

**Medieval Mean Girls: On Sexual Rivalry and  
the Uses of Cosmetics in *La Celestina***

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A 1997 RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)-led study on shark bile described how it might be used to fight against the oxidative damage in cells, tissues or organs caused by reactive oxygen species such as free radicals. The implications expanded the potential application of shark bile (hitherto used for its hepato-protective properties) into the field of dermatology (Macrides 1251). This line of medical inquiry resulted in the commercial production of shark bile salt, sodium scymnol sulphate, which was marketed by various cosmetic companies for excess oil absorption and the reduction of pores.<sup>1</sup> It thus proved through science the effectiveness of a Japanese folk remedy used by fishermen for the treatment of scalds, burns, and acne. The shark bile discovery brings to bear the potentially therapeutic benefits of traditional, empirical remedies within commercially-driven fields of scientific investigation. It suggests that the divide between science and folk medicine may not be unequivocal, and allows for some space to revisit the cosmetic attack on the twenty-year-old Melibea by her would-be fifteen year old rival:

AREÚSA: Pues no la has tú visto como yo, hermana mía. Dios me demande si en ayunas la topasses, si aquel día pudiesses comer de asco. Todo el año se está encerrada con mudas de mil suziedades. Por una vez que haya de salir donde pueda ser vista, enviste su cara con hiel y miel, con unas tostadas y higos pasados, y con otras cosas que por reverencia de la mesa dexo de decir. Las riquezas las hacen a éstas hermosas y ser alabadas, que no las gracias de su cuerpo, que assí goze de mí, unas tetas tiene para ser doncella como si tres vezes oviesse parido; no parescen sino dos grandes calabças. El vientre no se le he visto, pero juzgando por lo otro creo que le tiene tan floxo como vieja de cinquenta años. No sé qué ha visto Calisto porque dexa de amar otras que más ligeramente podría aver y con quien más él holgasse, sino que el gusto dañado muchas vezes juzga por dulce lo amargo. (227-28)<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, this passage is not notable for its medicinal value. It serves best as an example of adolescent arrogance. One can almost see the young Areúsa, over-

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<sup>1</sup> It was used specifically in an over-the-counter acne medicine by the name of Ketsugo, as well as in past formulations of pore minimizing and oil-absorbing lotions by Clinique and La Mer; see Macrides. All these products now have been reformulated to exclude this product or have been taken off the market, presumably because more effective skin conditioning agents have been developed.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from *La Celestina* are taken from Dorothy Severin's Cátedra edition (1994).

confident in her youth and over-proud of her ready talents, bristle at the thought that another may outstrip her. The excessiveness of her outburst reveals a rather pouty resentment that it is Melibea and not Areúsa who has claimed Calisto's attention. Fraker has noted Areúsa's vulgarity, bitterness, and envy, as manifested through the genre of the picaresque and the rhetoric of Senecan commonplace (65). These characteristics have, in part, been situated within discussions of the aspirations, apprehensions, and anxieties reflective of Castile's social instability at the close of the middle ages (Gerli 372-77; Hathaway 26-27; Weber 127-44). The disturbingly unappealing list of cosmetics may be read sardonically, as a way for Areúsa to diminish her rival's beauty and so supplant it with her own. The disfigurement inflicted upon Melibea's body –shaped as much by aesthetic as by economic and social ideals– thus allows for Areúsa's claim of social and sexual superiority.

This psychological questioning of Areúsa's motives perhaps is brought on by too close a reading of Gilman's "*Character*," but it is precisely her character that may be better understood through the repugnantly antithetical list of cosmetic ingredients. One might consider this undertaking a rather silly whimsy, since the true cosmetician in the dialogue novel is Celestina. Most studies of this protagonist have focused on the old bawd's more menacing occupation, that of witchcraft, and the damage wrought by it to the dominant patriarchy of society. Any of her other skills are subsumed within this more salacious profession, which persists in damning women for continued immoral behavior. The association between witchcraft and cosmetics is neatly expressed in Parmeno's description of the "poquito de bálsamo que tenía ella en una redomilla, que guardaba para aquel rascuño que tiene por las narices" [and a little balm she had in a small flask, which she kept for the scar she had about her nose] (112). Celestina's deceptions here are cosmetic, an evil attempt to hide what so prominently marks her connection to the devil. It is this demonic association that negates any positive interpretation of the therapeutic potential ascribed to her perfumes and cosmetics. This is despite the fact that its medicinal potential was understood in the late Middle Ages. Within the *Celestina* proper, both Pármeno and Lucrecia note Celestina's worth as a healer and recognize her importance as such within the town. Critics have remarked upon her role as "curandera" for certain amorous maladies: Areúsa's "mal de madre" and Melibea's "mal de amores" (Severin, "Celestina: a Life" 104). Despite her subaltern status, Celestina uses and abuses the same discourse as educated practitioners (Solomon 90). Celestina's age, her medical awareness, and her actions inscribe her within an expanded, if ambiguous, category of female medical practitioners. The medieval *vetulae* or *mulieres* ["old women," or simply "women," respectively], despite the fact they were scathingly represented by medical authors, brought empirical knowledge to their medical practice, but were increasingly marginalized as both legal and medical discourses condemned their modes of healing (Green, *Women's* 336-37). At least for the Crown of Aragón, Luis García Ballester argues, the thirteenth century saw the rise of the idea that medical science was "responsible for health, man's most precious possession, and was hence an important

factor in social equilibrium and stability” (4).<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps, then, in the interest of social stability that women increasingly were restricted within the medical field.

Marginalization of women from the medical field became increasingly acute with the rise of universities, which professionalized what had hitherto before been considered a trade occupation. Licensing requirements further alienated women from medical practice, although it is certainly true that the needs of townspeople overrode legal niceties. One can, nevertheless, see a steady decrease of women at practice, even from such traditionally female branches of obstetrics and gynecology. Their involvement within fields pursuant of cosmetic medicine was no exception. Cosmetological medicine, the study of the medical or aesthetic beautification of the body, increased in prominence as treatises on that subject proliferated in and after the thirteenth century. These almost invariably are authored by university-trained doctors. Of particular note is Henri de Mondeville’s *Chirurgie*, which contains such self-interested commentary as:

Cependant un chirurgien que demeurerait dans des provinces ou dans des cités où il y aurait beaucoup de riches et de femmes de cour, et qui serait renommé pour savoir bien opérer dans cet art, pourrait en remporter un avantage considerable et la faveur des dames, ci que n’est pas peu de chose aujourd’hui (582; 749) [Whereas a surgeon who lives in towns or cities where there should be many riches and courtly women, and who would be made famous for his skill in this art, could garner considerable

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<sup>3</sup> There have been at least two noted instances of the regulation of physicians in the Iberian Peninsula. King Alfonso IX of León (1188-1230) required physicians be examined and authorized before licensing their practice (qtd. in Solomon, “Women Healers,” 70). A similar decree was made for the Crown of Aragón in 1289 by Alfons III (1285-91). While there is some question as to the enforcement of these laws, numerous towns in the Crown of Aragón were quick to uphold their king’s decree. Cervera (1291) and Valls (1299) were two, the latter applying the rule “to all the members, male or female, of the realm’s three religious communities –Christian, Jewish, and Muslim” (García Ballester, et. al., 3-4). Alfons IV (1327-66), however, made further restrictions upon that rule, and specified years of university study as a requirement to practice medicine (García Ballester, et. al., 4) While Jews and Muslims did not have access to university studies, exceptions were made provided they could prove the requisite medical knowledge. However, García Ballester notes the 1329 *furs* provision that “no woman may practice medicine or give potions, under penalty of being whipped through the town; but they may care for little children, and women –to whom, however, they may give no potion” (29; Green, *Women’s* 53). However the provision may have been enforced, it attests to a changing attitude towards women in the medical field: one that, at least in theory, restricted their access to a variety of patients (Green, *Women’s* 53-54). García Ballester does not seem to agree with Green on this point, citing instances when other women practiced without licenses and with impunity, and giving witness to numerous Muslim female doctors in Valencia seeking the requisite licenses as established by the fourteenth-century *furs* (30-31). Perhaps the scarcity of doctors and the overwhelming need for medical care can in part respond to the laxity in enforcing the provisions negating female medical practice.

advantage and the favor of the ladies, which is no little thing in this day and age].<sup>4</sup>

Cosmetically inclined physicians had a strong motive to fly in the face of moral censure. Christian authorities attached to aesthetic practices a sinful component, as they led the Christian soul to perform devilishly sinful deceptions that superimposed their own image upon God's work. The particularities occasioned by such sins are moralized in detail in doctrinal treatises and confessionals. The overwhelming insistence with which one should ignore the aesthetic pleasures of one's body, or the desire for beauty in that body, reaffirms a (somewhat unhygienic) Christian spiritual ideal, echoed in such a literary example as Mary of Egypt. Christian works stridently condemned cosmetics, but a certain laxity in the morals of dress may be perceived in regards to one's rank and station (Sánchez Herrero 285). The leniency in dress code might serve as an aperture into other corporal domains. Both Siraisi and Green suggest that the "large number of gynecological remedies and cosmetics [...] perhaps implies an extensive practice among women and a situation in which upper-class males were prepared to spend frequently and generously for the medical treatment of their wives and daughters" (Siraisi 278; Green, *Women's* 62). Within the fictitious world of the *Celestina*, all its female characters –regardless of wealth or social station– presume a working knowledge of the use of cosmetics. Melibea falsely confesses to her mother, Alisa, that Celestina's second visit was to sell her a bit of *solimán* (mercuric chloride), a lie readily accepted by the mother. Lucrecia is corrupted by Celestina with the promise of gold hair dye and a breath freshener. Elicia launches a critique of Melibea's stomach churning, cosmetically enhanced beauty; her apprenticeship to the "maestra de hazer perfumes y açeites" makes clear her knowledge of the subject. Adding to Areúsa's understanding of cosmetics is the reference to the excessively dirty "mudas," a "sorte d'onguent dont les femmes se servent pour ôter les taches du visage" [type of ointment that women use to hide facial blemishes] (Oudin, *Tesoro de las dos lenguas* 686). Most of the standard editions and translations of the *Celestina* correctly identify the word as a cosmetic, although none go into the detail of the *Tesoro*. This specificity invites further reflection on the nature of Melibea's make-up. The cosmetic interpretation of the word favors an association between the "mudas" and those "cosas que por reverencia de la mesa dexo de decir" [things that out of respect for the table I leave off saying], since both symbolically hide or omit what is less than pleasing. Visual disgust, which leads to gustatory displeasure, precedes the first reference and reinforces the second. Melibea's presumed lack of youth and beauty then follows as a sort of amplification of that initial visual aversion. Areúsa's outburst, far from merely slighting her would-be rival, reveals a profound understanding of the perverse nature of cosmetics. "Mudas" conceal one's facial imperfections to engage

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<sup>4</sup> Nicaise's edition of the *Chirurgie de Maitre Henri de Mondeville* may be found in the Bibliothèque National de France's webpage; the English translations are adapted from Leonard D. Rosenman. I have cited both the online edition and English translation, respectively.

(with the aid of money) in a visual seduction. This is essentially the view that Gossy proposes when she argues for makeup as a strategy that “play[s] into the fantasies of what makes a woman desirable, so that the woman can gain power through attracting and marrying a man [...]” (50). Cosmetics’ nefarious qualities are contained not only in the thousand filthy, unspeakable things that comprise its makeup, but also in the sinister objectives for which they are used. This distended awareness of cosmetic knowledge thus emphasizes a threat that extends throughout the female community of *La Celestina* and exposes an aspect of its social and moral decay.

The use of cosmetics in the late middle ages, or any age, may be understood given its symbolic application. It is a means to effect upon or enhance one’s identity (Cabré, “Cosmetics” 173). Because of these properties, it is unsurprising that they appear in medical discourse. Ancient writers bequeathed a certain knowledge about practical aesthetics, which seems to have been forgotten in the early middle ages. Contributions from the vast tradition of Arabic medicine within the Iberian Peninsula cannot be ignored (Rashdall 117-18). In the twelfth century, there is a burgeoning of beauty treatments found within medical treatises, appearing under the rubric “ornatus” or “decoratus.” These terms were used in learned contexts to refer to the ways one could change the body’s appearance naturally or through objects or clothes (Moulinier-Brogi 2; Cabré, “Cosmetics” 173). A growth in the number of manuscripts dealing with cosmetics occurs in the thirteenth century, despite the fact that both medical and moral texts hesitate to approve of its application. The first Latin witnesses of these treatises appear in Salerno within the *Catholica magistri Salerni*, as well as the *De ornatu mulierum*, which became associated with the Trotula texts. Later witnesses were found in the Arabic translations of Rhazes and Avicenna, among others. Kamarneh published in 1965 his report on the first cosmetic treatise in Spain, a tenth-century Arabic treatise written by Abu al-Qasim Khalaf ibn ‘Abbas al-Zahrawi (Abulcasis, d. ca. 1013). Abu al-Qasim’s *Kitab al Tasrif* was translated in the twelfth century by Gerard of Cremona, and used extensively by Guy de Chauliac. Less well known is the purportedly lost *Kitab al-Zina*, argued by Kuhne Brabant to be contained within the *Kitab al iqtisad* by Abu Marwan ibn Zuhr (Abenzoar, ca. 1090-1162). Although more extensive than other treatises, its presence within the Western European medical tradition is not well known. Regardless of their provenance, one sees a plethora of works on beauty care appear during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A preliminary bibliography produced by Jean Luis Flandrin listed over seventeen different authors and twenty cosmetic works (25-29). Although the works he cites are particular to France, one might presume the Iberian Peninsula to have shared equally in the search for earthly aesthetics. Within the surgeries and other medical compendia included in María Teresa Herrera’s *Textos y concordancias electrónicos del corpus médico español*, no one text solely may be assigned a cosmetic value, yet many of the rubrics and recipes listed within these works treat cosmetic matters. In discussing the nature of cosmetological treatises, most distinguish them from other scientific treatises because of their fundamentally empirical nature (Cabré, “Cosmetics,” 174; Green,

*Trotula* 14; M. Martin 99). Recipes available for skin, hair, nails, and axilla list extensive pharmacological ingredients. Most are plant-based, although mineral and animal-based products also were common.<sup>5</sup> These ingredients then comprise a myriad of prescriptions, and take the form of ointments, depilatories, wax-based creams, scented and tinted waters, and dyes.

The prevalent use of cosmetics among women fast became a topic for moralist discourse, both inside and out of the Peninsula. Francesc Eiximenis (c.1340-1409) was quick to note the differences between God-given and cosmetically-acquired beauty. Eiximenis's Valencian contemporary, Vicens Ferrer (1350-1419), scathingly notes:

Aci ha-n'i nenguna (dona) que es meta en la cara afaits, e muda, o pelador, o la cara del diable? Com se lleven aquella, muda ab tanta dolor, e han aigua de serps e de llangardaixos. ¡Oh, gran pecat [fan] les que fan estes vanitats per complaure als hòmens (183; qtd. in Iradiel 67) [Is there here any lady among us who does not wear cosmetics or cream on her face, or uses depilatories, or *cara de diable*? How they sorrowfully take off that cream, and put on snake and lizard water. Oh, they sin greatly those who act so vainly, in order to please men].

The serious comments of these Christian moralists provide counterpoints to the more charming notes of the *Roman de la Rose*. Wildly popular, seven manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have found a place in Spanish libraries. In printed form it is thought to have circulated to a much greater extent, and perhaps even been known by Fernando de Rojas (J. H. Martin 79-89). The *Roman de la Rose* depicts a *vielle* who gives advice on a myriad of topics, including the use of make-up, ointments, hair dyes, a remedy for alopecia, bad breath, instructions on the art of décolletage, and the use of a make-shift brassiere. The exchange humorously transmits the sexual wiles of aged experience to girlish youth, but a misogynistic attitude invests the exchange with the deceptive purpose of these female endeavors (vv. 13278-70; Jacquart & Thommassett 112-13; Moulinier-Brogi 5).<sup>6</sup>

Woman's seductions and trickery are exposed further in the 1495 Castilian translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*.

E avn que todas estas cosas tengan mucho trabajan en quanto pueden que sobre todos estos dones que la natura les otorgo que por su industria & apercibimiento ellas añaden otros mas & mayores apostamientos a fin de

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Balard's "Importation des épices" studies the ingredients listed in prescriptions found in four French treatises for hair and skin remedies, and locates their source within fourteenth-and-fifteenth-century French and Italian apothecary and cargo ship inventories. The study notes the relative amounts of the materials imported, their import duties, and their source.

<sup>6</sup> Verses from the *Roman de la Rose* are taken from the Livre de poche edition by Armand Strubel (1992).

alcançar delos ombres aquello que ellas quieren: & si veen que en alguna cosa la natura fallescio luego vnas con otras han sus consejos & buscan por sus artes como aquellas menguas sean encobiertas emendando las hasta traer las cosas a sus propositos [...] Pues para qué fablare dela que tiene las manos hinchadas & pecas en el rostro & nuues en los ojos. E para otros tales fallescimientos [...] ellas son muy grandes melezinaderas sin llamar a Ypocras ni al físico Galieno (*Cayda de principes* I, xviii, f. xxir) [And even though they may have these things in abundance, they strive as much as they can to go beyond the gifts that nature gave them. Through their industry and their awareness they add more and greater adornments to get from men that which they most desire. And if they see that nature failed them in anything, then they together take counsel and look to how their failings may be hidden by their arts, thus repairing their flaws until their object is accomplished [...] So, why should I speak of the one with swollen hands and freckles and rheumy eyes? And for other similar failings [...] they are great medicine women, without having a need to call upon Hippocrates or Galen the physician].

Having listed among the more uncommon of their medical endeavors the ability to make the hunchback straight and the lame walk, Boccaccio enumerates several more sophisticated embellishments that are typically found in medical treatises: dying and curling hair, removing unwanted follicles, and the use of ivory dentures or teeth whiteners. Curiously, the Castilian translation notes both Hippocrates and Galen as doctors whose expertise has been surpassed by women. Placing their abilities beyond that of the two most renowned medical authorities of the Middle Ages, and specifically associating their expertise to the manipulation of man, thus exposes woman as a threat to masculine authority. The impact of Boccaccio's condemnation may be felt in the fifteenth-century Castilian *Corbacho*, which expands upon Boccaccio's *De casibus*.<sup>7</sup> Neither the Latin treatise nor the 1495 translation of Boccaccio's work go into the medical detail seen in the Castilian *Corbacho*, which includes a detailed recipe for making soap from the tallow of deer kidneys. This medical recipe whitened the nature of the skin, an act implicitly in connivance with the devil (Twomey 146). The archpriest's medical expertise, coupled with his awareness of women's ability to disease men, is certainly the cause for detailed warnings against feminine wiles. Martínez de Toledo shows an intimate knowledge of several recipes used to bleach and soften skin, and to reduce face wrinkles (158-59), and of other machinations used to create a feminine ideal (161-62). But the women in the Castilian *Corbacho*, instead of forming a community of aiders and abettors, enviously attack

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<sup>7</sup> The Talaveran archpriest may certainly have had access to the Latin treatise during his two year sojourn in Rome, although it is also possible he consulted Pero López de Ayala's translation. Ayala's translation, curiously enough, was published in 1495, three years before the Martínez de Toledo *incunabula*.

those who may be prettier. The object of cosmetic artistry, thus, is reviled:

Pues, yo vi a su madre vender toquillas e capillejos; muchas vezes vino a mi casa diziéndome si quería comprar alvaneguillas la vieja de su madre. E vereis su fija cuántos meneos lieva [...] Pues ¿si lieva blanquete? ¡A la fe fasta el ojo! Pues ¿arrebol? ¡Fartura! Las cejas bien peladas, altas, puestas en arco, los ojos alcoholados; la frente toda pelada y aun toda la cara –grandes e chicos pelos– con pelador de pez, trementina, e azeite de manzanilla; los beços muy bermejos, no de lo natural, sinón de pie de palomino grana, con el brasil con alumbre mezclado. Los dientes anozegados o fregados con mambre, yerva que llaman de India; las uñas alheñadas e grandes, e cresçidas, más que las de los merguellites, así como de blancheta, e aun las trae encañutadas en oro; la cara reluziente como de una espada [...] Mudadas para la cara diez vezes se las pone, una tras otra, al día una vegada, e quando puestas non las tiene paresçe mora de India (Gerli 161-62) [Well, I saw her mother sell shawls and headgear. Her old mother, she came to my house many times asking me if I wanted to buy hair nets. You'll see her daughter how she struts about [...] Well, does she wear white powder on her face? Truly, up to her eyes! And, blush? In excess! Her eyebrows [are] well tweezed, high and arched, her eyes made up. Her forehead [is] scraped clean, and even her entire face –the big and tiny hairs– with *pelador de pez*, turpentine, and chamomile oil. Her lips [are] very red, not natural but from red dove feet mixed with brazil wood and alum. Her teeth were brushed with nutmeg or scrubbed with styrax, an herb from India. Her nails [are] stained with henna and grown long, longer than those of her pinkies, also stained white, and she even covers them with gold. Her face [is] shiny like a sword [...]. She puts ten different foundation creams on her face, one after the other, once each day, and when she doesn't have them on she looks like an Indian heathen].

The presumed rivalry between the female narrator and the object of her derision bears close comparison with the *Celestina's* Areúsa and Melibea.<sup>8</sup> The similarities in setting and argument in the *Corbacho* intimate an equal social standing between vilifier and vilified, which is modified in Rojas's text. In the *Celestina*, the hostile rivalry between girls of unequal social standing manifests the instability of a society in flux. Areúsa is no household servant, but her condemnation of the relations between servant and master in act nine exposes the disintegrating social structure upon which these relations were based.<sup>9</sup> When Areúsa expresses her disdain for the mean and ungrateful

<sup>8</sup> Noted by Lida de Malkiel 682-83; Cejador II: 31; Castro Guisasola 175; Severin, ed. 226n15.

<sup>9</sup> These ideas are, of course, motivated by Maravall's understanding of the social and moral crisis and transformation within fifteenth century Castile (20). Alison Weber's "Celestina and the discourses of servitude" notes Rojas's awareness of the ambivalent relations marking the frayed social, economic and



lady, she does so not only through language but also through competitive artifice. This indubitably lessened the force of act nine's social critique, as the boasts of a teen-age prostitute would not have had been taken seriously by the work's original audience. The petty female bickering within Areúsa's harangue removes from it much of the tensions of class conflict. It reduces the matter to sexual rivalry with an ultimate objective of male seduction. The cosmetic commonalities of all women thus place women of all social classes on a common playing field. As all of *La Celestina*'s female characters are subsumed within the world of cosmetic artistry, the rivalry exposes the destructive force that all women may wreak upon society through the use of cosmetics.

Several studies directly or indirectly discuss cosmetics in *Celestina*. Modesto Lazo's study *El laboratorio de Celestina* includes a list of ingredients found in her laboratory; yet the plebeian quality of Areúsa's ingredients presumably is the cause for their absence. Leslie Twomey's excellent article on perfumes in *Celestina* describes a variety of ingredients as remembered by Pármeno from his days with the old bawd. Here again the list omits those ingredients given by Areúsa. Paloma Gómez's *La rebotica de la Celestina* faithfully lists all those medical remedies used by Celestina, which may still be of use to "las mujeres de hoy" [women today], but fails to note Areúsa's apportion to the cosmetic or pharmacological discussion. Moral de Calatrava's insights on the transmission of medical information between university-trained physicians and unlettered women reveal just how tenuous was the divide between an authority's theoretical knowledge and empirical practice. Pérez Carrasco's more general "Afeites y cosméticos en la Edad Media" makes clear the negative agency of woman's practice through his list of the many misogynist discourses chastising women for their beauty –or for their desire for beauty. The particularities of Areúsa's commentary thus are still in need of explanation.

Complicating our understanding of this commentary is the transformation it underwent in the early editions of the work. Standard editions of the *Celestina* keep the emendation of a renaissance editor, who added some "tostadas e higos passados" [toast and overripe figs] to the already envisaged "hiel y miel" [gall and honey]. The words, as they appear in the 1500 Toledo edition, "con vnas y con otras cosas" [with some and some other things], when modified by the 1502 Seville edition's use of "vuas tostadas" [parched grapes (or alternately) some toast] may have caused the text

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ethical boundaries of the master-servant relationship, while Gerli's "Dismembering the Body Politic" exposes Melibea's body, as seen in act nine, to question the notions of entitlement and authority within social class.

to suffer a second mutation. Nearly all the early translations of the work refer to grapes.<sup>10</sup> Mabbe's 1631 translation here serves as example:

O sister! Hadst thou seen her as I have seen her, I tell thee no lie, if though shouldst have met her fasting, thy stomach would have taken such a loathing, that all that day though wouldst not have been able to have eaten any meat. All the year long she is mew'd up at home, where she is daubed over with a thousand sluttish slobber-slabbers; all which, forsooth, she must endure, for once perhaps going abroad in a twelvemonth to be seen: she anoints her face with gall and honey, with parched grape and figs crushed and pressed together, with many other things which, for manner's sake, and reverence of the table, I omit to mention. It is their riches, that make such creatures as she to be accounted fair; it is their wealth, that causeth them to be thus commended, and not the graces, and goodly features of their bodies: For, she has such breasts, being a maid, as if she had been the mother of three children; and are for all the world, like nothing more than two great pompeans, or big bottled gourds. Her belly I have not seen, but judging it by the rest, I verily believe it, to be slack and as flaggy, as a woman of fifty year old. I know not what Calisto should see in her, that for her sake, he should forsake the love of others, whom he may with great ease obtain, and far more pleasure enjoy: unless it be, that like the palate that is distasted, he thinketh sour things the sweetest.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> These include the 1506 Italian translation, the 1527 French translation, and the 1631 English translation by James Mabbe. Only Kaspar Barth's 1624 *Pornoboscodidasculus Latinus* translation keeps toast among the list of ingredients:

AREUSA: Atqui tu eam non tantum introspeixisti quantum ego, soror. Deus mihi iratus sit si mentior, si quo ieiuniorum die illam videris, non poteris integro illo quicquam cibi sumere nausea et fastidio. Totum annum inclusa sedet mille deformibus maculis corpus vitiata. Cum semel in publicum proditura est ubi videri possit, caput melle et felle obfucat, ficibus passis, pane asso, mille talibus pigmentis et polituris quarum vocabula praesentis mensae verecundia vel efferre prohibet. Divitiae suae istas tales speciosas videri faciunt, non venustates corporum. Ita bene mihi sit, mamillas ista habet quae quidem virgo sit ac si iam ter peperisset grandes instar cucurbitarum. Ventrem ipsius non vidi quidem, tamen comparatione caeterorum facile iudicium capere possum non minus flaccidum et rugis confectum habere quam anum quinquaginta annos iam supergressam. Nescio quid intemperiarum Callistonem agat in conspecta semel ista tantopere furere, cum aliae sint quarum potiri minori negotio possit quaeque sane maiores ipsi delicias facere norint. Verum gustus semel corruptus amarum frequenter pro dulci *aestimat*" (Fernández 189).

<sup>11</sup> The Mabbe translation may be found among Miguel Garci-Gómez's *cibertextos*: <http://mgarci.aas.duke.edu/cibertextos/>. While Mabbe is an indispensable aid for the understanding of certain cosmetic terms, subsequent translations of *La Celestina* are my own.

Later *Tragicomedia* editions (1507, 1514) employ the indefinite article, but preference for the alternate reading is strengthened by the sixteenth-century commentary of the *Celestina comentada*, which notes that the “hiel y miel, [y] uvas tostadas e higos passados” [gall and honey, and raisins and ripened figs] are a reference to the “ciertos afeites o mudas que las mujeres hazen con estas cosas” [types of cosmetics that women make with these things] (331). The *Celestina comentada*, although loath to enter into a discussion of cosmetics, concludes with a series of legal and moral condemnations of its uses. Of the four (or five) ingredients listed by Areúsa to be used in Melibea’s make-up, only “hiel” [gall] overlaps with those found in Celestina’s laboratory. Pármeno mentions it among an extensive list of cosmetics:

Tenía una cámara llena de alambiques, de redomillas, de barrilejos de barro, de vidrio, de arambre, de estaño, hechos de mill faciones; hazía solimán, afeyte cosido, argentadas, bujelladas, cerillas, llanillas, unturillas, lustres, lucentores, clarimientes, alvalines y otras aguas de rostro, de rassuras de gamones, de corteza, de spantalobos, de taraguntia, de hieles, de agraz, de mosto, destilados y açucarados (111) [She had a room full of distillation vessels, wide mouthed and narrow necked flasks made of clay, glass, copper, or tin, made in a thousand different ways. She made sublimate, cooked-up make up, face-paints, lipsticks, *llanillas*, lotions, waters to make the face glisten, to cleanse the skin, *alvalines*, and other tonics, made of shavings of daffodil, wood bark, cittibush, tarragon, galls, sour grapes, [and] grape must, distilled and sweetened with sugar].

Laza Palacio, quoting Laguna, notes how gall is nothing but yellow bile, a hot and subtle humor found in the body. Its use is to make hot, subtle and efficacious ointments. Apart from a particular aphrodisiac, which presumably would be of no use to the still virginal Melibea, and a remedy to improve one’s eyesight, no remedy listed in his *Laboratorio* would be worthy of a young prostitute’s remembrance (141-42). Gómez’s *Rebotica*, however, places the galls used by Celestina within the larger context of lotions prepared by her, and used to brighten and clean the face. Substantiating this claim is Alfonso Chirino’s compendium *Menor daño de medicina*. Gall is used generally in a recipe for fading scars [29r], and specifically as a cosmetic for removing facial discolorations, stains, or other scars [189v].<sup>12</sup>

Honey appears three times in *La Celestina*. In addition to the reference given by Areúsa, Celestina mentions it twice, but never in a medicinal application. Her references are either symbolic, in regards to Melibea’s rigor turning into sweetness, and in the old saw, “[p]orque quien la miel trata, siempre se le pega dello” (225)

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<sup>12</sup> The *Menor daño* and subsequent Castilian medical texts can be found in María Teresa Herrero’s *Corpus médico*. The relevant recipes in the *Menor daño* prepare cow gall in conjunction with rinsed broad beans [29r, 189v]. This is perhaps the same remedy referred to by Bernard Metge in *Lo somni*, which I quote on page 20.

[Since he who deals in honey will always benefit from it]. One cannot readily determine honey's medical value, given its property as a preservative.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, honey is listed numerous times within a cosmetic context in Mondeville's *Chirurgie*. In the chapter on the beautification of men –also applicable, Mondeville notes, to women– honey is twice used as an ingredient for treating excessive redness and blemishes (582-83; 750-51). In regards to women in particular, it is part of a recipe to feign youth, claimed by Mondeville to be an objective particular to courtesans and old women (593; 760). In his *Antidotary* [surgical pharmacopeia] honey appears as a weak skin cleanser, and is listed almost without fail in poultices and ablutions for the cleansing of infected ulcers, wounds, or abscesses. It is also listed among the agents used to treat warm dyscrasias, a term originally used to describe an imbalance of bodily humors, but which Mondeville uses to discuss complications arising from wounds (841; 1027).<sup>14</sup>

The combination of honey and gall is mentioned only sporadically in medical treatises. Within the *Sumario de la medicina romanceada*, they appear as a remedy for *noctilupia*, an eye ailment that blinds the patient only at night. Mondeville's *Chirurgie* notes how eating honey is useful in the digestion of bile (605; 773), and would thus suggest the ingredients have somewhat of an opposite nature. Honey and bile appear in different recipes used for treating infection (611; 778), and together in the treatment of a concave ulcer:

Si grâce à ces deux sortes de médicaments appliqués sur l'ulcère celui-ci et le virus sont suffisamment desséchés, on provoquera la formation de la chair et la cicatrisation avec les médicaments qui sont décrits dans l'Antidotaire. Mais si ces remèdes ne font ni diminuer ni augmenter l'ulcère et le virus, ils ne sont pas dessiccateurs par rapport au corps ou au membre ulcéré; il faut alors y ajouter quelque abstersif comme du Miel et quelque astringent comme des Galles, de l'Alun, etc. (420; 588) [If thanks to the two types of medicines applied to this ulcer and the virus they are sufficiently dried, then, with the medicines described in the Antidotary, the regeneration of skin and the formation of scar tissue will be promoted. But if these remedies cause neither the shrinking nor the enlargement of

<sup>13</sup> The 1515 translation of the *Aromatariorum* compendium, *Compendio de los boticarios*, notes how “la miel tiene natura de conseruar todas las cosas en si puestas mas quel açucar: y mas que otra cosa q[u]quiera del mundo/ y porende las co[n]feciones y letuarios de miel/ mas luengo tie[m]po duran que de açucar” [41v] [Honey has a preservative nature [that conserves] all things placed in it, more so than sugar and more so than any other thing in the world. Therefore, honey confections or electuaries last longer than those made with sugar].

<sup>14</sup> “[L]e Miel simple, il purifie comme celui-ci et en outre il fortifie: on l'emploie avantageusement à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur contre les dyscrasies chaudes” [The simple ingredient honey purifies as well as fortifies. One may use it advantageously both inside and outside for warm dyscrasias] (841; 1027).

the ulcer and virus, they are not desiccative for the body or ulcer. It is necessary then to add an abstersive like honey or an astringent like gall, or alum, etc.]

In this case, then, the properties of the honey serve to cleanse the skin while the gall works on the skin like an astringent.<sup>15</sup> Under the best of circumstances, one might see these types of medicines applied to the problem skin of youth; given the disgust provoked by the sight of Melibea, one might assume her wracked by an infectious skin disease.

Neither grapes nor figs appear outside of Areúsa's quotation, although there is a passing reference to *higueruela*, an herbaceous plant from the papilionaceae family, with ternate leaves and bluish flowers somewhat akin to clover. When taken separately, the contribution of figs and grapes to the medical field does not resemble at first anything cosmetic. Figs were used in Mondeville to treat several different types of bites, to combat poisons, and for the removal of warts.<sup>16</sup> In the Spanish translation of Bernard of Gordon's *Lilium medicinae*, figs appear seventy times. Among their many applications, they are used to reduce fever, to improve one's eyesight and in a recipe to treat a cutaneous form of anthrax. Other Spanish treatises note their benefits in remedying chest colds, soothing sore throats and mouths, and treating sebaceous cysts.<sup>17</sup> Lansky and Paavilainen have documented the medicinal uses of figs as found in twenty different authors from the classical to the early modern period. As a cosmetic, figs combat wrinkles, as noted in Pliny's *Natural History*, Albertus Magnus's *Book on Growing Things*, Loenhart Fuchs's *Notable Commentaries on the History of Plants*, and Gregorio López's *Treasure of Medicines*. They treat pimples, as noted also in Pliny, Ishaq Israeli's *Complete Works*, Ibn al-Baytar's *Comprehensive Book of Simple Drugs and Foods*, and Rufinus de Rizado's *Herbal* (142-56). A combination honey and ripe fig essence also was used by Rhazes as an anti-wrinkle mask (Leveque-Agret 157). Villalobos's *Sumario de la medicina romanceada* rhymes the following treatment to make one's countenance beautiful and to remove pock marks and freckles:

Quien quiere hazer a su gesto hermoso  
 Costriña la sangre que venga aza el  
 con vino y manjar muy subtil y sabroso  
 el higo para esto es muy marauilloso

<sup>15</sup> These same properties seem to be in play when used for the clean and protect venomous wounds (447; 613).

<sup>16</sup> Dried, ripe, or unadulterated figs are used to treat weasel bites (441; 607), dog bites, and scorpion stings (449; 617). They are listed in the treatment of poisoned persons (452; 619), and their essence is used in the removal of warts (644; 812).

<sup>17</sup> See Herrera's *Corpus Médico*. Examples of the remedies listed may be found in these and other works therein compiled: *Lilio de medicina* [3r-v], *Libro de medecina llamado macer* [16r], *Summa de la flor de cirugía* [159v].

y ell agua de datil y cibos con miel  
 y si de viruelas ay hoyos nel gesto  
 vntalde con queso y con miel y con sal  
 y vngüento cetrino es muy bueno para esto  
 si pecas o paño en el rostro esta puesto  
 colirio de mirra aprouecha a este mal [22v]

[Whoever wishes one's face to be beautiful should constrain the blood from flowing towards it. With wine and food both subtle and tasty, the fig in this case is wonderfully good, as is date water and honeyed foods. And if from chicken pox one's face is marked, use an ointment from cheese, honey, and salt. And an ointment of *cetrina* [cerrusite, camphor, and oil mixed with citron] is very good for this. And if one has freckles or discolorations on one's face, a myrrh wash is beneficial].

Unfortunately, figs appear in the rhymed verses as a comestible to be ingested rather than as an ointment to remedy imperfections. Many treatises note how figs are salubrious in nature, and cite Galen as the source of this informational nugget. Toast remains remarkably elusive as a companion to the fig, but the figs' close association to grapes and raisins makes them medically synonymous.<sup>18</sup> Together they appear as a treatment of infectious skin diseases. Decoctions of figs and grapes are listed in the treatments of fistulas caused by abscesses, and melancholic apostemes (Mondeville 722, 897).<sup>19</sup> In the *Libro de experimentos medicos*, figs and raisins appear within a larger recipe that uses numerous ingredients. The slow distillation of these ingredients creates a panacea-like drug able to cure simple cuts, fistulas, and when ingested, prolong life.<sup>20</sup> Dry figs, raisins, and honey are all simple ingredients listed by Mondeville as "maturative," i.e., which bring the affected body part to a point in the healing process where they may be cured.

The combination of figs and raisins or grapes thus intensifies the malicious and comic intent of Areúsa's words. Given the nature in which the *Celestina* was first nurtured, the university-educated reader would surely have laughed at the wonderfully wicked description made by such an arrogantly beautiful whore. With this description, Areúsa criticizes Melibea

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, I have come across only one reference to figs and bread (but not toast) that may echo the same spiteful sentiment in Areúsa's words. The Castilian verse translation of Guy de Chauliac's *Chirurgie, Tratado de cirugía*, claims that a decoction of dried figs and bread may be used for the curing process of aposthemes, since they require suppurative and maturative measures [178r].

<sup>19</sup> Among the prescriptions given for "treating hot, thick and violent aposthemes," he includes the following: "Rp. Figues sèches grasses 6, raisins secs Once 1, deux têtes entières d'Ail mondées, grains de Poivre 12, Sel Dr. 2, triturez, ajoutez Huille vieille Onces 2, Vinaigre Onces 2, Levain très actif en quantité égale à la moitié du tout." (776; 965). [Recipe: 6 plump dry figs, 1 oz of dry raisins, 2 clean whole cloves of garlic, 12 seeds of peppers, 2 dr. of salt. Grind and add 2 oz. each of old oil and vinegar, and an amount of active yeast equal to half the total weight of all the rest].

<sup>20</sup> Please see María Teresa Herrera's *Corpus médico*. The relevant information is found between 101r-02v.

not only for her use of disgusting medicines, but also because of the even more unpleasant medical maladies these cosmetics sought to hide. Yet, by uncovering Melibea's secret, Areúsa reveals one of her own. In the same manner that Celestina and the servants' rhetorical use forces a recognition of the alien nature of their speech, Areúsa's medical knowledge underscores the uncomfortable position of the would-be female practitioner. The servants' alien and dissonant speech addresses their disenfranchisement from and dissatisfaction with society, and is analogous to the anxieties felt over women's potential for medical practice. As laws unknowingly reveal the attitudes toward society's unwanted practices, the almost universal condemnation of women's cosmetic use suggests an almost universal female working knowledge of cosmetics. This working knowledge, presumably, may readily transform into medical practice. It is this precisely that Dies de Calatayud expresses in the introduction to his *Flos de Medicines o receptes del Tesor de Beutat*,

Imaginando que a vosotras, muy honorables señoras, yo haga algún servicio con el presente libro, os lo he compuesto de diversas recetas que he sacado del Tesoro de la Beldad, cuyas más nobles y probadas, por experiencia de algunas notables personas, escogí. Es por esto que, en el presente libro, titulado Flores de las dichas recetas, señoras, nos ha parecido creer que en él encontraréis lo necesario para procurar la belleza, la gentileza y la pureza de vuestras personas. Aquéllas de vosotras, entre las otras mujeres, que hayan sido bastantemente dotadas por Dios, de tal gracia se pueden alegrar, pero el libro os lo he hecho y compuesto para que de él os podáis servir y ayudar para el cuidado y socorro de vuestras personas y gentilezas cuando, por algunos accidentes que ocurre, veáis las dichas gracias disminuidas. Suplicando a vuestras benignidades, señoras, que toméis mi servicio con agrado, no por lo que su valor merece, sino según la buena afición y voluntad con que el dicho servicio os ha sido hecho por mí. Y como en el dicho Tesoro, de donde saqué esta composición, se hace mención de baños y sudaderas, de substancias depilatorias y otras cosas para limpiar la suciedad del cuerpo, y vosotras sabéis ya la manera de hacer estas cosas, he procurado no tratar sino algunos baños y sudaderas que son medicinales para algunas cosas necesarias de saber y hacer, y de alguna singular manera de depilatorios; y también de la belleza de la cara y otras partes del cuerpo, como ya veréis en las presentes recetas (qtd. in Pérez Samper 135-36) [Thinking that I may serve you, very honorable ladies, with the present book, I have composed it from various recipes that I have taken from the *Tesoro de la Beldad*, recipes that I have chosen from among the more noble and tested from the experience of some notable persons. This is the reason why, in the present book titled *Flores* of the aforementioned recipes, my ladies, it has seemed to us that you may find in it that which is necessary to achieve the beauty, gentility, and purity of your persons. Those of you, among other women, who have been sufficiently graced by God, may be pleased

by such a blessing, but I made and composed the book for you so that from it you may be served and aided in the care and succor of your gentility and persons, when, on account of an accident that happens, you may find your said blessings diminished. Beseeching your benevolencies, ladies, that you accept my service gladly, not for what it is worth, but according to the good wishes and devotion with which the said service has been made by me. And as the said *Tesoro* from which I have taken this work mentions baths and steam baths, depilatory substances, and other things to cleanse the body's impurities, and you know already the way to do these things, I have tried to deal with but a few baths and steam baths that are medicinal [and] necessary to know and do for some things, and of some extraordinary ways of removing hair, and also of the beauty of the face and other body parts, as you shall see in the following recipes].

Much like the surgeon noted by Mondeville, Dies de Calatayud knows how to ply his trade. This is evidently a recipe book for women of a social station, who have resources available necessary for such a volume of cosmetic recipes. But, even these honorable and genteel women are in the cosmetic know. To distinguish himself from the more ordinary household products, Dies de Calatayud imparts his own extraordinary, *medicinal* cosmetics. These *medical* cosmetics, after all, have the advantage of their "noble" recipes, and have been tested by the "experience of notable persons." In contrast, Areúsa's household ingredients list what Iradiel has noted as a "cosmética alternativa" (66). This term, which Iradiel creates because the products used are primarily natural and can be processed at home, designates a gender divide. The home remedies that women provide do not appear strikingly different from those by university-trained doctors. Bernard Metge, for example, describes women's cosmetic activities in the following manner:

[les fembres] aprenen d'estil·lar, de fer untaments, de conèixer herbes e saber llur virtut, e la propietat de les figues seques, del vermell de l'ou, del pa fresc de pura farina pastat, de les faves seques e de la llur aigua, de la sang e sagí de diverses animals, e de la llet de la somera (108) [(Women) learn how to distil, to make ointments, to learn about herbs and know their properties, and of the properties of dried figs, and the yolk of the egg, of fresh bread made from pure flour, and of dried broad beans and their water, of the blood and fat of animals, and of ass's milk].

This list of domestic ingredients includes many of these same products listed in the surgeries and other previously mentioned treatises. The examples listed by Metge, the recipes alluded to by Martínez de Toledo, and Areúsa's ingredients form a barely tangible world of women's ordinary practices in the household context. They are, as Cabré suggests, a potentially wealthy source of information with which to look at



women's health care practices ("Women" 38). They are, moreover, instances of female medicinal knowledge, which instead of forming a parallel world of alternative medicine, cast shadows upon the increasingly masculine world of the medical authority. These findings, preliminary though they are, confirm a rivalry not between women, but between women and the masculine medical world.

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