypertext are organized into paths that make operational sense to author and reader. Each topic may participate in several paths, and its significance will depend upon which paths the reader has traveled” (Bolter 24).

Fueled by this particular model of readership, meaning in *Celestina* thus travels through beds which open narrative corridors both within and outside Rojas’ text. As the material narratives of the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio suggest, Rojas seems to imagine a sort of ‘wandering reader’ who both reads as they travel through texts, and travel as they read texts following the narrative paths opened by household objects which, beyond serving as repositories and producers of meaning, function as gateways of significations within *Celestina* itself and among other texts. This is a reader who moves as the same time that the reading process moves; a reader, as Rojas himself notes, “cuyo verdadero placer es todo” (80). This is a modern reader who participates in the elaboration of meaning and embraces dialectical engagement with it. This is a reader who is called to the bends, twists and turns of the process of interpretation and the wanderings of imagination. As imagined by Rojas, for these readers the text becomes a boundless space in perpetual and inevitable expansion because it is necessarily transformed as it is being read.

In *Celestina* meaning also exists exactly where it does not reside, as significance is not only produced by what is said but also by what is constantly left unsaid. Rojas, then, imagines a reader who also reads for absence and pursues meaning rather than arresting it. This approach to reading in *Celestina* reminds us that meaning cannot be perceived as a totalizing category as it is

³⁵ Rimmon-Kenan defines ambiguity as “the co-existence of mutually exclusive readings, [that] renders choice impossible and frustrates the reader's expectations of a univocal, definitive meaning.” From this perspective, ambiguity “restricts uncertainty to an insoluble oscillation between the opposed members of a logical contradiction (‘a’ and ‘not a’).” Multiplicity, on the other hand, allows all possible meanings coexist without cancelling out one another (185-86).

alive and perpetually shifting in time, space, and referents. As the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio manifest, meaning is made simultaneously by, through, in, and beyond the text which implies that signification changes, transforms, escapes and disappears, casting the process of interpretation as an ongoing enterprise that never exhausts itself.

In this regard, the beds of Calisto, Areúsa, and Centurio embody modernity at the end of the 15th Century in the Iberian Peninsula as they serve as representations of a new and modern kind of reader. The particular model of literacy in this work serves as a trademark of modernity for Fernando de Rojas. He envisioned a new kind of reader who turns the process of reading into a collaborative, creative, and self-perpetuating journey that transcends the textual boundaries of his text. At the dawn of modernity in the Iberian Peninsula *Celestina* confirms that “the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network” (Foucault 23).

The examples analyzed in this essay suggest that the locus of signification resides in a reading process conceived as an ongoing search for meaning that is potentiated by objects. As readers focus on the linguistic level in their search for specific significations, they leave aside others that emerge as objects are read in connection to their possessors and cultural contexts. Signification in *Celestina*, then, is related to the impossibility of performing a global reading of this text without incorporating objects as rhetorical devices transgressing a mere decorative function. Beds in *Celestina* compensate the inherent evasiveness of texts in that these household objects supplement the unconsciousness of Rojas’ work, enriching its significance by revealing what the text has silenced or suppressed. However, precisely in doing so, these beds remind us that in Rojas’ literary world meaning behaves as an unstable and plural construct that cannot be arrested in totality but is rather transformed into a dynamic and slippery concept that manifests the biggest gap of all: the closure of the process of reading.

Rojas’ use of the bed helps us interrogate the relationship between objects and signification which highlights the use of material possessions as rhetorical devices within a text. By means of an approach based on materiality and the semiotic potential of the bed, the narrative of this household item in *Celestina* contributes to an understanding of Rojas’ literary craftsmanship as illustrated through objects that can ‘speak’ to us on their own terms about “relationships – connections, reflections, support, power, balance; of taste, touch, and smell; of man and nature; of markets and appetites and genetics and diet; of time, mortality, and regeneration” (qtd. in Lowenthal 3). Whereas the symbolic importance of objects in connection to the narrative structure of the literary text is generally accepted, as suggested by Rojas’ treatment of the bed in *Celestina*, however, objects refuse to be reduced to the status of mere ornaments. Instead they absorb the nuances of the living dynamics of each situation. They are able to voice their own discourse claiming their role as catalyst of a particular narrative: that of the objects that seem not to ‘speak’ unless we ‘listen’ carefully.

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