Celestina’s veritas: Fetishizing the Salve/salve of Healing Wine

John T. Cull
College of the Holy Cross

Y aún vulgarmente atribuyen la verdad al vino.
[Pliny, Book 14, chap. 22, ii, p. 212]

The Oxford English Dictionary registers, among others, these definitions for the word salve: «healing ointment for application to wounds or sores; figurative, a remedy for spiritual disease or sorrow; a salutation.» It is at the crossroads of the medical and spiritual significations of salve that a reader of Celestina can find some intellectually salutary applications. On the spiritual axis, Celestina can be seen as a mock priestess in the work; on the medical axis, the healing salve of wine is a palliative evoked with great frequency in the text: where the two coincide, a deeper meaning can be coaxed out.¹

The medical uses of wine have been explicated in medical treatises and other authoritative repositories of received knowledge since time immemorial.² It is little wonder then that Celestina, whose penchant for

¹.– Research for this article was facilitated by my participation in a 2009 NEH Summer Seminar at the University of Virginia, directed by E. Michael Gerli, on Celestina and the Threshold of Modernity. I am most grateful to Professor Gerli for his careful reading and helpful suggestions.

².– Marcelino V. Amasuno has observed that the study of medicine in Salamanca in the middle ages was an «Arabized Galenism» (galenismo arabizado, p. 45), but that by the early part of the fifteenth century, the direct study of Avicenna was almost a certainty, thanks to its introduction into the medical curriculum in Paris, Bologna and Montpellier (48-49). See: Marcelino V. Amasuno, «Saber médico, literatura loimológica y la Universidad de Salamanca en el siglo xv», in ‘Nunca fue pena mayor.’ Estudios de Literatura Española en homenaje a Brian Dutton, eds. A. Menéndez Coller and V. Roncero López, Cuenca, Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1996, pp. 45-70.
the distillation of the grape is unparalleled in late Spanish medieval literature, should possess some knowledge of its healing properties, especially in view of her talents as a curandera. Celestina’s inordinate dedication to wine is further enriched in the text by the go-between’s systematic depiction as a priestess. The imagery of Celestina as one who officiates (in the sense of performing or celebrating a religious service or rite), permeates the entire text. When she visits the members of her congregation in their homes, it is with the priestly greeting from Luke 10.5: «Paz sea en esta casa» (Act IV, p. 110). Celestina, as the negotiator between her clients and the sins they would commit, assumes by association the role of confessor, who mediates between sinners and the salvation they seek from their God. Indeed, Celestina displays a great penchant for eliciting the confession of the hidden and transgressive desires of virtually everyone she encounters. This is especially manifest in the confessional language of the textual asides, whispered snippets of unguarded truth.

The associations of Celestina with wine, revelry and priestly mysteries seem to be a clear allusion to the ancient cult of Dionysus (in Greece) and Bacchus (in Rome). If the divine essence of Dionysus is madness, then his connection to Celestina is appropriate, to the extent that «in the art of prophecy, madness is represented as secret knowledge.» Celestina’s art is precisely the ability to penetrate the innermost recesses of the psyches of the men and women she attends, to apprehend what motivates them, to see inside of them with her mind’s eyes. In Act 1, when Pármeno utters his defamatory asides against Celestina, thinking that she cannot hear him, and ironically boasting of the «vision» that experience has given him («cosas he visto asaz y el seso y la vista de las muchas co-

3.— Much has been written on Celestina’s medical knowledge of love melancholy, or amor hereos. For more general studies of Celestina’s healing arts, see: Marcelino V. Amasuno Sarraga’s «Hacia un contexto médico para Celestina: dos modalidades curadoras frente a frente», Celestinesca 23.1-3 (1999), pp. 87-124 and Paloma Moral de Calatrava’s «Magic or Science? What ‘Old Women Lapidaries’ Knew in the Age of Celestina», La Corónica 36.1 (Fall, 2007), pp. 203-35.

4.— Vulgata: «in quamcumque domum intravertis primum dicite pax huic domui.»

5.— Patricia Finch has studied the function of textual asides in Celestina in her article «The Uses of the Aside in Celestina», Celestinesca 6.2 (1982), pp. 19-24.


sas demuestran la experiencia», p. 60), she chides him with: «Bien te oí y no pienses que el oír con los otros exteriores sesos mi vejez haya perdido. Que no sólo lo que veo, oigo y conozco; mas aún lo intrínseco con los intelectuales ojos penetro» (p. 62). The magic elixir that inspires the intoxicating frenzy of divine and prophetic knowledge, for both the Dionysian priestesses and Celestina, is wine. Another parallel to be drawn here is that in classical antiquity, Dionysus was constantly surrounded by a sisterhood of women who were required to worship the phallus as an integral part of their rituals (Otto, 174).¹⁸ Celestina’s retinue is, of course, primarily the women who render services on her behalf.⁹ What is more, Celestina shares with Dionysus a certain androgyny (Otto, 175-176). I will have more to say about snake imagery in Celestina later, but we should note that in the Bacchae of Euripides, each woman who dances in a frenzied manner to worship Dionysus has «wound a snake around her body beneath her clothes to protect herself from the lustful desires of men even when she is asleep or defenseless» (Otto, 177).

What exactly transpires in Celestina’s isolated and mysterious house, «al cabo de la ciudad, allá cerca de las tenerías, en la cuesta del río, una casa apartada, medio caída, poco compuesta y menos abastada»? (Act 1, p. 52). Just as in the cult of Dionysus, when the Greek women assembled yearly on distant Mt. Parnassus to enact their arcane rituals, it is the lack of knowledge on the part of the unitiated that lampless the imagination to fear the wildest possible excesses. When Sempronio and Pármeno arrive at the open door of Celestina’s domicile in Act 9 to indulge in the banquet, Pármeno has some trepidations: «Llama antes que entres, que por ventura están revueltas y no querrán ser así vistas,» to which Sempronio responds: «Entra, no cures, que todos somos de casa» (Act 9, p. 224). They are all complicit in whatever goes on there. The Diccionario de autoridades provides as one meaning for revolver: «Vale también inquietar, enredar, mover sediciones, causar disturbios y dessazones. Lat. Turbare. Perturbare.» Celestina’s house is a place of real or imagined subversion, a threat to the prevailing social order. The Romans, under Livy, banned the Bacchanalia, fearing the sexual excess of these secret rites, which included

¹⁸.– Phallus worship at the bacchanalia was not only for the sake of fertility: «The sexual symbols of the cult were certainly not, as among simple people, thought of merely as bringers of fertility: for the well-to-do townspeople they had piquant attraction, allowed by the rites, even if not so crude as the Carmina Priapea» (146). See: Martin P. Nilsson, The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age, Lund, Svenska Centraltryckeriet, 1957.

⁹.– The sisterhoods of Celestina exist in four types of female microsociety in the work, according to Deyermond: «Celestina’s house is not only a brothel and house of assignation, but a center of commerce and light industry (manufacture of cosmetics, recycling of virgins), and it therefore has a varied and fairly complex economic base» (6). See: Alan Deyermond, «Female Societies in Celestina», in Fernando de Rojas and ‘Celestina’: Approaching the Fifth Centenary, eds. Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph T. Snow, Madison, Hispanic Seminar of Medieval Studies, 1993, pp. 1-31.
homosexuality, an act of sedition: «These orgies, Livy insists, were a danger to the state, a conspiracy (coniuratio, 39.8.1, 39.15.10), and the matter was deemed to be so important that the consuls themselves investigated it [...] The purpose of their meetings is the pursuit of sexual license, and that in itself the authorities construe as seditious [...] Religious observance meant the meticulous performance of ritual, and self-indulgence was as incompatible with piety as it was with duty to the state.»¹⁰

As a bawd, then, Celestina officiates by arranging and presiding over the sometimes Bacchanalian orgies of her clients. Let us return to the several meanings of salve. Celestina’s facial scar brands her as a marked transgressor. It functions as her stigmata in the word’s primary sense of a distinguishing mark, or a mark of disgrace or infamy (OED). However, in her role as mock-priestess, the scar, paradoxically a wound sewn back together, also acquires the Christian connotation of stigmata as the never-healing wounds of Christ’s passion. It is in this sense that we must read Lucrecia’s curious description of Celestina’s scar as «su Dios os salve» (Act 4, p. 118). In religious discourse, as in the well-known Salve Regina, salve is an antiphon, a versicle or sentence sung by one choir in response to another. Antiphonic (sounding against, etymologically), is an apt metaphor for the use of language throughout Celestina: almost every utterance is a dissonance evoking its opposite, words voiced in constant opposition to unarticulated suppressions. In the Catholic tradition, certain Salves were included as part of the office for the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin (Alma Redemptoris and Salve Regina).¹¹

Now then, Celestina claims as one of her offices (oficios), a term repeated incessantly in the work, that of pouring wine: «Después que me fui haciendo vieja, no sé mejor oficio a la mesa, que escanciar» (Auto, p. 226). The rich and intentional ambiguity of Celestina allows for a sacrilegious reading here, since office can be interpreted from the liturgical point of view as well, with Celestina as the priestess who presides over the mock-eucharistic sacrament.¹³ Indeed, although escanciar now


¹¹.– See the entry for antiphon in the Catholic Encyclopedia Online: [http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/]. It is surely no accident that Pleberio’s lament and the text of Celestina end with a verse from the Salve Regina: «in hac lachrymarum valle» (p. 402).

¹².– A search of the Julio Cejador y Frauca online edition of Celestina (Madrid: Ediciones de la Lectura, 1913) available on the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes website [http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=90], yields interesting results. Oficio (or the variant oficio) occurs 29 times from the beginning of the work through Act xii. After Celestina’s death in this act, it occurs only four more times in the remainder of the text.

¹³.– Manual da Costa Fontes, in his chapter on «Christian Prayer and Dogma in Celestina,» concludes that: «there is no question that the Scriptures, Christian prayer, and the saints are systematically turned upside down, being used in sacrilegious and heretical ways.» The Art of Subversion in Inquisitorial Spain, Rojas and Delicado, West Lafayette, Purdue UP, 2005, p. 151.
means simply to pour, or to serve, for a contemporary audience, its connotations were more ritualistic, and therefore more appropriate to the liturgical parody. The *Diccionario de autoridades*, for example, tells us that *escanciador* is: «La persona que ministra la bebida, y con especialidad, el vino en las mesas, y le echa de un vaso en otro.» Celestina is, then, a(n) (ad)minister(er) of wine. Covarrubias Horozco, in the *Tesoro de la lengua*, in one of his always fascinating etymologies, offers: «A otros les parece haberse dicho de la isla Scancia, que está cerca del polo ártico, y los habitadores della, por mucho frío, se deben de aforrar los estómagos con buen vino y emborracharse, que no es esto por allá afrenta; y así el beber bien se dijo escanciar.»

If in her ministrations, then, the bearded old lady officiates as a mock priestess over the banquet of Act IX, her encomium of wine can be read initially as the saying of grace, a kind of prayer to bless the meal to be served to those who commune around Celestina’s dinner table. However, to take the Eucharistic imagery a step further, the doctrine of transubstantiation contends that the communal wine is transformed literally into the blood of Christ. One wonders if this is Celestina’s analogical allusion when she intimates to Calisto that: «La mayor gloria que al secreto oficio de la abeja se da, a la cual los discretos deben imitar, es que todas las cosas por ella tocadas convierte en mejor de lo que son» (Act vi, p. 154).

It is her application of the word office (*oficio*) in its Christian context to the secret, veiled and perhaps miraculous transformation wrought by the bee in converting nectar into honey, that calls the reader’s attention to the parallel with both Celestina and the mysteries of transubstantiation.

The initial salvo in Celestina’s oration, an invocation if you will, both in the sense of prayer and conjuration, sings the general praises of wine, somewhat outside of the medical context, and culminates in a phrase lat-

14.– Rafael Beltrán has studied the parodic use of the language of prayer in other passages of the *Celestina* in his comparison of it to *Tirant el Blanc*. See: Rafael Beltrán, «Entre la parodia de la oración y el equívoco religioso: nuevas intertextualidades de la *Celestina* con la novela catalana», in *El mundo social y cultural de ‘La Celestina.’ Actas del Congreso Internacional, Universidad de Navarra, junio, 2001*, eds. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús M. Usunáriz, Madrid and Frankfurt, Iberoamericana / Vervuert, 2003, pp. 27-44.


16.– Lida de Malkiel has pointed out the classical association of priestesses with bees: «De ahí que las sacerdotisas de Deméter y de Artemis se llamen abejas exactamente como en la páginas más antigua de la Biblia [...] se llama abeja, es decir, Débora, la profetisa que cantó las justicias de Jehová en la tierra prometida de Canaán» (p. 76). She sees in this passage from *Celestina*, however, only the go-between’s pride in having wrought a transformation in Melibea’s heart (p. 78). See: María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, «La abeja: historia de un motivo poético», *Romance Philology, 17* (1963-1964), pp. 74-86.

17.– Celestina’s literal conjuration to induce *philocaptio* in Melibea has been studied by Ana Vian Herrero, «Transformaciones del pensamiento mágico: el conjuro amatorio en *La Celestina*»,
This page is a continuation of the previous discussion on Celestina and her relationship with food and wine. The text continues to explore the symbolism and meaning behind her comments, particularly focusing on the parodic allusion to the communal host and wine in her description of her food intake as a "cortezón de pan ratonado" lasting her for three days. It is noted that "pan" and "ratón" are medieval Spanish euphemisms for the phallus.

Celestina's comments about lining all her clothes with wine and perfume are discussed, with a reference to Pliny's Natural History, which mentions the medicinal uses of wine on the body. The text also touches on the encomium to wine, which has a long literary tradition back to classical antiquity.

The meaning of "De esto aforro todos mis vestidos" is not totally clear, and the Diccionario de autoridades cites this passage under the primary meaning for "aforrar": "Doblar la vestidura, tela, u otro qualquer género de ropa, o cosa por dentro con otra tela para mayor abrigo, o para más duración, o para que haga, y tenga más cuerpo." If we are to interpret Celestina's comment about lining all her clothes with wine as soaking them or perfuming them, Pliny, in Book 23 of his Natural History, tells us that wool soaked in wine and applied to the body has medicinal uses: "aplicado por de fuera, en lanas húmidas, mitiga los apostemas e hinchazones" [ii. 462]. Perhaps Celestina dips her clothes in wine to temper the fires of her lust. Pliny says in Book 14 that "Tiene el vino tal naturaleza que, bevido, calienta por de dentro, y resfría aplicado por de fuera" [ii. 201].

Celestina’s beatitudes on the virtues of wine are highly selective. If we compare her brief catalogue to the number of cures enumerated by Pliny...
or other authorities who elaborated the medicinal uses of wine, we are surprised by the conciseness of her list:

Esto quita la tristeza del corazón, más que el oro ni el coral; ésto da esfuerzo al mozo y al viejo fuerza, pone color al descolorido, coraje al cobarde, al flojo diligencia, conforta los celebros, saca el frío del estómago, quita el hedor del anhélito, hace potentes los fríos, hace sufrir los afanes de las labranzas, a los cansados segadores hace sudar toda agua mala, sana el romadizo y las muelas, sostiene sin heder en la mar, lo cual no hace el agua [...]
No tiene sino una tacha, que lo bueno vale caro y lo malo hace daño. (Auto ix, p. 22)

Upon closer examination, however, Celestina proves to be highly selective and purposeful in relating the medicinal wonders of wine, as she focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on those properties that would make the imbiber better prepared for the venereal act (happiness, strength and endurance, courage and daring, potency, sweetness of breath, etc.).

The bawdy oenophile makes the humorous claim that her modest consumption of wine allows her to indulge in the best that money can buy: «Pero todavía con mi fatiga busco lo mejor, para eso poco que bebo; una sola docena de veces a cada comida» (Auto ix, p. 226). The text’s silences are deafening in this entire passage. Not only are many medicinal properties of wine conspicuous by their absence, but Celestina’s self-delusion-al temperance evokes a vast, largely absent discourse from the medical tradition on the health risks of the immoderate use of wine. As Paul Strohm demonstrates in his analysis of Guinevere’s bloody bed, this too is «a case in which meaning is both ostentatiously exhibited and arrantly

20.– Advocacy for the immoderate use of wine may have come down to Rojas through Lorenzo Valla’s influential treatise on pleasure: De voluptate (Piacenza, 1431); substantial additions and revisions with the new title De vero falsoque bono appeared in 1433 (Milan) and 1444-49 (Naples). Wine and speech are lauded as two of nature’s greatest gifts, for they are endowed upon man alone. Panizza Lorch finds in Valla’s rationale a superiority even of wine over words: «With wine we have therefore a stability and a permanence of enjoyment, and a possibility of further enjoyment with a further refinement, that neither risus nor even words can give us» (91). See: Maristella de Panizza Lorch, A Defense of Life. Lorenzo Valla’s Theory of Pleasure, Munich, Wilhem Fink Verlag, 1985. Valla’s list of the properties of wine is less medical than what we find in Pliny: «O wine, author of delight, master of joys, companion of happy times, solace in adversity! You are ever the chief of banquets, leader and guide of nuptials, arbiter of peace, concord, and friendship, father of sweetest sleep, restorer of strength in tired bodies [...], liberator from anxiety and cares. Finally, you change us from weaklings into strong men, from craven into brave ones, from tongue-tied mutes into orators» (107). See: Lorenzo Valla, On Pleasure. De voluptate, tr. A. Kent Hieatt and Maristella Lorch, New York, Abaris Books, 1977.

al ciégoy veyer / y al coxo coRer / y al mudo faubla / y al enfermo organar; / así co dize en el scripto, / de fazer el cuerpo de Iesu Cristo». I cite from the Wikisource Online Edition: [http://es.wikisource.org/wiki/Razón_feita_d%27amor].
withheld, in which a debate about meaning is foregrounded and fully thematized in the text, even as all the most promising interpretative avenues are blocked, rerouted and systematically disavowed» (202).21 Pliny, in Book 14, is adamant on the dangers of the immoderate consumption of wine: «De manera que, con razón, se puede dezir del vino no haver co-
sa para las fuerzas del cuerpo más provechosa si se beve con templanza, o que más abra la puerta a los vizios si destempladamente y con desor-
den se usa de él» [ii. 201]. Celestina is, of course, the poster-child for the latter.22 The particular wines to which Celestina is devoted, those patron saints that she worships, are adduced towards the end of Auto ix, as the old lady reminisces about the good old days when priests would send endless provisions to her house to accompany their debaucheries with those devout girls of Celestina’s brothel (aquellas sus devotas): «¿Pues vino
no me sobraba? De lo mejor que se bebía en la ciudad, venido de diversas partes, de Monviedro, de Luque, de Toro, de Madrigal, de San Martin, y de otros muchos lugares» (Auto ix, p. 242).23

It is beyond the scope of this study to try to grasp the slippery eel of the precise source(s) utilized by Rojas for the salutary properties of wine in the hallelujah of the puta vieja alcoholada (Auto i, p. 50). Since most books of this period that included information availed themselves of the same classical sources, it really does not matter that much where Rojas obtained his knowledge of the medicinal properties of wine.24 However, a brief overview of the topic might prove useful. The popularity of flor-
legia and miscellanies in the early modern period suggest that they might provide us with a road map of where to initiate an inquiry of this nature.

21.– See: Paul Strohm, Theory and the Premodern Text, Minneapolis and London, U Min-

22.– Celestina’s total abandonment to life’s pleasures (and she is not alone in this philos-
ophy of life) has been branded neoepicurean by Ángel Alcalá: «El mensaje neoepicúreo de Rojas quedaría cifrado en el mismo de Epicuro: ‘En un mundo vacío de Dios, buscar por el único método de la limitación de los deseos el medio de vivir feliz’» (p. 242). See: Ángel Al-

23.– Kathleen Kish has an excellent article on the role of wine in Celestina. In particular, she analyzes how the list of the best wines changes from country to country in the different translations. See: Kathleen Kish, «The Wines of Celestina and the Omnibibulous H. Warner Allen», in ‘Nunca fue pena mayor.’ Estudios de Literatura Española en homenaje a Brian Dutton, eds. A. Menéndez Coller and V. Roncero López, Cuenca, Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-

24.– The anonymous scholiast of the sixteenth century Celestina comentada refers the reader to quite a few sources, but not Pliny. He makes special mention of the De secretis secretorum of Aristotle: «quenta bien largo los provechos que se siguen del buen vino y son quasi todos de ellos los que aquí nuestro author quiso contar» (326). It is noteworthy that the commentator dedicates much more space to the condemnation of the evils caused by wine than he devotes to its virtues. See Celestina comentada, eds. Louise Fothergill-Payne, Enrique Fernández Rivera and Peter Fothergill-Payne, Salamanca, Universidad, 2002, pp. 326-328.
Pedro Mexía’s widely circulated *Silva de varia lección* (Sevilla, 1540) points us in the right direction. Mexía generally names his sources (presumably the same sources consulted by all men and women of learning of the time) and copies shamelessly and almost verbatim from them. The main source utilized by Mexía for his extensive anecdotes on the medicinal properties of wine is Pliny’s *Natural History*, which we have already cited.²⁵

Pliny’s observations on wine are found throughout his treatise, but are most abundant and condensed in books 14 and 23. I reproduce here only a few passages that correlate best with the properties elucidated by Celestina (emphasis added):

> Restaura el vino las fuerzas, sangre y color de los hombres, y en éstos difiere la parte media y más templada del mundo de las que tiene a la redonda. Y cuanto a aquéllos de fuerza la fiebre, tanto da a nosotros este líquor. [...] Con el vino templado se ayudan y favorecen los nervios y con el destemplado se dañan, y ni más ni menos los ojos, recréase el estómago, despiértase el apetito, embótase el cuidado y tristeza, expélese la orina y frialdad, y provócase sueño. Fuera de esto, detiene el vómito, y aplicado por de fuera, en lanas húmedas, mitiga los apostemases e hinchazones. [II. 462]


Y así, dize Platón (según refiere Macrobio, segundo libro) que el vino, templado y en poca cantidad, abiva y adelgaza el ingenio del hombre, aumenta la fuerza y esfuerza y alegre el corazón, quita la congoxa y cuydado. Plinio, en el libro veinte y tres, dize también que, con el vino templadamente usado, se multiplican las fuerzas y la sangre y la color del rostro, fortíificanse los nervios, ayuda a la vista de los ojos, esfuerçase el estómago, despierta el apetito, provoca la urina, atrae el sueño, quita el vómito, quita la tristeza y pone alegría en el corazón y hase otros muchos provechos. Asclipiades, médico, hizo también libro particular de las virtudes del vino [...] aconseja que, para esforçar el estómago, beva un poco de vino templado.

En muchas medicinas usan los médicos del vino, porque el vino templado todos los humores rectifica y repara, pone sangre al que le falta, alegre al melancólico y ayuda a gastar la melancolía, corta y destruye la fiema, humedesce al colérico y ayuda a purgar la cólera. (Silva iii.16). Vol. 2, pp. 103-04.

[...] y allende del apetito y gusto que da en infinitas cosas, para la salud humana y para curar algunas enfermedades, es de maravillosa fuerça: tiempla el calor en el cuerpo, quita el hastío del estómago; y, beviendo un trago dél, quita el hypo y singulto y, con su olor, el estornudar demasiado. Al que rescibe baño, es muy provechoso tenerlo en la boca, para reprimir el excesivo calor. E, siendo muy aguado, defiende del calor del Sol, y cura del ya rescebido. Y también es provechoso para los ojos y para la sarna y toda manera de lepra. Es remedio para las mordeduras de los perros y de los alacranes y para la de cualquier savandija o abispa o otra cosa que pica con aguijón [...] Estanca la sangre, estríñe el muy suelto de estómago; e, assí, tiene otras virtudes muchas que, por no hazer recepta, dexo de contar. (Silva iii.16). Vol. 2, pp. 109-110.
...a los enfermos del corazón por comunicación del estómago es cosa muy excelente ponerlo sobre la teta izquierda en una spongia, y para todo, principalmente, lo blanco que se vaya añejo. Foméntaseles los miembros viriles a las bestias provechosamente con vino cálido, por el cual, echado por un cuerno en melecina, se les quita el cansancio. [ii. 463]

Este género de vino caliente cuece, purga, y es al pecho y vientre provechoso. También al dolor de la madre si vi- niere sin calentura [...] flaqueza de nervios, hincharones, tose, dificultad de aliento, y a los huesos desconcertados puesto en lana sucia. [ii. 463]

Y es cosa cierta estar puesta la última esperanza de los que padecen mal de corazón por compasión del estómago en el vino. [ii. 463]

[El vino bieo] Aprovecha al estómago relaxado o que no puede digerir, a las preñadas y hombres flacos, paralíticos, trémulos, vaguidos, dolores de vientre y sciática. [ii. 464]

More to our purpose, it is in Book 14 that Pliny further explains the relationship between the immoderate consumption of wine and venery: «De esta destemplanza viene [...] sueños desatinados, noches desasosegadas, y lo que se tiene por mayor premio de la embriaguez, luxurias contra natura y monstruosas y una deleitosa maldad» [ii, chap. 22, p. 212]. Celestina’s censorship of the deleterious consequences of excessive imbibing is an intentional strategy. In her old age, voyeurism and bibulosity have become the displacements for her halcyon days of sexual indulgence, days she recollects with nostalgic pride: «Camino es, hijo, que nunca me harté de andar; nunca me vi cansada; y aún así, vieja como soy, sabe Dios mi buen deseo» (Act 3, p. 100).

At this juncture I would like to interrogate another of Celestina’s many strategical silences. In chapter 1 of book 23 of the Natural History, Pliny observes that pure wine is effective against the bite of serpents [«Es el vino puro remedio contra (...) picaduras de serpientes y escorpiones» (ii, 463)]. Why would Celestina decline to include this remedy in her cata- logue? If the Dionysian pseudo-priestess self-identifies with the serpent on some level, she would not want the cure to her bite to be widely known. In Act v, once Sempronio comes to the realization that Celestina has reneged on her promise to share the spoils of their machinations, he lets loose with a series of invectives and vituperations. One of his imprecations reads: «Más seguro me fuera huir de esta venenosa víbora, que tomalla. Mía fue la culpa» (Act v, p. 144). In his prologue, Fernando de Rojas cleverly interweaves his seemingly innocuous anecdotes with
key threads which, when tugged upon, unravel coded meanings. Among these is an observation drawn from natural history: «La víbora, reptilia o serpiente enconada, al tiempo del concebir, por la boca de la hembra metida la cabeza del macho y ella con el gran dulzor apriétale tanto que le mata [...]… y, quedando preñada, el primer hijo rompe los ijares de la madre, por do todos salen y ella muerta queda y él casi como vengador de la paterna muerte» (Prologue, p. 17). Fernando de Rojas could have been acquainted with these beliefs from any number of sources. Mention is found in Pliny’s *Natural History* (Book 10, 82), the *Physiologus*, Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* (Book 12, 4: 10-11), etc. It was also widely illustrated in medieval bestiaries.26 Both of these bits of lore became commonplaces in the emblem tradition and in Spanish Golden Age literature.27 In the first instance, Théodore de Bèze’s *Icones, id est verae imagines virorum doctrina simul et pietate illustrium* (Geneva: Jean de Laon, 1580), provides a wonderful example of the matricidal viperlings avenging the death of their father by shredding their mother’s side during childbirth:28


28.– This and the following emblem have been taken from the excellent website on French Emblems at Glasgow [http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/index.php].
In his 1565 emblem book Emblemata, Junius Hadrianus portrays the reason for the revenge of the viperlings, as the sharp-fanged female viper bites the head off of her lover during intercourse. The emblem’s motto, Femina improba, means «the monstrous female»:

Celestina is (or perhaps used to be) the female viper that is so lascivious and wanton that, in seeking her own pleasure in the procreative act, kills her male lovers with her bite. If Claudina had an identified male partner who helped raise Pármeno (pp. 66-68), there are few textual mentions

29.– The sexual connotations of teeth in Celestina have been amply studied. See, for example, Geoffrey West, «The Unseemliness of Calisto’s Toothache», Celestinesca 3.1 (1979), pp. 3-10 and Javier Herrero, «The Stubborn Text: Calisto’s Toothache and Melibea’s Girdle» in Literature among Discourses: The Spanish Golden Age, eds. Wlad Godzich and Nicholas Spadacini, Minneapolis, U of Minnesota P, 1986, pp. 132-147.

30.– When Melibea confesses her malady to Celestina in Act x, she does so with curious serpentine imagery: «Madre mia, que comen este corazón serpientes dentro de mi cuerpo» (p. 248). This is not a symptom from the medical discourse of amor hereos. If Celestina does indeed constitute a pseudo-Mother for Melibea, these serpents devouring her heart are the viperlings of desire that will gnaw through her own side and result not only in her death, but in that of Celestina in revenge. For Celestina has figuratively copulated with Melibea, implanting in her those seeds of desire that lead to the destruction of both. When Melibea further clarifies that her «mal es de corazón, la izquierda teta es su aposentamiento» (250), one wonders if Rojas was recalling Pliny’s cure for the enfermos del corazón cited above: of applying wine «sobre la teta izquierda en una spongia» (II, 463). Indeed, serpentine imagery is pervasive in Celestina, from the mentions in the prologue to the oil made from viper poison
of Celestina’s past partners. She drains the vital fluids of her mate and moves on to the next one. This is perhaps why her husband is remembered by Pármeno in Act 1 as such a great «comedor de huevos asados» (p. 52). Celestina does, however, have a figurative son who wreaks revenge for her sexual slayings: Pármeno. Celestina refers to him countless times as her hijo, or son, just as he and other characters in the work usually call her madre. And the very first time that they meet up again, years after his lurid childhood experience sleeping at the foot of her bed, she ridicules him with a series of diminutives that include a none too veiled allusion to his sexual organ, which by association with the diminutives, is belittled: «¡Neciuelo, loquito, angelico, perlica, simplecico! ¡Lobito en tal gestico! Llégate acá, putico, que no sabes nada del mundo ni de sus deleites. [...] Mal sosegadilla debes tener la punta de la barriga» (Act i, p. 64). But if Celestina is no longer what she used to be, and must resort to wine as a substitute for sex, it is because age has made her toothless. As she herself observes, however, if she can no longer chew on a phallically charged barbiponiente (200) as she did in the good old days, she can at least savor the taste nostalgically with her gums: «Que aun el sabor en las encías me quedó; no le perdí con las muelas» (Act vii, p. 302).

There is perhaps something else at play here. In mythology, Tiresias stepped on a pair of copulating snakes, and as punishment, was made to inhabit a woman’s body for a period of time. As a consequence, he/she was able to arbitrate in the dispute between Zeus and Hera as to which gender derived more pleasure from the sexual act. The response of Tiresias was that women derived 90% of sexual pleasure, and men only 10%. Out of anger, Hera blinded Tiresias, but Zeus made him a seer. The parallels with Celestina are striking: the androgyny; the poor vision; the clear carnal delight in both sexes, and the role as mediator between the two sexes. In a different version of the myth, related by Callimachus, Tiresias is blinded for seeing Athena naked. And it is here that Celestina as Dionysus and Celestina as Tiresias start to overlap. Nicole Loraux says: «Here we are, as close as we can be, to the ‘terrifying childhood anxiety’ about losing one’s sight that Freud detected in The Sand Man [...] In this way we may question the secret law by which seeing Athena’s body means losing one’s sight but also, perhaps, acquiring the gift of divination» (pp. 211-212). The loss of concupiscence in the physical
arena has been transmuted into a new kind of potency for Celestina: her visionary understanding of the dynamics of human desire.

In a world practically devoid of Christian consolation, a world not fashioned by a merciful God, but rather by the characters themselves, it is somewhat perplexing that Pleberio would invoke the Salve Regina as the conclusion of his memorable lament in Act 21 («¿Por qué me dejaste triste y solo in hac lachrymarum valle?» [402]). But we must interpret it as the final ritual in a mock liturgy that is parodied throughout the work. His cries and weeping are not heard. There is no mercy to be found, and no Assumption of Melibea’s soul to heaven.

Part of Celestina’s modernity is that it is a work fraught with anxieties. And to the extent that these anxieties are displaced onto inappropriate objects, they become fetishes in the Freudian sense. Henry Krips argues that: «fetishism plays a subversive role in reversing the tendency to ‘abstraction’ (in the sense of the erasure of difference), which is so characteristic of modernization.» Several aspects of fetishism in Celestina have received critical attention, such as the voyeuristic gaze and Melibea’s cordón. I believe that wine for Celestina constitute’s another of the text’s fetishistic anxieties. Impervious to any possibility of spiritual consolation, and with her carnal appetites only partially satisfied through voyeuristic indulgence, Celestina’s desires are displaced to the only substitute that can provide her with both a spiritual and corporal sublimation: wine. Freud’s early theory of anxiety sheds great light on what exactly troubles Celestina:

Freud identified anxiety with the energy of repressed libido. In this view, anxiety was taken to be an alternative mode of release for instinctual energies denied expression by the secondary agencies of the psychic apparatus. Refused discharge along preferred pathways, energies


subject to repression undergo a transformation and are experienced in characteristic somatic reactions [...] Freud associated the genesis of anxiety with sexual abstinence or coitus interruptus and asserted that «anxiety has arisen by transformation out of the accumulated sexual tension.»

But who needs Freud? Medieval medicine intuited very well this theory of the cause of anxiety and prescribed a very apt remedy. The last cure offered by Francisco López de Villalobos for unrequited lust in his chapter «Del mal de amores que Avicena llamó flisei y los griegos le llaman hereos» is: «y tinto con blanco le deuen aguar / que siempre emos visto del enborrachar / caer los amantes y amores en tierra.» Celestina’s response to the anxieties produced by a world without order or transcendence, by a world that no longer offers her the consolation of the flesh and cannot deliver the salvation of the soul, is to indulge in the spiritual and corporal salve of wine.
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Este artículo estudia el encomio que hace Celestina al vino en el Auto 9 como una manifestación más de su papel a lo largo de la obra de pseudo-sacerdotisa, ya en su vertiente cristiana, donde preside la celebración de la «eucaristía» durante la escena del banquete, ya en su dimensión dionísica, en la que, como parte fundamental del culto a este dios pagano, el vino desempeña un papel clave. Se analiza además el papel de las imágenes serpentinas en la obra, sobre todo en relación con el mito de Tiresias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: vino, mito de Dionisio, mito de Tiresias, eucaristía, serpientes

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia el encomio que hace Celestina al vino en el Auto 9 como una manifestación más de su papel a lo largo de la obra de pseudo-sacerdotisa, ya en su vertiente cristiana, donde preside la celebración de la «eucaristía» durante la escena del banquete, ya en su dimensión dionísica, en la que, como parte fundamental del culto a este dios pagano, el vino desempeña un papel clave. Se analiza además el papel de las imágenes serpentinas en la obra, sobre todo en relación con el mito de Tiresias.

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ABSTRACT

This article studies Celestina’s encomium of wine in Act 9 as a manifestation of the role she plays throughout the work as a pseudo-priestess, whether in its Christian aspect, when she presides over the «Eucharist» during the banquet scene, or in its Dionysian aspect, in which as a fundamental part of the cult of this pagan deity, wine played a key role. The article also analyzes the importance of serpent imagery in the work, especially with respect to the myth of Tiresias.

KEY WORDS: wine, myth of Dionysus, myth of Tiresias, Eucharist, serpents.