"Wining and Dining at Celestina's Table in Fernando de Rojas' *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*"

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The act of procuring food and beverage and the depiction of the spaces where food is exchanged and consumed are ubiquitous in the historical and literary archive and their impact is felt cognitively and epistemologically as well as sociologically. Notwithstanding this intrinsic centrality, the scrutiny of the various aspects of the materiality of food and drink continue to remain as relatively marginal topics within scholarly discourse. In the last few decades, nevertheless, scholarly interest in food and eating has extraordinarily increased and attention has been devoted to the dynamics of social relations as enacted in communal meals and banquets.[1] Thus, remarkably, even though in Plato's *Gorgias* Socrates had openly disparaged rhetoric in comparison to dialectic by equating the first to mere and base cooking, it is in the *milieu* of an eating and drinking feast that the most famous of Plato's dialectical dialogues takes place: the *Symposium.*

Paul Friedlander affirmed in 1969: "Someday when the history of Platonism is written, one of its most important chapters will have to deal with the influence of the *Symposium* on later ages" (3, 33-34). It is my impression that he is right in more ways than one: not only has Plato's dialogue been more influential than we have hitherto admitted in medieval culture, but the act itself of the *symposium*[2] and its performance have also been conceptually an important component of the development of cultural discourse throughout the medieval and early modern period as well as a trope of the process of acquiring knowledge through conversation coupled, of course, with the imbibing of wine.

Consequently, my purpose here is to revisit the discussion of the possible links between two very famous *symposia*, the one hosted by Agathon in Athens immortalized by Plato in the dialogue I just mentioned, the *Symposium,* and the banquet which takes

[1] Scholarly discourse is now taking food seriously and all disciplines seem to have been affected by this trend, from philosophy to sociology. David M. Kaplan in *The Philosophy of Food* argues for the pertinence of food as a subject of philosophical argumentation while in the field of Social Psychology Paul Rozin has been influential in highlighting the importance of food choices. In Anthropology one can refer to Claude Lévi-Strauss pioneer work and to Mary Douglas' findings on the symbolisms of food in *Purity and Danger* as well as in the compilation of her collected works in *Food in the Social Order* (1984) while the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu discussed food choices when he examined the broader theme of taste in his 1979 *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (translated in1984 by Richard Nice as *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*). For a more complete assessment of the development of Food Studies as a scholarly discipline see the introduction to the volume *Forging Communities: Food and Representation in Medieval and Early Modern Southwestern Europe*. Ed. Montserrat Piera. University of Arkansas Press, 2018. This sustained rise in the scholarly study of food received a noticeable impetus for the medieval and early modern period with the publication of several pivotal books devoted to the cultural history of food by medieval and early modern historians: Caroline Walker Bynum's landmark study *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*; Paul Freedman' *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*; Massimo Montanari *The Culture of Food*; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Food: A History*; and Melitta Weiss Adamson, *Food in Medieval Times* and *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: A Book of Essays*, among others.

[2] A *symposium* was a drinking party in Ancient Greece. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as "a convivial party (as after a banquet in ancient Greece) with music and conversation" and "a social gathering at which there is free interchange of ideas".

place in Act IX of the 15th-century Iberian text *Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea* or *La Celestina*, composed by Fernando de Rojas and first published in1499.[3]

I am certainly not the first scholar to suggest that there might be similarities between these two texts. Carmen Parrilla already observed that the festive ambiance in the *Tragicomedia*'s ninth act exhibits similarities with the "*convivium*, en su acepción clásica y ciceroniana."(69) In addition, Lee Arthur Gallo defended the Neoplatonism of the text while Kevin Larsen suggested various analogies between Plato's *Symposium* and Rojas' text in his article "Bed and Board: Significant Parallels between Plato's *Symposium* and Rojas *La Celestina*". In spite of these contributions, nevertheless, the consensus among scholars is that Rojas did not know Plato. James Burke, for example, states that "many scholars have doubted that the author(s) of *Celestina* could have had much familiarity with the ideas of Plato" and mentions the fact that while Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* was finished around 1474-75 there is no evidence to prove that Rojas knew of it (115).[4] On the other hand, Nicholas G. Round argues that Plato's dialogue could not have directly influenced the composition of the *Tragicomedia*: "Of the love-philosophy of the *Symposium*, reinterpreted for heterosexual reference, Rojas' lovers know nothing. It seems a reasonable inference that Rojas knew nothing of it either."(105) Thus, according to Round, the few parallel elements between the two works may only be considered coincidental since there is no evidence that the *Symposium* had been read in the Iberian Peninsula before 1500 (105-106). Eloisa Palafox and other scholars that have dealt with food and wine in *La Celestina* follow Round's stance very closely.

Nevertheless, as Étienne Gilson stated, "The more one studies the Middle Ages, the more one notices the polymorphism of the Platonic influence. Plato himself does not appear at all, but Platonism is everywhere; let us say rather that there are Platonisms everywhere." (144) Linde Brocato hypothesizes that Plato's ideas were available in one form or another during Rojas' time and were debated in Iberian academic and intellectual circles (529) and cogently argues for the presence of philosophical ties to Platonism in *La Celestina*:

> Rojas need not have read Greek nor have travelled to Italy to read Plato's writings or to hear about Plato, since there is indeed evidence of the presence in Castile of vernacular translations of Plato, most notably the *Phaedo*. The publication of Ficino's translation in the mid- to late fifteenth century, at a time when Spain's connections with Italy and Italian humanists were quite intense, indicates at least

[3] The first edition was entitled *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* and was published by Fadrique de Basilea in Burgos in 1499. There was no mention of the autor. Two new extant editions with added material and a reference to the name of the autor, Fernando de Rojas, appeared in 1500 (Toledo) and 1501 (Sevilla). In 1502 the work is reedited with a new title, *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea.* This version expands the *Comedia* with five new Acts and an additional prologue. The 1502 first edition of the *Tragicomedia* was lost but a1507 reedition in Zaragoza is extant. The Venice edition of 1517 changes the title to *La Celestina* (Eukene Lacarra, *Como leer 'La Celestina'* Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1990, 29-31).

[4] Other scholars that have noted but ultimately disregarded a possible association between Rojas' text and Plato's dialogue are Louise Fothergill-Payne, "*Celestina* as a Funny Book: A Bakhtinian Reading," *Celestinesca*, 17.2 (1993): 29-51; and Roberto González-Echevarría, *Celestina' Brood: Continuities of the Baroque in Spanish and Latin American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

> the probability that Spanish thinkers and students were more than likely familiar with the intellectual ferment around the recovery of the Platonic corpus (528).[5]

Furthermore, it is revealing that *La Celestina* acquired great popularity in the 16th century precisely during "a period in which Plato and Platonic forms of literary discourse were widely known and translated" (Scott, 26).[6] Therefore, what I am attempting to do here might seem a departure from the scholarly discourse about Rojas' work but, keeping in mind Friedlander and Gilson's assertions, I suggest that there are a certain number of elements that bear comparison and that can shed light not only on the *Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea* but also on the pivotal and radical importance of food and drinking within medieval culture in its myriad of facets.

The Greek symposium was a forum for men of patrician families to carouse with others, to boast about their military or sexual prowess and to engage in political or philosophical debate. Often it also served to celebrate various great events in Hellenic society such as athletic and poetic victories as well as to mark the introduction of young men into aristocratic society. Literary works that describe or take place at a symposium include two Socratic dialogues, Plato's *Symposium* and Xenophon's *Symposium*, as well as a number of Greek poems such as the elegies of Theognis of Megara.[7]

Symposia were usually held in the andrōn (ἀνδρών), the men's quarters of the household. The participants, or "symposiasts", would recline on pillowed couches. Food and wine were served. Entertainment was provided, and depending on the occasion could include games, songs, flute-girls or boys, slaves performing various acts, and hired entertainment. The men of the symposium would discuss a multitude of topics - from philosophy to love and the differences between genders. Undoubtedly, the most famous symposium of all, described in Plato's dialogue of that name (and rather differently in Xenophon's) was hosted by the poet Agathon on the occasion of his first victory at the theater contest of the 416 BC Dionysia. In this particular gathering, the topic of discussion was love. As Martha Nussbaum declares, "The Symposium is a work about passionate erotic love –a fact that would be hard to infer from some of the criticism written about it" (167).[8]

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[5] For general information about the dissemination of Platonic discourse, especially in Italy, see also James Hankins' *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

[6] Rachel Scott suggests a comparative reading between *Celestina* and *Vita delle puttane*, a section (the third *giornata*) of Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, which were meant to be a parody of Platonistic dialogues. Some scholars even suggest the possibility of *Celestina* being the source for Aretino's or at least for Aretino's translator, Fernán Xuárez (Ana Vian Herrero, "El legado de la Celestina en el Aretino espanol: Fernán Suárez y su *Colloquio de las damas*" en *El mundo social y cultural de "La celestina"* Eds. Ignacio Arellano y Jesús Usunáriz (Madrid: Vervuert/Iberoamericana, 2003), 223-254; Donatella Gagliardi, ed. *Coloquio de las damas. Diálogo* Rome/Salerno, 2011, xxvi-xxviii). E. Michael Gerli has also observed the similarities between the *Raggionamenti* and *La celestina* while discussing the collusion of go-betweens and mothers in seducing marriageable daughters (*Celestina: The Ends of Desire*) and argues that in Aretino's character Nanna one finds, in fact, the most audacious manifestation of "the misogynistic portrait of the complicitous mother" (132).

[7] See Palafox (71) and Jeanneret (149) for a more exhaustive listing of texts which exemplify a symposiac setting.

[8] Martha Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato's *Symposium*" *Philosophy and Literature* 3 (1979): 131-72. 167. The nature of the love depicted in Plato's *Symposium* has been and still is a topic hotly debated. Jacques Lacan devoted a extensive commentary to this dialogue (*Seminar VIII: Tranference, 1960-1961*) and other philosophers and thinkers follow him in arguing that we are faced in the Symposium with a cacophony of ideas about love and that "we must, in Lacan's view, take each seriously even as we see them being made fun by various characters in the dialogue" (Fink 62-3). For other

According to Plato's account, the celebration was upstaged by the unexpected entrance of "the toast of the town", the young Alcibiades, dropping in drunken and nearly naked, having just left another symposium. But there was yet another significant "upstaging" in the work, and that is the appearance in the banquet, for the first and only time in Plato's *Dialogues,* of a female character, Diotima, of such superlative attributes that she will not only become the crux of the discussion within the text itself, but will also be morphed into a highly influential and contested figure by later audiences and posterity.

In a Greek symposium, wine was only drunk after dinner, and women were not allowed to attend while in a Roman symposium or *convivium* wine was served before, with and after food was served, and women were allowed to join. The wine was drawn from a *krater*, a large jar designed to be carried by two men, and served from pitchers (*oenochoe*).[9] Certain formalities were observed, most important among which were libations, the pouring of a small amount of wine in honor of various deities or the mourned dead.

Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger, among others, show that daily dining with friends was an established social and cultural institution at Rome. Cicero talks, in his letter to Paetus, of the *convivium* as the ideal setting in which Romans can *con-vivere* (Cicero *Ad Familiares* 9.24.3), that is, live together. It was the optimal *locus* for interaction, conversation and relaxation as well as the occasion to strengthen friendships and display cultural accomplishments.[10]

In Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina* the banquet scene in Act IX parallels the conditions found both in Greek *symposia* and Roman *convivia.* In this act, Celestina has invited Sempronio and Pármeno, who are Calisto's servants as well as Celestina's partners in crime, to supper at her house.[11] The "symposiasts" in this case are the old procuress, the two servants, who are actually the ones who bring the food after stealing it from their master, and two prostitutes, Elicia and Areúsa, who, in addition to their profession, also perform the roles of business associates and disciples of Celestina.[12] While as Larsen states "the substance of the conversations between the two young women and their 'gallants', as mediated by Celestina, initially seem far-removed from the more highfalutin speeches described in the *Symposium,*" (250) the fact is that the subject matter is the same: erotic love in its various manifestations.

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interpretations of love in the Symposium and Lacan's views on it see the articles by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and A.D.C. Cake.

[9] The feast of the *symposium* was frequently recreated in drinking cups or kylixes. There are several of them at the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston which depict various scenes of a typical symposium. Young and older men dancing together to music played on a lyre or drinking wine while a youth with an *oinochoe* stands by a *krater,* ready to replenish his fellow revelers' cups. In a very revealing one the scene of the *symposium* depicted on the interior surface of the cup becomes a sort of mirror for the drinker. As he empties the cup he can see himself in the illustrations of the inebriated men attending the *symposium* and playing the drinking game called *kottabos*.

[10] Garnsey *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity,* 136.

[11] Carolyn Nadeau ("Transformation and Transgression at the Banquet Scene in *La Celestina*" in *Objects of Culture in the Literature of*.. Ed. F. de Armas and Mary Barnard, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) persuasively points out that "Pármeno casts himself as host to the affair" (208) since the banquet is his idea and he provides the food and invites the guest and she equates Pármeno to Trimalchio in Petronius' *Satyricon* (209). Notwithstanding, I wish to argue that the true host is, in fact, Celestina insofar as the event takes place in her house and she is truly the orchestrator of what takes place in it.

[12] Pármeno steals quite a lot of food from Calisto for the banquet they have planned at Celestina's house: "pan blanco, vino de Morviedro, un pernil de tocino, seys pares de pollos, unas tórtolas."

In the banquet hosted by Celestina the topic of erotic love will be fused with food and wine imagery. The old hag transforms her erotic desires into a desire for wine, on which she "expostulates, even rhapsodizes in Act IX".[13] Earlier, Pármeno had referred to her as a "puta vieja alcoholada."[14] Wine was mentioned, however, much earlier on the text. When Sempronio attempts to cure his lord Calisto from the symptoms of *amor hereos* that are afflicting him upon seeing Melibea, the servant engages into a misogynistic diatribe against women and appeals to Solomon: "Oye a Salomón, do dize que las mugeres y el vino hazen a los hombres renegar"[15] [Listen to Solomon when he says that women and wine make a man swear].

Celestina's association with wine can be seen as an allusion to the ancient cult of Dionysius in Greece and Bacchus in Rome, which is further enhanced by her representation as a sort of priestess which officiates or performs religious services or rites (Cull, 40). Nevertheless, her actions as a confessor, the equally revealing references to bread and wine and her role as the convener of the banquet in Act IX also unmistakably link her to a Christian liturgy and to the figure of Jesus.

Wine was, of course, an intrinsic component of the liturgy. Wine was, in fact, important in all religious traditions in the Iberian Peninsula, be it Muslim, Christian or Jewish but it only had sacred connotations in the latter two. For Muslims it was just a drink of "evasion", reason why among them wine was equated to hashish, consumed very regularly among the *moriscos* of Granada at the beginning of the 16th century while for Christians and Jews the use of wine was tied to sacred religious uses (Piqueras Haba 270, 205).

In the Christian liturgy, in particular, wine acquires spiritual and metaphysical connotations. Through the Mass, the faithful not only "eat" the body of Christ and "drink" his blood but also symbolically feed their soul. José-Luis Martín refers to Pedro de Cuéllar's explanation of the importance of the bread and wine during the Eucharist and compares them to a salvific medicine in his *Catecismo* (1325): "Es menester este sacramento mayormente después de la penitencia, que el que está en pecado decimos que está enfermo; […] e así como dan a tales manjares buenos, para estar más recio en la gracia de Dios debe tomar el manjar que es Corpus Christi" [This sacrament is necessary especially after penitence, since that who lives in sin is like a sick person... and the same way we provide rich and pleasant foods to the sick, in order to gain strength so the Christian must consume the feast that is the body and blood of Christ] (José-Luis Martín 31). Christ's blood was, in fact, believed to have miraculous and curative powers. Caroline Walker Bynum has brilliantly explored the eucharistic importance of the transfiguration of the blood of Christ into wine and related aspects of late medieval piety in her study *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond.*

Celestina praises the medicinal powers of wine in a guise reminiscent of religious discourse. Additionally, Celestina repeatedly declares her love of wine throughout the text. When Melibea asks her to express what her needs are Celestina quickly underscores that her purpose in coming to see the maiden is to fulfill someone else's needs, not hers.

[13] Larsen 255; Stephen Gilman, *The Art of 'La Celestina'* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956, 84-85.

[14] It is possible, however, that this is a reference to dying her eyelids, not to alcohol consumption.

[15] Fernando de Rojas *La Celestina*. Eds. Marta Haro Cortés y Juan Carlos Conde, Madrid: Castalia, 2002, p. 131; *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*, Burgos: Imprenta de Fadrique de Basilea, 1499. Ed. Emilio de Miguel, Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanaca, 1999, p. 68.

Celestina's needs are simpler than Calisto: all she craves is a bit of food and wine: "¿Mías, señora? Antes ajenas, como tengo dicho; que las mías de mi puerta adentro me las paso sin que las sienta la tierra, comiendo cuando puedo, bebiendo cuando lo tengo. Que con mi pobreza jamás me faltó, a Dios gracias, una blanca para pan y un cuarto para vino," (*La Celestina* 221-2) [even in my most extreme poverty I never lacked some coins for bread and a quarter of liter of wine]. In a different passage she also alludes to an earlier time when she and her associate Claudina (Pármeno's mother) would visit the tavern regularly and enjoy drinking wine together. Celestina's need for the beverage has continued in her old age so much so that, as she readily admits, she must leave her house many times during the day to procure herself of it: "Seis veces al día tengo de salir por mi pecado, con mis canas a cuestas, a le henchir a la taberna. Mas no muera yo muerte, hasta que me vea con un cuero o tinajica de mis puertas adentro" (222) [Six times I leave the house to get my sin (to buy wine), even with my gray hair and all, I have to go to the tavern to get my fill. I just hope I do not die until I have a good wineskin near me].

Hence, in this conversation with Melibea Celestina has repeatedly conjoined the desire for food and wine with the sexual yearnings symbolized by Calisto's "agenas necessidades." The likening of wine consumption and male companionship is further underscored by the use of several popular sayings that reiterate these ideas: "pan y vino anda camino, que no moço garrido" and "donde no hay varón, todo bien fallesçe", which although alluding to Celestina's widowhood, can be also clearly applied to Melibea's virginal inexperience and lack of companionship and sexual fulfillment.

In fact, the reference to her love of wine becomes so intricately linked to her persona that the text itself is modified in later editions in order to amplify this theme (Palafox 75).[16] The first version of Rojas's text, the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea,* was published in 1499 and it had 16 acts. In 1500 and 1501 two new versions with some added material were published in Toledo and Sevilla; these included the letter 'El auctor a un su amigo', some acrostic octaves that for the first time mentioned Fernando de Rojas's name, an 'incipit', a "argumento general de la obra" plus some short paragraphs summarizing each of the successive acts and some final "coplas" or couplets where the corrector Alonso de Proaza explains that the octaves reveal the author's name. A new and amplified edition in 1502 is retitled *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* and contains five more acts, an additional prologue and three final octaves where Rojas justifies the change of title. It is among these new materials that we find Celestina's long perorations about the properties of wine.

It is, however, in the banquet scene in Act IX where *La Celestina* and wine can be more fruitfully interrelated with Plato's *Symposium*. The banquet begins when Sempronio deferentially invites Celestina to sit first: "Asiéntate, madre Celestina, tú primero" [You first, Mother Celestina] (*La Celestina* 318) to which Celestina replies: "Asentaos vosotros, mis hijos, que harto lugar ay para todos, a Dios gracias…yo, que estoy sola, porné cabo mí este jarro y taça, que no es más mi vida de quanto con ello

[16] See also Kathleen Kish's article "The Wines of *Celestina* and the Omnibibulous H. Warner Allen" for a thorough comparison between the first editions of *La Celestina* and its translations regarding the references to wine. Celestina and its readers' love and consumption of wine certainly reflects societal trends. Germán Orduna highlights the importance and economic value of wine in Castilian society in his study of wine in medieval literature, "El vino y el pan: del Cid a Celestina." Of interest also to better understand the shifts in consumer's tastes and the increase in consumption in general during the 15th century is Raúl Alvarez-Moreno's "Celestina o el intercambio simbólico: algunas consideraciones sobre la lógica social del consumo en la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea."*

hablo. Después que me fui faziendo vieja, no sé mejor oficio a la mesa que escanciar" [No, you sit down, my children, there's room enough for everyone, thanks be to God…I'll sit next to the wine. The high spot in my life is a conversation with a jug of wine. Since I'm so old, my best job at table is pouring out the wine] (318). She follows this with a long speech about her particular uses of wine as well as the medicinal and other beneficial properties of the craved fluid:

> Pues de noche en invierno no ay tal escallentador de cama; que con dos jarrillos destos que beva quando me quiero acostar, no siento frío en toda la noche. Desto aforro todos mis vestidos quando viene la Navidad; esto me callenta la sangre; esto me sostiene continuo en un ser; esto me faze andar siempre alegre; esto me para fresca, desto vea yo sobrado en casa, que nunca temeré el mal año: que un cortezón de pan ratonado me basta para tres días. Esto quita la tristeza del corazón más que el oro ni el coral; esto da esfuerço al mozo y al viejo fuerça, pone color al descolorido, coraje al cobarde, al floxo diligencia, conforta los celebros, saca el frío del estómago, quita el hedor del anélito, haze potentes los fríos, haze suffrir los afanes de las labranças a los cansados segadores, haze sudar toda agua mala, sana el romadizo y las muelas, sostiénese sin heder en la mar, lo qual no haze el agua (318-9).
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> [On wintry nights it's the best way to get warm in bed. Two little jugs like these before I hit the hay and I never freeze. I line my clothes with it when Christmas comes, it warms my blood and keeps me going. Puts a spring in my step and freshens me up. Always makes me think I've enough food at home. I never worry when it's a bad year, because a crust nibbled by mice can last me three days. Wine chases the sadness from my heart, more quickly than gold or coral, strengthens youths, fortifies old men, turns pale cheeks red, gives courage to the cowardly, energy to the weak, soothes the brain, kills the chill in the belly, hides bad breath, fills the frigid with lust, enables tired reapers to labour hard in the fields, cleans out the system, cures colds and tooth-ache, lasts at sea without going smelly. That is certainly not the way with water]

And she concludes her description with a very revealing and humorous remark: "No tiene sino una tacha: que lo bueno vale caro y lo malo haze daño. Asi que con lo que sana el hígado enferma la bolsa. Pero todavía, con mi fatiga busco lo mejor para esso poco que bevo" (319) [It has only one drawback; good wine costs and bad wine makes you puke. What hits the purse doesn't punish the liver. So though I am old and weary I always go for the best and drink little]. Celestina displays here a remarkable good judgement about drinking wine thus seeming to endorse conventional and frequent moralists' admonitions in regard to wine consumption, such as Francesc Eiximenis' recommendations in his *Doctrina compendiosa:* "Sisè, que en general, de la vianda e del vi prengues en tal o tanta quantitat que sia deçà e luny de golofria e deçà luny de embriaguesa, car si aixi no ho faïes, passaries la ralla e exiries fora del cercle de la virtut, e daries en lo dit vici de gola, qui es fort vil i molt noïble a l'anima i al cors"(49). [Sixth Rule of behavior: in general of food and wine partake in such quantity that is far from gluttony and drunkenness, otherwise you would be crossing the line and would be exiting from the circle of virtue, and you would fall into the sin of gluttony, which is strong and vile and damaging to both your body and your soul].

What appears to be a judicious stance on the part of the old hag, nevertheless, is categorically belied by the following statement when she exclaims: "Una sola dozena de vezes a cada comida: no me harán passar de allí, salvo si soy combidada como agora" (319) [a dozen glasses with each meal and I never drink more unless I'm a guest as is the case today], which is followed by a humorous interaction where Pármeno asserts: "Madre, pues tres vezes dicen que es lo bueno y honesto todos los que escrivieron" (319) [Well, mother, the experts say that what is good and honest is three glasses of wine] (my translation) to which Celestina retorts: "Hijo, estará corrupta la letra: por treze, tres" (319) [Pármeno, my son, there must be a mistake, the writing must be corrupt and a letter missing, 13 instead of 3] (my translation). Celestina's intake of wine seems quite extraordinary; however, if one judges by the effects and uses she detailed in her eulogy of wine she seems to be well within the boundaries of a measured consumption of it.

It must be remembered also that wine consumption at the time was quite high. Wine was the common beverage among all social classes and it was consumed daily and in great quantities for two main reasons: first, water contamination was so frequent that people distrusted drinking it and secondly, wine was believed to possess, as we have seen, therapeutic attributes. In the *Liber de vinis medicinalibus*, attributed, probably erroneously, to the physician Arnau de Vilanova, the author praises the medicinal properties of fermented grapes; this treatise was later translated to German and became an editorial success, being printed eleven times before even 1500 (Carreras i Artau 11). Wine was also common in monastic communities, particularly among the Cistercians. Antoni Riera i Melis analyzes the dietary changes that take place from the period of establishment of the Benedictine rule to the ascetic reform of the Cistercians and a notable change is the increase in the appreciation of wine among the latter not only as a product for consumption as part of the monk's diet but also for the economic benefits that its cultivation furnishes to the monastic community:

> Whereas Benedict of Nursia believed that wine was not suitable for monks and approved its presence in the refectory only in order to prevent defections, Bernard of Clairvaux, after noting that Christ took wine regularly and even chose it as one of the elements of the Eucharist, claimed that it was better to drink small amounts of wine to prevent digestive diseases than to fill the stomach with water out of anxiety. This attitude led to the early development of viticulture in Cistercian domains (126).

In medieval aristocratic and royal courts the importance of wine and its consumption can be further corroborated by the existence of a specialized occupation, that of the bottler, who took care of all the drinks but particularly of wine, the most consumed. For instance, in the *Ordinacions de la Casa i Cort de Pere el Cerimoniós* we find a "boteyler major" and at least two younger assistants, "II boteylers comuns" (García Marsilla 26; Gimeno et al. 59-62). In *La taula del senyor duc: Alimentació, gastronomia i etiqueta a la cort dels ducs reials de Gandia* Juan Vicente García Marsilla, after exhaustively scrutinizing the medieval accounts of the duke Alfons el Vell, attempted to establish what would have been the *per capita* consumption of wine at the time and found that daily rations were very high at the duke's court and not that different from rations among other social classes: "Normalment es calculava de 'vy de casa' un consum diari al voltant dels 12 quarters de mitjana pel mes d'agost de 1386, quan al col.lectiu consumidor hi havia unes huitanta persones, cosa que donava *grosso modo* uns 600 centilitres per cap i

jornada"(87). Thus, Celestina's wine intake does not seem to deviate much from societal norms and expectations.

On the other hand, in the play *Semele or Dionysus* (c. 375 BC) Eubulus has the god of wine, Dionysos, describe proper and improper drinking:

> For sensible men I prepare only three kraters: one for health (which they drink first), the second for love and pleasure, and the third for sleep. After the third one is drained, wise men go home. The fourth krater is not mine any more - it belongs to bad behavior; the fifth is for shouting; the sixth is for rudeness and insults; the seventh is for fights; the eighth is for breaking the furniture; the ninth is for depression; the tenth is for madness and unconsciousness.

Celestina uses or has used in the past the equivalent of three "kraters" (big vases of wine in symposia) of wine as wise men do: for health, for love and pleasure, and for sleep. After that amount, as Dionysos asserts, wise men go home. And so does she. Celestina's behavior, therefore, and her passion for wine would not be necessarily censured among her contemporaries. After all, as Lorenzo Valla asserts on his influential treatise on pleasure *De voluptate* (Piacenza, 1431) "wine and speech are lauded as two of nature's greatest gifts, for they are endowed upon man alone" (cited in Cull 45, note 20) and Celestina certainly excelled at making use of both.

In turn, Socrates' relationship to wine in the *Symposium* mirrors Celestina's love of the drink. Socrates outdrinks the other guests but is never drunk. Both Celestina and Socrates thus demonstrate their "superiority with regard to this Dionysian activity" (Larsen 255) much in the same way they both demonstrate their prowess in the knowledge or *sophia* of erotic love. For despite the fact that Celestina seems to be under the spell of the wine she loves so much, even during the banquet she is consciously manipulating the other guests, who abandon themselves to their carnal impulses without realizing that Celestina is ensnaring them even further into her nets. Her ultimate intention is to divert Sempronio and Pármeno's attention from the monetary gift of 100 golden coins which the love-smitten Calisto gave her as payment for her services and which she purportedly has to share with the servants.

Eloísa Palafox, in fact, persuasively claims that Celestina's strategy during the meal in Act IX is to implant in her listeners' minds, between a joke here and there, the idea or perception that she deserves to be pitied because she is old and poor: "Al tiempo que hace reír a sus comensales, la alcahueta parece querer suscitar en ellos algo de lástima, estableciendo un contraste entre la juventud, la compañía y el apetito que tienen los jóvenes y su situación de mujer vieja, sola e inapetente, incapaz de gozar y desear otra cosa que no sea un poco de vino"(76)

Such covert strategy worked to some extent since at the end of the banquet, again employing a reference to the good and plentiful amount of wine she used to consume in a previous and more prosperous period of her life ("Pues ¿vino? ¿No me sobrava? ¡De lo mejor que se bevía en la cibdad, venido de diversas partes! De Monviedro, de Luque, de Toro, de Madrigal, de Sant Martín y de otros muchos lugares" [331]), Celestina is still referring to her dismal present and both Areúsa and Sempronio try to sympathetically console her before leaving the house. The prostitute tells her "no llores , madre, ni te fatigues, que Dios lo remediará todo" while Sempronio adds "Madre, ningund provecho trae la memoria del buen tiempo si cobrar no se puede; antes tristeza, como a ti agora, que nos has sacado el plazer de entre las manos" (332).

Hence, this dynamic of persuasion at Celestina's table echoes Michel Jeanneret's remarks on the singular rhetoric at work in banquets in his work *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance:*

> Like public speaking, convivial conversation implies a knowledge of psychology and postulates an accurate perception of one's partner. A micro-society is formed around the table in which the speaker can sense the effect of his or her words. A whole system of rhetoric is in operation, but it is one which seeks more to seduce than to persuade; the skill here lies in being able to hide one's ability in order not to be oppressive or intimidating. (94) [17]

Thus, the dialogic frame during the banquet is an example of Celestina's use of such veiled rhetoric of seduction which does, in fact, remind us of a Socratic or elenctic way of discourse as described by Alciabiades in the *Symposium*, that is, when one attempts to refute an argument by proving the falsehood of its conclusions:

> If you were to listen to his [Socrates] arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners… But if the arguments are opened and one sees them from the inside, he will find first that they are the only arguments with any sense in them, and next that they contain within themselves utterly divine and multitudinous figures of virtue (*agalmat' aretês*). (221e1–222a4)

Likewise and in a parodic reversal of Socrates' virtue, Celestina will refute or craftily delay Sempronio and Pármeno's demands of payment by establishing through her incessant and persuasive discourse that she is so poor and destitute that she cannot possibly share her spoils without seriously jeopardizing her chances of survival in her old age, thus contravening the servant's argument that she has plenty to share. Her arguments surely also sound ridiculous to Sempronio and Pármeno who know better than to believe what she is telling them but by the end of the ritualized banquet she has managed to appease them and they are grateful to her for having provided for them not virtues perhaps but certainly pleasures and entertainment. Hence, they will leave Celestina's house without even demanding their fair share of the booty.

Therefore, if we return to the *Symposium,* for Alcibiades, then, Socrates' body is identical to his words; the virtues that are in him are in them (talking philosophy is having sexual intercourse, and vice versa). Celestina's words also contain within all her virtues and capabilities, her hidden knowledge of human nature and her skills as an enchantress of wills. As Joseph Snow explains, the old go-between practices an art of gossip which enables her to fabricate "stories" that serve to manipulate those around her. As demonstrated in several episodes where Celestina repeatedly weakens through words the resisting objections of Pármeno, Areúsa, Alisa, Melibea, and Lucrecia, the old woman has accumulated so much knowledge about the people around her that she is able to increase her authority and to exercise social and verbal ascendency over her peers (344). Snow defines her as the "consummate gossip" and argues that her multifaceted roles all

[17] Carolyn Nadeau also refers to Jeanneret's work in her chapter about *La Celestina*'s banquet scene ("Transformation and Trangression at the Banquet Scene in *La Celestina*") but she applies it to her argument in a slightly different manner than in my discussion. See page 207 of her study.

"revolve around her ability to outwit and outmaneuver one and all with her storytelling and her nonpareil gifts in the art of persuasion" (368). Her hidden motives might be apparent to the attentive reader but, as we see in the banquet scene, remain concealed to the old bawd's interlocutors.

This points to another striking similarity between the *Symposium* and *La Celestina*: both Socrates and Celestina are wise, rhetorically dexterous but also ugly on the outside. Likewise, in spite of their ugliness (Celestina had a knife scar across her face) they both possessed a kind of sensual charisma (Larsen 253), which will enable them to captivate Alciabiades and Melibea, respectively. In both cases, both characters allude to being bitten by a serpent: "I have been bitten by a painful viper" says Alcibiades while Melibea confesses to Celestina that "many serpents are devouring my heart within my body". It is the type of bewitchment Marsilio Ficino speaks of in his commentary to the *Symposium* and to which Rojas might have had access: "Moreover, Love is called a sophist and a magician…These lovers suffer as well as the loved ones, since lovers, blinded by the clouds of love, accept the false for the true, in thinking their loves are more beautiful, wiser, and better than they really are…But why do we think love is a sorcerer? Because in love there is all the power of enchantment" (Cited in Sears Reynolds 199).

There is a great emphasis on the *Symposium* (clearly derived from Socrates condemnation in 399 BC for corrupting the young men of Athens, which, incidentally, is also the charge levelled against Celestina by subsequent readers and moralists for corrupting the young lovers) on defending Socrates and expressing what he represented for the young men he encountered. Plato's account of one such relationship—that with the brilliant and beautiful Alcibiades—is an illuminating case in point. Alcibiades was so in love with Socrates -"it was obvious," the *Symposium* (222c1–2) tells us - that when asked to speak of love, he speaks of his beloved.

Alcibiades's enraptured account prompts all other attendants to the symposium to share their stories. The stories of all the other *symposiasts*, too, are stories of their particular loves masquerading as stories of love itself, stories about what they find beautiful masquerading as stories about what is beautiful. In *La Celestina* the same process occurs. The moment she ends the aforementioned joke about the thirteen glasses of wine, Sempronio says: "Tía señora, a todos nos sabe bien, comiendo y hablando; porque después no havrá tiempo para entender en los amores deste perdido de nuestro amo y de aquella Graciosa y gentil Melibea" (320). His complimenting comment about Calisto's beloved will enrage Elicia and bring about a debate among the servants regarding Melibea' beauty or lack thereof and about the subject of love in general.

The dinner guests' ensuing dispute hinges on what is true beauty and what is love. Sempronio and Areúsa engage in a heated debate about the beauty of Melibea and when Sempronio affirms that she must be beautiful because people's opinion says so, Areúsa, after having offered a scathing physical description of a not so attractive Melibea, with breasts as big and saggy as pumpkins, among other things, asserts: "Ninguna cosa es más lexos de verdad que la vulgar opinión. Nunca alegre vivirás si por voluntad de muchos te riges. Porque éstas son conclusiones verdaderas: que cualquier cosa que el vulgo piensa es vanidad; lo que fabla, falsedad; lo que reprueva es bondad, lo que aprueva maldad" (321).

Similarly, in Plato's *Symposium* an equivalent exchange of divergent perspectives on one subject takes place. For Phaedrus and Pausanius, the canonical image of true love—the quintessential love story - features the right sort of older male lover and the

right sort of beloved boy. For Eryximachus the image of true love is painted in the languages of his own beloved medicine and of all the other crafts and sciences. For Aristophanes it is painted in the language of comedy. For Agathon, in the loftier tones of tragedy. In ways that these men are unaware of, then, but that Plato knows, their love stories are themselves manifestations of their loves and of the inversions or perversions expressed in them. As Sempronio counters to Areúsa: "Hermana, paréceme aquí que cada bohonero alaba sus agujas" (321). Therefore, like Sempronio and Areúsa and, of course, Calisto and Melibea, Plato's dinner guests think their stories are the truth about love, but they are really love's delusions -"images," as Diotima will later call them, triggered by what Sempronio labels as "ojos de alinde" (eyes that embellish), which encouraged Calisto to hyperbolically worship Melibea's physical attributes. As such, however, these love delusions are essential parts of that truth. For the power of love (and one must remark how love and wine have much in common here) to engender delusive images of the beautiful is as much a part of the truth about it as its power to lead to the beautiful itself.

In the last and very poignant act of Rojas's *Tragicomedia*, Pleberio, Melibea's father, utters a very pessimistic speech upon witnessing his daughters' suicide. The entire soliloquy decries the perils of love and of the delights of the flesh but in a particularly revealing passage of it, he does so by utilizing, precisely, a discourse replete with food imagery: "Cévasnos, mundo falso, con *el manjar de tus deleites*; al *mejor sabor* nos descubres el anzuelo: no lo podemos huyr, que nos tiene ya caçadas las voluntades" (480). As in Plato's *Symposium* one cannot separate food and wine consumption from other pleasures such as love and knowledge. Like the protagonist Celestina, who cannot live without wine, each of the characters in her eponymous drama succumb to their desires, be it gluttony, intemperance, greed or lust.[18] And all of them suffer catastrophic deaths: Celestina is viciously stabbed to death by Sempronio and Pármeno, who, after the deed, break their bodies after jumping from a window, Calisto splatters his brains on the pavement after ridiculously falling from a ladder after his soirée with his beloved and Melibea jumps to her disfiguring death from a tower, after hearing of her beloved's death. One cannot help but notice the predominance in Fernando de Rojas' text of the act of scaling and descending walls, windows, ladders and towers.

These repetitive gestures in *La Celestina* are revealingly juxtaposed to Diotima's famous description of the *scala amoris* in the *Symposium*.[19] According to Diotima, a lover ascends gradually through such figurative scale "from the triviality of any single

[18] In his illuminating study *Celestina and the Ends of Desire* E. Michael Gerli asserts that "desire in *Celestina* is ubiquitous" (9). The old go-between "knows the human body and the mind and traffics in the appetites of both: covetousness, sex, the will to power, and domination" (48). In view of Celestina's desire for wine we must add another of the appetites to the list: gluttony.

[19] Diotima is a fascinating anomaly in Plato's work. Lacan interprets Diotima's perspective in the *Symposium* as a rupture in Socrates' authority ("N'est-ce pas dans la mesure où quelque chose, quand il s'agit du discours de l'amour, echappe au savoir de Socrate, que celui-ci s'efface, *se dioecise,* et fait à sa place parler une femme?" (Lacan 147). It is indeed remarkable that Plato chooses a woman to be the one to utter the, allegedly, most authoritative ideas about the nature of love and the one to whom all other *symposiasts* defer on account of her wisdom. While I do not have time here to discuss her more in depth it is worth noting that Diotima functions in the *Symposium* not only as a priestess but also, in psychoanalytical terms, as a sort of analyst that can help analysands, much in the same way as Celestina can assist her ailing and afflicted clients, such as Calisto. In addition, like Diotima, Celestina occupies, in the words of Peter Dunn, "a place at the center of the work, where she affects the lives of all the rest of the cast and creates a network of interests which converge upon her; makes her, in short, the vortex into which they are all drawn" (116).

beautiful thing to the ultimate love of beauty in its nature" (Cake 234; *Symposium* 210b-e). Such ascending movement should help lovers distinguish between desire and love. In *La Celestina,* instead, climbing and ascending and the subsequent descents are always motivated by desires which cannot transcend the realm of material consumption or possession. Thus, let Plato's *Symposium* and Rojas' *La Celestina* be a warning to all that when we do consume or partake in any of such delights it is best to stay away from ladders and high towers as well as old and wise Athenian philosophers and Castilian sorceresses.

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