Religious Struggle, Linguistic Struggle:
Exposing the Challenge to the Transcendental in *Celestina*

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Few works of its time reveal the remarkable linguistic consciousness observed in the *Tragic-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, better known as *Celestina* (1499). Language is a central reality of this work, whose undeniable meta-linguistic component has been recognized time and time again by critics.[1] On the other hand, *Celestina's* treatment of religious themes has consistently inspired contrasting opinions ranging from the consideration of the moral character of the work within an orthodox Catholic framework, to the opposing view of the play as a radical challenger of the religious values of its time.[2]

This seditious view of *Celestina* serves as the point of departure of this article. However, instead of adhering to traditional explanations of the religious subversion such as the *converso* origin of its author(s), its connection to spiritualist movements, or the medieval anticlerical literary tradition, among others, I will open up another possible interpretation that does not necessarily discard these previous analyses. The basis of my evaluation is the complex relationship between both the linguistic and religious elements disclosed in the text, by considering the idea of struggle displayed throughout the work as a focal point. Then, the objective of this study is to offer an explanation of the religious conflict offered in *Celestina*, within the framework of a larger conflict in its metaphysical and transcendental elements, and ultimately influenced by the changes in the way "linguistic meaning" was conceived in the 15th century.[3]

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[1] M. Read highlights the linguistic self-consciousness in *Celestina* (72), while critics such as E. Morgan (7), and C. Parrilla (402) insist upon its meta-rhetorical magnitude. For an evaluation of the dialogic-discursive self-consciousness, apart from S. Gilman's traditional study (*The Art*), see L. Brocato (104).

[2] Examples of the first case are M. Bataillon, F. Mundi, and more recently E. Fernández. Conversely, in the second group we find S. Gilman, J. Goytisolo, or Costa Fontes. All these studies are listed in the bibliography of the present study.

[3] In this matter, our discussion goes along with D. Seidenspinner-Núñez, who has drawn attention to *Celestina's* opposition to a realistic concept of a fixed system of transcendental language composed of signs that either literally or figuratively reflects a superior spiritual reality. As we also seek to reflect in our article, this critic has eloquently connected the work's view of language as a performance, the multiplicity and arbitrariness of language, the fragility of significance, and the idea of situational text and its actualization for every individual reader with the non-transcendental and antiallegorical vision of the World shown by the *Tragicomedia* (see especially 242-46). However, our constitutive linguistic conception allows us to understand language itself −its use− not just as the result of another primary cause such as Rojas's *converso* experience or his profession as a lawyer, but as a decisive reason of what occurs in the play. In our view, language does not just simply reflect an aprioristic conflict; we are not in front of a cosmetic rhetoric depicting a struggle that exists previously and outside of it. In other words, the different relation between letter and sense is what overturned the "proper" relation between

Celestina is a discursive-dialogic creation that was first produced and received during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabelle, the Catholic Monarchs (1473-1516). These monarchs consolidated the Modern State in Castile, a political institution that pursued to concentrate all authority in their hands. Through the *letrados* at their service, and under the ideological principles of unity, efficient control, and common good, Ferdinand and Isabelle practiced a regulatory and dominating control that reached society on all levels. These activities included the regulation and control of religion and language, two central and interconnected aspects of society by both the Modern State and the author(s) of *Celestina*.

The religious stance of power was deeply ambivalent during this historical period in Spain. The sincere and pious fervor of the monarchs, especially that of Queen Isabelle, combined with the political and ideological instrumentalization of faith, and the subordination of religion to political and ideological purposes, which were equally admired in King Ferdinand by Machiavelli.[4] J. Thompson defines ideology as, "the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of domination." Furthermore, this critic suggests three principal means in which ideology operates: legitimization, dissimulation, and reification (130-31).[5] Within the Christian and theoretically scholastic *cosmovisión* prevailing at this time, of the three ideological foundations of the Catholic Monarchs' Modern State –religious, ethical-political, and legal– the first two were largely dependent on the third. Consequently, ethics and law overlapped a transcendental, metaphysical, and stable concept of existence and history based on Christian revelation.[6] Despite the Modern State's efforts to impose political

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spirit and matter. As a result, we do not observe a failure of language in *Celestina* but instead a failure in the use of language by some particular users under specific circumstances. And underneath the strife between different readers' interpretations and the dialogical flux of *Celestina* and the editorial intends to fix it, brilliantly pointed out by Seidenspinner-Núñez (243-45), we see a non-declared war between two different ways of conceiving language, in which "the situational" takes precedence over "the realistic" that is also present in the text.

[4] Ferdinand the Catholic King attracts Maquiavelli's attention because of the king's tranquil and undisturbed presence and words, which speak nothing but peace and faith (Chabod, F. qt. in Di Camilo 181). A fine example of this religious service to political power was the New Inquisition (1478), an instrument of the State and not of the Church as some have at times believed: "Los inquisidores eran en principio una burocracia no de la Iglesia, sino del estado: eran preparados en las mismas instituciones que formaban el personal para los consejos de estado, los corregimientos y los tribunales" (Kamen 143).

[5] "Relations of domination may be sustained by being represented as legitimate […] relations of domination which serve the interests of some at the expense of others may be concealed, denied or blocked in various ways –dissimulation– […] A third way in which ideology operates is by means of reification, that is, by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time" (131).

[6] See Saint Augustine (XII, 11-14). This view of existence and of history, perfected by Scholasticism, was followed in its basic principles by Christian Humanism. According to C. Cárceles, despite the fact that this type of humanism deepens in human values, ethics and esthetics from Classic Antiquity, it presents a conception of the world and of man that "no se opone a la medieval, sino a la que llega a deificar al ser humano, y continúa en lo esencial las líneas de la antropología cristiana y, concretamente, la formulada por Santo Tomás" (28-29).

power on the Church, it never sacrificed the advantages of having the solid, secure, and united foundations provided in providential terms by Christianity. Christian ideology not only continued to represent the primary means of legitimizing and dissimulating power's activities, but also of reifying them or presenting them as something natural, permanent, unhistorical, and without any other alternative form.

With respect to language, the evolution from the Medieval Kingdom to the Modern State significantly raised the ideological demands. In the Spanish context, this fact became more noticeable by the legitimizing needs of the Trastámara dynasty to which both Isabel and Ferdinand belonged. Image was rationalized and conceptualized, which made it easier to express it through linguistic codes. This, in turn, made it possible for ideology to be more effectively projected through linguistic and written means as opposed to symbolic-figurative ones.[7] In fact, within a process that begins in the 13th century and that is encouraged decisively in the 15th century, writing was consolidated and began to gradually invade all of the spheres of public and private life. This evolution allowed power to advance towards a system in which "the meaning that served to sustain the relationships of domination" was increasingly expressed through language and writing.[8] As one of the ideological foundations of power, religion also stimulated this process of verbalization and writing in its activities without renouncing to the image on stained glass windows, capitals, altarpieces, and the mobilizing power of its image-based rites.[9] Furthermore, the invention of the

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[7] As Armando Petrucci remarks, in contrast to the changes that occurred during the Early Middle Ages, in the Late Middle Ages "la parificazione tra Ecclesia e luogo fisico del culto aveva concentrato nel ristretto spazio delle chiese urbane le essenziali esposizioni del messaggio ideologico, generalmente figurate piú che scritte." When writing was used "la tipologia scarsamente articolata delle testimonianze grafiche corrispondeva a funzioni esencialmente univoche, piú celebrative e simboliche che non espressive o trasmissive" (4). For Gónzalez Echevarría this is the time when "the symbolic relationships of the patrimonial state are replaced with the codified signs of the bureaucratic one" (55).

[8] In contrast to other European Kingdoms, the vernacular language was the language of administration since Alfonso X in Castile –13th century–, which helped consolidate the writing system in the 15th century. The process would have been made easier in the 13th century by the increase of the use of paper and glass convex lenses (Deyermond 1971, 239). Since the middle of the 14th century, and with the limits of the period, a rapid increase in alphabetization in Castile also took place, prior to the initiation of the printing press in the 80's (Lawrence 83, 86). Towards the end of this century, writing even penetrated –thanks to humanism and the imitation of the classics–, certain private spaces. The flourishing of the epistolary genre that we observe in Alfonso de Palencia, Fernando del Pulgar, Lucio Marineo Sículo or Pedro Mártir de Anglería's private collections of letters is a good example of what we state.

[9] Indeed, the process was perfectly coherent with its own doctrine. The Church had always been considered as the institution of the *word* and Saint Augustine gave priority to words above other symbols and signs, as well as the written word of God (*De Doctrina* II, 3). Furthermore, it is not a coincidence that in the 15th century the professional homiletic literature, with genres such as the homily and the vulgar sermon, become highly popular, linked to phenomena such as Millenarianism, the need to reform religious orders, and larger indoctrination needs. Simultaneously, the demand for private reading and the spectrum of readers of religious texts in romance languages increased under the reformist movements and more individualist and spiritual attitudes (Cátedra 176). We should not forget

printing press, which was introduced in Spain around 1470, significantly turned the country into, "the first large state to be created after the printing press was perfected" (González 65).

The Catholic Monarchs led the most extraordinary attempt of discursive and ideological control carried out in Spain prior to the Council of Trent (1545-63). The potential dangers of the decisive diffusion of heretic messages through the printing press were crucial for the monarchy's increase in control of the discourses of power, particularly religious discourse.[10] Nevertheless, in order to find some of the keys to the substantial intensification of discursive control in the time of *Celestina* we should also examine the epistemological consequences derived from a challenge to the traditional-hegemonic way of conceiving meaning that intensified and become more influential throughout the 15th century.[11]

Since Antiquity, metaphysics had been the main discipline that provided power with the mechanisms used by ideology, as we mentioned, to reify or present that which is transitory, historical, and provisional as ultimately permanent, natural, and transcendental. In spite of first Platonic and subsequent Christian mistrust in language, metaphysics had inevitably made use of it since Plato, in order to establish the central and absolute principles and ground truth in a single ultimate point, a process that Derrida called *logocentrism* (279). To present historic and cultural creations such as truth, sin, history, good virtue, justice, natural law, and other ideological fundamentals as units with a "real" transcendental existence, power promoted and prolonged a vision of language and meaning that justified an aprioristic and "previous to human experience" existence of these entities.[12] Within this hegemonic vision of language,

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either that at the end of the 15th century the production of bulls proliferated, and the Spanish state often orchestrated and regulated its production in order to obtain extra funding.

[10] The abovementioned control was not only limited to printed and / or religious discourse. For example, this implementation of communicative control cost royal historian Alfonso de Palencia his position in 1480 as he refused to subjugate his summary of the Acts of the Courts to the official censor (Tate 666). On the other hand, questioning the rule of the sovereigns was enough to unshackle an investigation, as we observe in the cases of the mayor of Medina or the author of *Las Coplas que se hicieron en Jerez de la Frontera en vida del rey don Fernando y de la reina Isabel, sobre la gobernación del rey* (1490), a text for which the author, Hernando de Vera, had to flee to avoid punishment (Gómez Sierra 66).

[11] We have drawn this conclusion thanks to a combined investigation of the bases of the control of religious discourse in relation to the ethical-political and legal one; by studying the bottom of the feared religious division, particularism, and relativism that new pious practices were thought to bring; and by revising the disciplines and linguistic activities such as translation, and the formal education of the "hombres de letras" designed to produce and interpret discourses. In the specific case of religious discourse, the Nominalist crisis of the 14th century, prolonged by the pious and spiritualists tendencies against theological speculation, was deepened with the humanist rapprochement to language, which resulted eventually into Erasmism and Protestant Reform (see Waswo 112, 208).

[12] If language, the instrument or institution that formed these "realities" was essentially historical, contingent and semantically constitutive, it may be possible for them to share the same qualities. This idea was something that all constituted power had tried to repress by different means since the beginning of Western Civilization.

words were just a reflection of the things that already existed as they were linked to power and presented generally as unique, natural, and universal. Consequently, meaning was the result of the most unequivocal, direct and transparent correlation possible between both elements –*verba et res*– by means of representation. The accurate reality was fixed outside of language, in the objects or ideas that it depicted in either a true or false fashion.[13]

Since its rudimentary origins, which show a natural and magical convergence between words and things, this vision of meaning evolved thanks to both the Aristotelian philosophical and the Augustinian theological traditions. It moved from offering a reocentric pattern to a more sophisticated psychocentric one: words continued to stand for something that previously existed without them such as concepts, thoughts, categories or ideas of the things in the mind, which eventually referred to things.[14] In summary, all of the variants of this theory since Plato assumed the basic principles that language reflected but did not constitute reality, and that terms obtained their meaning by standing for something more significant that men had to find, a relationship through which all these theories tried to confer force and meaning.

This ontological form of conceiving language was favored in the West long after the 15th century.[15] Logically, its convenience to power, especially in a Modern Castilian State just reshaped to guarantee stability, turned out to be more evident when linguistic expression became more significant as a creator of ideology and expanded its diffusion with the printing press.[16] As a result, the overall success of the previously mentioned discursive control rested ultimately on the capacity to maintain alive and ongoing the abovementioned semantic conception of language at all costs, which had suffered a serious challenge in the 15th century.

After analyzing numerous municipal and religious documents from the 15th century J. Ferreras, in a study related to *Celestina,* ended up formulating the problem in linguistic terms: "La sociedad del S. XV parecía haber olvidado el *lenguaje* cristiano *fundamentador* de su existencia, mediante el cual se *representaba* a sí misma y cuya *representación* la constituía como comunidad" (149). Moreover, F. Layna

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[13] For Foucault, the relation between both components was based on the seemingly "*resemblance,*" a concept that has always played a basic role in Western culture (26).

[14] In *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle even accepts the conventionalism as the bond between voices and letters, and between concepts and voices that signified *ad placitum*. Nevertheless, the impressions of the soul or concepts signified *naturaliter* in relation to reality. As a consequence, vocal and written terms acquired their meaning through imposition, depending in the end to signify on the mental terms they were subordinate to (16.3).

[15] The decisive shift, even though I would question the definitive victory over the idealist tradition, would probably not have occurred until the 20th century, when, as Terry Eagleton maintains, "we have shifted from thinking of words in terms of concepts to thinking of concepts in terms of words" (193).

[16] W. J. Ong, to whom "logocentrism is encouraged by textuality and becomes *more marked* shortly after chirographic textuality is reinforced by print" (168), recognizes it in this way. Evidently, the Modern State consolidated in Castile at the end of the 15th century was not an exception, especially, as we saw, linguistic expression became an essential constituent of ideological transactions, which determined the conception of language promoted in both written and oral manifestations.

bases the tedium of transcendence at the end of the Middle Ages on the opposition to the Aristotelic cognoscitive system, derived from a static and atemporal relation with a Supreme and Meta-human Understanding, and that was finally supported in the indicated rational linguistic correspondences (69). Nebrija himself was aware of this problem. For instance, in the repetition *De vi ac potestate litterarum* (1486), a statement with which he closed his university course in Salamanca this same year, he sought to sell his humanist program assuring that *it*, more effectively than the Scholastics, guaranteed the connection between words and things. To do this, he turned to Aristotle: "Nam quemadmodum Aristoteles tradit, eo modo litterae verba humanis vocibus informata designant quo verba ipsa res mente conceptas quae per ea significant" (36).[17] As a result, the foundations of power were safe with his humanist activities. These actions, according to Nebrija, assured the secular connection of meaning and helped to optimize the reciprocal concurrence between its parts "invicem consentierent." In other words, they improved the clarity and transparence that would evade any crisis, and on which the communication and public faith that sustained human society, the arts and sciences, and even religion were based.[18]

When faced with this context, a study of the religious aspects in *Celestina* may find revealing to begin asking why language, in the second half of the 15th century, could not provide the representation of the World upon which society and its values, especially religion, were instituted as effectively as before. The means by which some recent theorists have analyzed this issue shows a coincidence when perceiving "a change" in the conception of linguistic meaning that had substantial discursive consequences. For example, R. Waswo affirms how, in the epistemological frame of the relationship between words and things, what was an automatic and direct correspondence for Dante at the beginning of the 14th century, had already stopped being this way for authors of the 16th century such as Francis Bacon.[19] For M. Foucault the transition from the medieval *episteme* to the classic produced a progression from the representation to the meaning in which things and words were separated from one another, creating a fissure in the natural relationship, based on the

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[17] Language was, accordingly, just a drawing, a representation "*designare*," a mere copy that originated not directly from things, but rather from mental concepts. Meaning was produced, with corresponding intermediaries, in the same connection between words and things that was established by Plato, developed by Aristotle, assumed in theory by rhetoric, and reinforced later by San Augustine's theory of the sign, the grammarian Donatus, and the scholastic's *modi significandi.*

[18] "Quod si non quattuor haec ex ordine sibi invicem consentirent –dico res conceptus voces litterae–, interirent utique comercia et publica fides qua hominum societas continetur, interirent omnes artes et scientiae quae vitam humanam cultiorem reddunt, interiret denique hic ipse sacrarum litterarum splendor quibus ad christianam religionem instituimur et docemur" (36). In 1517 Nebrija repeats the same idea in his *Reglas de Ortografía* (78-79).

[19] "The correspondence between word and thing may still, of course, be regarded as desirable (indeed, the more passionately desired because it has been threatened); but it is no longer felt as necessarily given. Language can no longer automatically supply it; it has become problematic" (50).

similarity, between language and the world (43).[20] Bakhtin confirms that from the beginning of the 16th century, a new linguistic consciousness resulting from a complex intersection of languages became possible. This fact would have created exceptional conditions in which dogmatism was harder to validate, resulting in the birth of the novel (471).[21] In *Desire in Language*, Julia Kristeva explains the production of meaning from the antagonism between the symbolic process of meaning and a semiotic one, in which instinctive impulses are expressed, along with the incomprehensible and the undetermined. According to Kristeva, the dialectic disposition of both levels reached an inflection point at the end of the Middle Ages with the decisive challenge from the sign to the symbol.[22] The primary consequence was, "a new signifying relation between the two elements" (39).

In accordance with these opinions, we consider that the 15th century contributed to intellectual history with an energetic reexamination of the traditional ontological connection between words –*verba*– and things –*res*–. This assessment of the relation was not new but it found the most unprecedented strength and diffusion since the Sophists due to a combination of circumstances both related to and within language.

In addition to the invention of the printing press, among the first group of conditions that contribute to the fracturing of the old epistemic approach to the World were the shift to a diachronic and lineal concept of time that encouraged human beings to manage it; the change of thought-patterns brought by a modern money-based economy; the discovery of new lands and, in the case of Spain, the reevaluation of fixed models and values produced by the long-term coexistence of three cultures.[23]

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[20] Foucault places *The Quijote* as the limit of a change from one epistemological system to another (53). For an eloquent critique of the chronology Foucault offers in *The Order of the Things*, in relation to some of these assumptions, see Waswo (69-70). Related more specifically to *Celestina*, I emphasize M. Gaylord's opinion of the same subject, whose chronological reading of the "transition" plainly coincides with ours: "Foucault locates the crisis of representation more than a century after the publication of Rojas' play, finding it most telling enactment in Cervantes' masterpiece. My reading suggests that this crisis must already have been brewing in 1500" (25).

[21] The exceptionality of the time is clearly summarized by this critic, for whom "the Renaissance is the only period in the history of European literature which marked the end of a dual language and a linguistic transformation. Much of what was possible at that exceptional time later became impossible" (465). Among other factors that Bakhtin addresses that made these extraordinary circumstances possible, we find a blur of the limits between Latin and vernacular languages, a phenomenon that had started in Castile in the 13th century and became more noticeable two hundred years later.

[22] "The second half of the Middle Ages (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) was a period of transition for European culture: thought based on the sign replaced that based on the symbol " (38).

[23] Maravall already connected the early monetary economy and the new conception of time as profit in *Celestina*. In the specific case of money, Saussure's comparison of the contingency and mutability of worlds with that of money is remarkable (167). The discovery of new lands was also very important as, for example, the fact that many indigenous peoples roamed around naked without feeling shame cast doubt on the dogma of Original sin. Finally, with regard to the coexistence of the three cultures, Laurence de Looze argues that the double-truth theory was in essence a Hispanic contribution that originated from the Hispanic-Muslim Averroes's translations of and comments to Aristotle, and discussed among others by the Hispanic-Hebrew Maimonides. From there, the debate extended to

Among the linguistic components in the last third of the 15th century, grammatical and rhetorical attitudes and perspectives that endorsed particularity and relativism arrived more profusely in Spain. The discovery of Quintilian's complete work in 1416 and the reinterpretation of his rhetorical practice by humanists such as Lorenzo Valla was a decisive factor in the proliferation of the aforementioned attitudes.[24] The study of classic Latin and Greek outside the context of the Church exposed previously unalterable semantic certainties to the contingencies of time as a result of the evidence that many words within those languages had possessed different meanings in different historical times. The publication of Varro's *De lingua latina*, edited by Pomponius Laetus in 1471, contributed to this change as this text offered reliable data about the Latin used in Rome prior to Augustus. Additionally, and without disregarding the Spanish background in these activities, the impulse in the studies of Hebrew and Arabic brought to the forefront a non-Indo-European grammatical tradition, that contributed to relativity of previous linguistic universal assumptions even before the opening of the new "American Babel" in 1492. Furthermore, as vernacular languages gained prestige and became objects of linguistic reflection, they intensified the historical and contextual components of meaning, which almost immediately created the "necessity" to fix them in dictionaries and grammars.

All these factors combined made the flourishing of different attitudes in the treatment of language possible. Although these new perspectives were repressed and modified for their inclusion by power, or simply left out of the hegemonic way of thinking about language, they produced tensions in linguistic practice that had an influence on the entire time period.[25] The acceptance of "use" as a decisive element of meaning, and the closer consideration of language activity or "actio" promoted a vision of language as something in constant historical transformation, more open to changes, adaptable to circumstances, and constituted by forms that competed with one another. The awareness of a particular and contingent human language encouraged its manipulation, undermined the "*auctoritas*" of the texts, and offered a disturbing relevance to the physical component of the sign –*verba*–. As a consequence, it became easier than before to intentionally challenge the univocity and transparent

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Europe, first with Duns Scotus and later, and more radically with nominalists such as William of Ockham (44).

[24] R. Waswo perfectly summarizes the conjunction of elements that were influential in the time period: "Observations such as: historical changes in the forms and meaning of words; their context dependency; their systemic functions; their possession of multiple referents; their ability to constitute knowledge, shape feeling, and mold behavior; their domination by social usage were not new. But as observations they remained largely isolated, not seen, until the Renaissance (and then only temporarily), to be mutually relevant or to cohere sufficiently to provide a sustained challenge to the dominant model of meaning" (17).

[25] In Salamanca towards the end of the 15th century these new perspectives were founded more than in logic –nominalism– in the humanist linguistic tendencies of Lorenzo Valla's followers such as Hernando Alonso de Herrera –*Tres Personae* (1496), *Disputa contra Aristóteles y sus seguidores* (1517)–, Fernando de Manzanares –*Flores Rhetorici* (1485)–, and partially in Antonio de Nebrija and Juan del Encina.

correspondence of allegorical meanings with rhetorical multiplicity and ambiguity, and eventually overturn the hierarchical and symbolic order of the World as Seidenspinner-Núñez correctly claims for *Celestina* (246). This changes facilitated the possibility of a more systematic and conscious use of the parody, ambivalence, inversion, phatic resemantization, metaphor, and irony that allowed *Celestina* to evade the Inquisition until 1632.[26]

From this background, essential to us to understand the rhetorical, contentious, circumstantial, unstable and non-providential configuration of the world created by the work, we can briefly deal with its subversive religious approach. In order to do this, and as a result of the linguistic perspective adopted in our analysis, we will cover the selected material in three interrelated groups: the word "God," the word "of God" –*The Scripture*–, and the word "to God" –*prayer and confession*–.[27]

In 1495, in his translation of *De Propietatibus Rerum* –tribute to the control of meanings applicable to names–, the schoolman Vicente de Burgos devoted himself widely so that the word "God" and other words used to refer to Divinity were especially meaningful within the logical and direct relationship between *res* and *verba*. His mission, although in a Christian framework, was not pioneering at all. Ever since ancient Greece and in the representational linguistic theory that we previously unfolded, offering an aprioristic idea of the Gods was critical to power in order poets and other artists could "represent" them in the way they "really" were. Just five years later, of the 222 times that the author(s) uses "God" in *Celestina*, practically all of them function on the level that M. Read names "phatic communion, where language is notoriously mechanical in its use and weak in cognitive meaning" (81-82). Furthermore, when within formulaic and automatic expressions, use and its effects inject fresh meanings into the word; they are not by any means what Vicente de Burgos would have expected.

For example, when Calisto sees Celestina arrive with news, he calls upon God "¡Oh alto Dios, oh soberana deidad!" (*La Celestina* 175), but it is not clear here if he speaks of God, or of Melibea, to whom he constantly refers as "my God," or to Celestina, to whom he also adores in this light. Moreover, Sempronio, in identifying,

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[26] Many of these phenomena were also frequent in previous periods. However, the proliferation of human meaning and perspectivist relativism gained an unusual strength in literature just when the source of authority and truth started to lie within the text rather than outside. After all, Bakhtin refers to this time as a period of "exceptional linguistic freedom," when, according to his theory, was possible the birth of novel. We should underline here that *Celestina* has been often deemed as the first novel, and some critical studies have related this work in the past to Bakhtinian polyphony and dialogism.

[27] We will leave aside the parody of external aspects such as those that affect to the Church's wealth, "aunque los ricos tienen mejor aparejo para ganar la gloria que quien poco tiene" (*La Celestina* 211); or those linked to the sexual behavior of the "devoted monks" to Celestina's pupils, for being recurring anticlerical topics treated similarly in other works of this period. We do the same with religious terms such as "glory" and "passion," used with a ludic and sexual connotation in the work, but that were also commonly employed in this same light by *cancionero* poets, as K. Whinnon demonstrated. For a parodic transposition of the latter concept into prose, with even an analogy between Leriano's and Christ's passion, see D. S. Severin (35-46).

"cuál es el fuego de Calisto," uses a biblical expression "¡O soberano Dios, quán altos son tus misterios! (93) to underpin his finding, suggesting at the same time that the divine mysteries include Calisto's sexual passion, and contributing to the indistinctness between the spiritual and material limits that run throughout the text.[28] God ends up heading off requests of any kind, without any type of limit, such as "alcançar el lugar conveniente" besides Melibea or the "deseado fin" (104). As a result, God becomes a sexual facilitator or go-between, which explains his identification with Celestina. Calisto ambiguously insinuated this connection between God and Celestina when he sends Sempronio to accompany her: "No te partas della, Sempronio, ni me olvides a mí, y ve con Dios" (108). Sempronio uses the word "God" in a similar indefinite fashion in the proverb he applies to Celestina's involvement in Pármeno's sexual liaison with Areúsa: "Por esto dizen, más vale a quien Dios ayuda que quien mucho madruga" (216). As far as she is concerned, Celestina not only embraces God's name for herself, but she acts as God or his representative as well: "Pues no quiero más de ti, que Dios no pide más del pecador, de arrepentirse y enmendarse" (193). Additionally, "Quédate a Dios" is a stereotypical expression used in Spanish to bid farewell to others. However, upon leaving her house, Celestina expands its meaning by using it with Elicia in front of Sempronio, knowing that the former has another lover hidden indoors named *Crito = Cristo* (106).

There is such an intense resemantization of these formulas in *Celestina* that sometimes the ambiguity is even much more evident. For instance, in his love quarrel with Elicia, Sempronio replies to calm her down "Calla, dios mío; ¿y enójaste? Que no la quiero ver a ella ni a mujer nacida…" (*La Celestina* 106). The editor's punctuation "dios" already provides an interpretive option, assuming that in saying this Sempronio refers to Elicia as "his God" rather than using the expression of relief "Dios mío." We can agree with this interpretation, but "dios mío" applied to a prostitute is resemanticized anyways, especially with all of the Courtly Love precedents and as we are familiar with the denomination applied to Melibea by Calisto (95). Finally, M. Read has evaluated the exchange between Calisto and Celestina at the end of Act I in terms of ambiguity: "Quede Dios contigo (Cal.): Y él te me guarde" (129), by presenting as biunivocal possibilities of *te me guarde* "for me" and "from me" (83).

Other "divine" terms such as Christian afterlife (*más allá*) and sin, generated thanks to the same sign theory that sustains an inherent connection between words and signified things, undergo a similar treatment. Consequently, Melibea neither breaks the symbolic order by lacking the representation of afterlife in heaven after death as Ferreras suggests (149), nor includes implicitly the afterlife only to show the author's belief in an orthodox and extratextual ontology, as Fernández could imply (147). In our view, as M. T. Caro establishes, heaven is "una promesa irónica" in *Celestina* (132). This means that rather than displaying an objective and stable significance, the *más allá* happens to take a steadily particularized and utilitarian meaning for every

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[28] The quote comes from Saint Paul *Romanos*, XI, 33 (see Severin, *La Celestina* 93).

character and every reader of the play. Thus, while God's followers lost their personality and earthly being upon going to heaven in the devout treaties of the time, Melibea's heaven is erotic and pagan, a place where she can still bodily "love" Calisto.[29] In the same way, to the worldly Celestina, paradise means the sensual pleasures of food, wine, and sex: "Assentaos vosotros, mis hijos, que harto lugar ay para todos, a Dios gracias. Tanto no diessen del paraýso quando allá vamos. Poneos en orden cada uno cabe la suya…" (*La Celestina* 224). Ironically, *el más allá* is also the reward to the old bawd and witch Claudina –Celestina's mentor in her arts–, as a result of her "buenas obras de acá" (200). Respectively, in relation to Pleberio and contrary to its Petrarchan sources, the work not only closes to his grief the stoic consolation but also the Christian relief of heaven. As A. Deyermond has underlined "a partir de los préstamos de Rojas resultaría difícil descubrir que Petrarca era cristiano" (2001, 116). Finally, on the subject of sin, the term's dogmatic conception is visibly destabilized by the circumstances. The two capital sins of religious and moral treaties such as Saint Thomas's *De malo*, greed –avaricia– and lust –lujuria–, are being constantly redefined by *Celestina´s* characters in terms of convenience such as benefit –provecho– and delight –deleite–. In this way, Melibea asks for forgiveness because she is able to assign the term "sin" a meaning in which the reasons behind her suicide are entirely justified. In contrast, for Celestina, sin ambiguously means "wine" with the suitable punctuation: "Seis veces al día tengo de salir por mi pecado…" (*La Celestina* 159). To her, moreover, Areúsa's sin is –inversely to the catholic moral– the fact that she fails to *entertain* Pármeno: "Mira que es pecado fatigar y dar pena a los hombres podiéndolos remediar." (203).[30]

The tensions and ambiguities that the use of the term "God" and other similar transcending expressions raise in the work are extended to the use of the word "of God" as well, which materializes in a potentially corrosive application of both communicative situations and quotations coming from the *Scriptures.*

To start with the situations the text normally exploits inversion and indetermination in order to put forward different readings of them and to uphold deniability. In her Marian capacity as *mediatrix*, eloquently scrutinized by Costa Fontes (101-41), Celestina mimicked Virgin Mary's Annunciation and subsequent Visitation to her cousin Isabel in her visit to Areúsa. Nevertheless, as E. Fernández has brightly shown, this scene is presented in an inverted form as Celestina –an elderly woman– visits the younger *ramera*, the archangel is Saint Miguel in place of the messenger Saint Gabriel, and Areúsa is blessed among all of the women for the beauty

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[29] Lorenzo Valla had discussed the topic in the third part of *De voluptate*: "Que autem ad corporis sensus attinent aut his quibus modo fruimur fruemur aut si qua cessabunt in eorum locum multo melioribus donabimur," with the unfolding of interesting views: "Ergo resumptis corporibus intermissa gaudia sed tamen sanctiora et ut dixi cum multo fenore reddentur, sed non statim post mortem. Nam priora sunt anime, ipsa corporis in novissimum tempus reservantur" (298).

[30] In any case, we can not forget either about all the men who "descalzos, contritos y rebozados…" used to enter Celestina´s house "a llorar sus *pecados*" during the breaks offered by the religious holidays (*La Celestina* 111).

of her body more than for her virtue as we observe in Luke's *Gospel* (143-46). On the other hand, Celestina undermines Calisto's transcendental-loving verbosity in an aside, with a subtle allusion to Saint Paul's revelation. The statement: "Sempronio; déxale, que él caerá de su asno y acaba" (191) alludes to Saint Paul's conversion (*Hechos* 9), with Calisto falling from a downgraded "donkey" instead of a "horse." In addition, she expects that in doing so, Calisto will see a "truth" that for the old bawd is located in silence, and not in the metaphysical-theological language of Courtly love. Finally, it is also ironic that Calisto asks God to allow him to reach Melibea's "glory" at the Church of Magdalene, and that the prostitute Elicia makes love to Crito = Cristo, a lexical-thematic motif that from *Celestina* influenced the *Fábula burlesca de Jesucristo*, according to K. Brown and H. den Boer.[31]

The text also recontextualizes systematically Biblical quotes, uses them on unpredictable circumstances, and puts them into practice serving questionable purposes. This application turns this type of reference into one of the preferred means of creating irony. They not only cease to acceptably represent authorized sources of truth but also become evidence of the creative power of language by constituting new meanings. S. Gilman previously wrote an article about the deviated use of Matthew (5:10) in *Celestina*. Thus, the go-between uses the statement "Bienaventurados los perseguidos por causa de la justicia" to ironically disapprove of Claudina's punishment for being a witch, an allusion that the author of *El Lazarillo* would duplicate years later. This one is not the only manipulation of lines from the *Sermon on the Mount*. Pármeno also alludes to the beatitudes, "la paz no se pude negar, bienaventurados los pacíficos que hijos de Dios serán llamados" (*La Celestina* 127) to solidify his friendship with Sempronio which ends up in a violent and not peaceful act against Celestina. On the other hand, Areúsa reproaches Centurio –by using the same words as Saint John Baptist referring to God–, that owing to her contacts as a prostitute he got a job in the past: "púsete con señor que no le merescías descalçar" (184). In her identification with God, Celestina even dares to present herself before Melibea in transforming the words used by Christ against the Devil to deny his temptation in the desert into a tempting argument: "E no sabes que por divina boca fue dicho contra aquel infernal tentador, que no de solo pan viviremos?" (158). This conformative prominence that language acquires in configuring the universe in *Celestina*, and its creative treatment by characters with particular interests, contexts, and communicative goals, have encouraged critics to compare the way characters use language and the way it was used by God to create the World. For example, M. Bentley matches up the statement used by Calisto to consent to accompanying

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[31] Within this subject matter, Cantalapiedra has pointed out that the page, in which Crito's name should appear, is missing in Palacio's version of the manuscript. As a consequence, this critic speculates about the existence of that version of the name with the -*s* (49). On the other hand, Crito was the name of one of Plato's characters, Socrates's friend, who, according to Diógenes Laercio, was in charge of keeping Socrates satisfied. This "provider's" role seems to have been the same one played, according to some traditions, by some Evangelical women such as Mary of Magdalene towards Jesus Christ.

Celestina "Bien dicho es; después será" to "God's command to *let there be light* and the result *and there was*" (260).

Finally, in a parallel way to the word "God" and the word "of God," the word "to God" or statement directed to the Divinity experiences a perturbing treatment in the play as it also ultimately refers to the allegedly ontological relation between words and things. We will examine this issue with relation to prayer and the sacrament of confession.

In the *Oracional*, a devotional book written around 1454 but conveniently printed in Murcia in 1487, Alfonso de Cartagena praised the unselfish prayer –*oración desisteresada*– and considered it to be an interior act of virtue with a double form, essential and accidental, ensuring through its essentiality the secular connection between words and the transcendental things.[32] Some years later, in his work *Comentario a la oración dominical* (1524) –*The Our Father*–, J. L. Vives also reminded us that in the act of praying, one had to ponder each phrase, each prayer, each accent "remembering that, in his fallen state, man must strive hard to make words correspond with external action" (*Introductio ad sapientiam*, XVIII, qtd. in Read 67).

In remarkable contrast to that which was recommended by prayer-oriented literature, the prayers offered by the clergy in *Celestina* do not find a connection to a metaphysical entity, but rather are very much tied to the worldly go-between who provides their "needs" and for whom they interrupted their assigned prayers by the *Book of Hours* (*La Celestina* 235). Also, the term "devotion", the second interior act of religious virtue along with the prayer, is converted into an exterior and physical channel of sexual communication: "… que por medio de aquellas, comunicava con las más encerradas, hasta traer a ejecución su propósito, y aquestas en tiempo honesto, como estaciones, procesiones de noche, missas de gallo, missas de salva, y otras secretas *devociones*" (110).[33]

In this work the characters' prayers are exclusively interested in and directed to a personal-material benefit rather than a transcendental one. For example, Celestina's prayers fingering her rosary while in church are disguises for her business, as Sempronio graphically admits by revealing their value and mercantile "spirit": "Lo que en sus cuentas reza es los virgos que tiene a cargo, y quántos enamorados ay en la ciudad, y quántas moças tiene encomendadas, y qué despenseros le dan ración…" (*La Celestina* 223). Sometimes, as Costa Fontes points out in the excellent example in which Celestina pretends to have long been asking God to find Pármeno (145-46), the

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[32] "La forma esencial en la oración es aquella que le da la esencia a el ser. E esta es levantamiento del coraçón en Dios con voluntad deseossa de se allegar a Él" (118). For this reason, the truthful prayer was that which was formed in the heart and that entered in a transcendental connection with God. Despite the intervention of free will, the less dangerous reason set up the connection, leaving out everything having to do with the body: "[…] que la oración desçiende de la virtud que nombramos derechamente syn mixtura de corporalidat alguna seyendo engendrada por la razón en lo más alto della que es la parte intelectiva e asy se engendra por el entendimiento en la voluntad" (154).
[33] "Ca han de proçeder de los de dentro ca en otra manera no serían meritorios los actos interiores pertenecientes a la virtud de religión, son devoçión e oración" (Cartagena 107).

very holy speech act of praying becomes a made-up argument *ad hoc* to deceive her prey. The prayer of Saint Apollonia that Celestina asks Melibea to say for Calisto aims to a toothache without *res significata*, resulting linguistically in a rhetorical pretext to break out of a sticky situation. Additionally, the later also turns into a phatic mechanism exploited to leave the communicative line between the two lovers open. Regarding Calisto, his religious petitions have an erotic goal "el deseado fin," as he believes as well that God's saints have granted his date with Melibea thanks to his prayers (*La Celestina* 263). Moreover, the prayer that Calisto utters when Sempronio leaves his house to go to Celestina's is a parody of the epic prayer of plea.[34] R. Beltrán has related this previously mentioned prayer to the *Ritual de Agonizantes*, a plea that included a numbered list of miracles that God used to save people in both the Old and New Testaments from extreme situations (29). If we consider Melibea's case, when she prays to God, she does it to maintain her honesty and not her virtue or, in other words, to obtain enough strength of mind to hide her passion instead of overcoming it: "O soberano Dios… humildemente suplico: des a mi herido coraçón sufrimiento y paciencia, con que mi terrible passion pueda dissimular…" (*La Celestina* 238). In a vivid aside, Sosia will even undermine the sincerity of Melibea's post-coital prayer by using religious terminology: "Ante quisiera yo oýrte essos milagros, todas sabéis essa *oración* después que no puede dexar de ser hecho" (286).

Turning now to the confession, the relationship between the sign and the object must be intrinsically necessary in the sacraments, where this "something in common" between words and signified things was expressed more perfectly than in other realities (Saint Thomas III, 60, 6). Intimately linked by the schoolmen to the doctrine of "matter and form," confession was established over the linguistic base of representation. The parts of the contrition and the confession needed the perfect correspondence between *verba* and *res*, so that the repentance was sincere and the confession valid.[35] Furthermore, under normal conditions, the speech act of confession acquired validity –*forma sacramenti*– only when being verified by a representative of God on earth. This circumstance initially minimized the validity of contrition without the expedient institutional corroboration, even before the reaction to Luther attacks and denials of the power of the priest to administer absolution.[36] Words alone, in the

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[34] "¡O todopoderoso, perdurable Dios, tú que guías los perdidos, y los reyes orientales por el estrella precedente a Bethleén truxiste y en su patria los reduxiste, humildemente te ruego que guíes a mi Sempronio…" (*La Celestina* 104).

[35] "La segunda cosa es la confesión la cual es que el pecador declare todos sus pecados delante su confesor por su boca asi como los fizo. Aquesta confesión debe ser verdaderamente hecha. Conviene saber que el pecador no encubra algo de todos sus pecados al confesor de los que entonces acordarse se pudiere. Ca si alguno encubre toda la confesión no le vale cosa alguna…" (Fernández de Madrigal aiii).

[36] Pedro de Osma, university professor of Moral Philosophy in Salamanca, had defended the idea that the sacramental confession was not a divine institution. As a consequence, mortal sins could be redeemed just by contrition, without confession, and thus there was not necessary to confess bad thoughts because it was enough just to reject them. Osma's opinions ended up in a scandalous theological condemn, and with the burning of his *Tractatus de confessiones* at the doors of the

absence of a priest, could only suffice to guarantee heavenly peace in cases of extreme necessity, making confession "*quodammodo sacramentalis*" in St. Thomas' words (IV, 17, 3); but even within this theological precept, repentance should be deep, univocal, clear, and absolutely sincere.

Based on these general premises, confessions and attempts to confess in *Celestina* are all but transparent. They are characterized by a high level of ambiguity that either questions their existence or makes us doubt whether they are either successful or failed speech acts. Celestina exploits confession in at least two ways throughout the work. The first is in a lucrative form. As an alternate institution to the Church, Celestina registers the newborn girls in town, similar to the practice that Cardenal Cisneros had just implemented in 1498 by decreeing that every parish recorded its baptisms. This allows her to create a "sacramental monitoring" for these young girls and to persuade them more effectively later to follow her wishes and demands. As we see with Melibea, and even with Pármeno, Celestina bases her persuasive method on forcing a confession, on creating the sheltered communicative context to assure that her victims linguistically articulate their desires. In the course of this verbal transaction, Celestina subverts the linguistic model of the theory of truth giving it another purpose, which she executes in acting both as doctor and confessor: "Por ende cumple que al médico como al confessor se hable toda verdad abiertamente" (*La Celestina* 240). Accordingly, it makes perfect sense that priests without rents offer Celestina "*el bódigo*" or the offering made for the parishioners after confession: "Pues otros curas sin renta, no era ofrecido el bódigo quando en besando el feligrés la stola era de primero boleo en mi casa" (236).

The other noteworthy use of the confession that we observe in the character of old bawd comes up in the scene that describes her murder. The work context, with previously stated remarks such as Sempronio's "cuando ella tiene qué hacer no se acuerda de Dios ni cura de santidades" (*La Celestina* 222), generates doubts about whether or not there is any genuineness in Celestina's repentance.[37] To De Miguel that confession is for Celestina a desperate linguistic attempt to solve the spiritual part of her problems, at the same level that she tries to solve the temporal ones by crying out for justice and calling the neighbors (256). All the same, for us, more than in terms of

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university in 1479. Osma's prime "offence" had been arriving at conclusions that greatly stemmed from understanding language not only in its representational sense, but also in a perlocutive dimension and without an institutional approval. The possibility that a sin could be pardoned in an individual act "per solam cordis contritionem" and the diminishment of Pope's power to this respect, "Papa non potest indulgere alicui vivo in poenam purgatory" clearly undermined the ecclesiastical institution (qtd. in Rucquoi 249). Also, Osma's seventh conclusion in which he stated that the Roman Church could err meant the recognition of the human, historical, and circumstantial character of its linguistic manifestations. According to Gilman, the echoes of these events were still alive in Salamanca fourteen years later, when *Celestina* was written (1972, 297).

[37] De Miguel thinks that confession is for Celestina a desperate linguistic attempt to solve the spiritual part of her problems, at the same level that she tries to solve the temporal ones by crying out for justice and calling the neighbors (256).

truth –sincere or not–, her speech act should be analyzed in terms of relative perception and taking into account the collapse of the boundaries of metaphysical concepts such as good and bad. Celestina requests a confession because in a world without absolutes and in which meaning is constituted by contingent and historical language, she may naturally see herself as an old woman "qual Dios me hizo, no peor que todas" (273).

This same confessional pattern, based on philosophical-theological principles molded with the self-interest by words, is observed in other characters as well. Calisto's final confession is previously remarked by Centurio in a burlesque fashion when Areúsa goes to request that the latter carries out her revenge: "…Dime luego si está confessado" (*La Celestina* 315). This provokes the prostitute's straightforward answer to this new-found institutional impostor: "No seas tú cura de su ánima" (315). Furthermore, this confession is an addition from the *Tragicomedia* to the *Comedia*, wherein Calisto died without requesting a confession, creating a contradiction with the opinions of the rest of the characters.[38] With all of this, Calisto's contrition for the mortal sin of fornication is uncertain or absent. The only regret expressed by him in a previous scene is not for fornicating with a virgin or for his contribution to the deaths of Celestina and his servants, but rather for his own neglect for covering up the worldly infamy and dishonor of his name (288). The disfunctionality of Melibea's confession is similar, and it also highlights the particular and worldly beyond concepts such as sin: the young girl confesses before her father instead of a priest, she does not regret having enjoyed but rather of not having enjoyed more, and it turns to a pagan suicide which would have made a pardoning of her actions impossible.[39]

In conclusion, this study has explored an alternative and inclusive examination of *Celestina*'s treatment of religion in relation to the crisis of the transcendentals reopened in the 15th century. This crisis was ultimately the epistemological consequence of the changes in the conception of linguistic meaning produced in the context of the economic, social, political, and cultural transformations observed at the

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[38] Tristán: "!O mi señor y mi bien muerto, o mi señor y nuestra honrra despeñado! O triste muerte y sin confessión" (*La Celestina* 327). Tristán again: "Lloro mi gran mal, lloro mis muchos dolores; cayó mi señor Calisto del scala y es muerto; su cabeça está en tres partes. Sin confissión pereció" (327). Melibea: "…Cortaron las hadas sus hilos; cortárosle sin confessión su vida; cortaron mi sperança; cortaron mi gloria" (334). The other possible contrition, that of Pármeno or Sempronio, is also an addition to the *Tragicomedia* that is left hanging in the air. Sosia's words do not seem to make clear anything: "… hincó los ojos en mí, alçando las manos al cielo, *quasi* dando gracias a Dios…que no me avía de ver más hasta el día del gran juyzio" (278). Furthermore, this version fails to agree with the subsequent and accelerated description of the event by the same character, which makes the participation of free will and the intellect in the act almost impossible: "…saltaron de unas ventanas muy altas por huyr del aguazil, assí quasi muertos les cortaron las cabeças, que creo que ya no sintieron nada" (280). Of the two servants, one was with "todos los sesos de la cabeça de fuera sin ningún sentido," which makes the speech act impossible; meanwhile the other, the one that was supposed to lift his arms to the sky, had "quebrados entramos braços" (280).

[39] As Rodríguez Puértolas points out it is not possible to find regret in Melibea, nor a guilty conscience, nor the idea of sin; on the contrary, she requests "campanas para sepultar mi cuerpo" (52).

end of the Middle Ages. At this time, in close relation to the challenge of vernacular languages to Latin, the linguistic historicism, the reevaluation of rhetoric, and the reformulated conception of the dualism between words and things, we observed an intensified interest for the particular, visible, and material opposite the universal, transcendental, and spiritual in the way of perceiving and responding to the world. If words were not only labels of objects but mainly functional instruments used to achieve human objectives, linguistic use was the fundamental component of meaning, and men were the creators and not only the users or something given by God. Then, truth and falsehood might be inside of language and the metaphysical concepts, including the religious ones, were no longer untouchable. This raising but very son repressed linguistic contingence and the supportive opportunity that it offered to manipulate language and to create indetermination and ambiguity through different devices are crucial to understand the conscious and systematic possibilities for the subversion of religious terms in *Celestina*.

At the end of the work, Pleberio, more than any other character, endures the fracture of the metaphysical-ontological system provided by the conjunction of pagan philosophy and Christianity since Plato. Ironically, he had been the figure who had most believed in and lived according to it. Pleberio's desperation comes from learning that transcendental things do not have the names that correspond to them according to Aristotelian logic and the Augustinian theory of the sign, but rather they have been arranged just by convention or necessity.[40] In a deeper level, Pleberio's tragedy is that the things that he had believed in for his whole life as ontological realities just depicted by men words are in fact realities conventionally created by and without an existence outside of language. Without a God that offers a rational order and a stable design, without transcendent and solid entities upon which the meaning of words can rest, the work diverts to an "existential" crisis in which neither humanist ethical doctrines, nor Christianity can deliver comfort, and in which, urged by the contingency of language, even the alternative of afterlife redemption slips away.

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[40] This is also the main reason because some critics have alluded to a World without God in *Celestina*. In his misery, Pleberio asks love who has given it a name that does not correspond to love, and in which exists a non-understandable fissure between the word and what is supposed to represent: "¿Quién te puso nombre que no te conviene?" (*La Celestina* 341-42).

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