

“Nuevas sentencias sentía”: *Celestina* and the Misery and Dignity of Man¹

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand the significance of *Celestina* (1499) as it moves through time. It contends that new meanings emerge when the context in which the work is printed and read changes. As the prologue to the *Tragicomedia* intimates, each new act of engagement brings to the fore meanings that may not have been intended or even conceivable at the point of its composition. Taking a synchronic and comparative approach, the article looks at the ‘horizon of expectations’ of *Celestina*’s reception in sixteenth-century Spain and Italy, when at the height of its popularity. Focusing on the issues of self-knowledge and solitude, it contextualises their portrayal within ideological debates about the misery and dignity of man that circulated in the Renaissance and within an environment that was considering the possibility of disbelief. It juxtaposes *Celestina* against other contemporary texts involved in this supranational debate, such as Fernán Pérez de Oliva’s *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* (1546). It argues that, in this new horizon, *Celestina*’s portrayal of self-knowledge and solitude and its engagement with debates about the misery and dignity of man goes beyond its medieval origins.

Keywords

Celestina; reception; *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*; *miseria hominis*; *dignitas hominis*; Innocent III, Petrarch; *nosce te ipsum*; solitude; misery and dignity of man; self-knowledge

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Resumen

«*Nuevas sentencias sentía*»: la recepción de *La Celestina* y la miseria y la dignidad del hombre Este artículo pretende entender el significado de *La Celestina* a través de su recepción. Sostiene que surgen nuevos sentidos cuando cambia el contexto en el que la obra se imprime y se lee. Como sugiere el prólogo de la *Tragicomedia*, cada interacción textual resalta nuevos significados que pueden sobrepasar los del momento en el que se concibió. Utilizando un método sincrónico y comparativo, analiza el ‘horizonte de expectativas’ de la recepción de *La Celestina* en España e Italia del siglo dieciséis cuando alcanzó el momento cumbre de su popularidad. Se centra en los conceptos de *nosce te ipsum* y de la soledad, contextualizando su representación en los debates ideológicos sobre la miseria y la dignidad del hombre que circulaban en el Renacimiento y en un ambiente que examinaba la posibilidad del ateísmo. Yuxtapone *La Celestina* con otros textos que formaban parte de este debate supranacional tal como el *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* por Fernán Pérez de Oliva (1546). Mantiene que la representación del autoconocimiento y de la soledad por *La Celestina* y su relación con los debates sobre la condición humana superan sus orígenes medievales en este nuevo horizonte.

Palabras clave

La Celestina; recepción; *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*; *miseria hominis*; *dignitas hominis*; Inocencio III, Petrarca; *nosce te ipsum*; soledad; miseria y dignidad del hombre; autoconocimiento

“En su proceso nuevas sentencias sentía”

Rather than representing a fixed and static object that is passively received by an audience *Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas (1499) exemplifies the process-like nature of textual creation, development, and reception. Formed from concepts and discourses that circulated throughout Europe – evident in medieval traditions such as courtly love, the dialogic form, and the use of *exempla*, as well as in its appropriation of elements from Petrarch, Seneca, and the humanistic comedies developed in Italy² – *Celestina*’s engagement with its origins is nevertheless not unquestioning or uncritical; indeed, it reveals them to be not rigid taxonomies but conventions capable of adaptation and modification. This dynamic process is intrinsic to the work’s textual development, as much scholarship has shown:

2. On *Celestina*’s medieval antecedents see Pattison (2009), Deyermond (2003 [1961]), and Fothergill-Payne (1988). Di Camillo (2010, 2012) raises the possibility that *Celestina* was written in Italy (possibly Florence), given the influence of Italian humanist culture on the work.

an anonymous fragment apparently found by Rojas and turned into a sixteen act *comedia*, which was then transformed into the twenty-one act *tragicomedia* that in turn came to be known both colloquially and in print by the title of its eponymous character, *Celestina*.³

The paratextual material, in particular the prologue appended to the twenty-one act tragicomedy, reveals an author who is fully aware that meaning is not constant or fixed but rather open and mobile. This is particularly clear in the statement Rojas makes about how each of his own readings of the found fragment brought to the fore “nuevas sentencias”.⁴ Reading is characterised as an act determined by a nexus of circumstances: among them age, status, education and, of course, purpose:

Así que cuando diez personas se juntaren a oír esta comedia en quien quepa esta diferencia de condiciones, como suele acaecer, ¿quién negará que haya contienda en cosa que de tantas maneras se entienda? (2000: 20)⁵

The *Tragicomedia*'s prologue gives an account of the struggle for interpretive authority that begins with a borrowing of Petrarch's reference to Heraclitus, continues with imagery of the conflict endemic in all acts of creation, and concludes with mention of reading strategies and the interfering *punturas* made by the work's printers. But it comes to us most clearly in the depiction of the *comedia*'s reception and the challenges of the earliest readers who, if Rojas is to be believed, resisted the initial interpretation of the narrative and pushed him to return to the text, to re-read, re-interpret, and re-work it.

This article takes as its starting point the interpretative openness and evolution of meaning that occurs through reception, as described in the prologue to the *Tragicomedia*. It is not concerned with genetic influence or sources, or indeed authorial intention, but with the way a work can be understood differently as it moves through time. As the prologue intimates, each new act of engagement by an audience has the potential to bring to the fore meanings that may not have been intended or even conceivable at the moment of composition. Studies of literary reception have frequently been undertaken diachronically; but they do not necessarily have to be done this way. Taking my cues from the dynamic

3. I will not be addressing the question of the work's authorship. Much valuable research has been done on this issue, as on *Celestina*'s textual transmission. For an overview of the various arguments, see the introduction to the recent edition by Canet Vallés (2011: particularly pp. 11-30). Regarding the work's title in its European print history, the articles by Berndt Kelley (1985), Kirkby (1989), and Lawrence (1993a) are also useful.

4. We should not forget that authors are themselves first and foremost readers. Snow articulates this in a study of Rojas as the initial reader of the found fragment (1995).

5. Unless otherwise stated, all citations from *Celestina* are taken from the *Crítica* edition prepared by Lobera et al (2000). References to page numbers will be made in parentheses in the main body of the article.

process described by Hans Robert Jauss' flawed if useful concept of "horizon of expectations", I propose a synchronic reading of *Celestina's* sixteenth-century European reception, focusing primarily on Spain and Italy.⁶ It is important to recognise that a synchronic approach is not only chronological but spatial. As already noted *Celestina* was forged from a transnational environment and formed part of an emergent "European" culture. This transnational character can clearly also be seen in *Celestina's* reception. The many translations it underwent (into most European vernaculars not to mention Hebrew and Latin) and the number of continuations and adaptations it spawned are further testament of the appeal it held across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and of its status as a key interlocutor in the context of sixteenth-century European literature and thought.⁷

As the term "horizon" suggests, a synchronic history of reception examines not only the contemporary literary context of a particular time and place – what was being written, printed, and circulated concurrently – but also the wider philosophical and social background. Existing studies have frequently sought to understand *Celestina* according to the ideological context of its composition as well as its sources or influences.⁸ José Luis Canet Vallés, Ottavio Di Camillo, and Consolación Baranda have all individually addressed the link between context and text, interpreting *Celestina* in relation to late fifteenth-century philosophical debates.⁹ This article does not seek to supplant such readings but to complement them. It builds

6. First appearing in his *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (1970) and subsequently in a collection of his essays in English (1982), Jauss's theory can be understood as signifying the expectations, experiences and conventions which condition the literary context in which a work is both produced and received. For a critical appraisal of the concept of "horizons of expectation" see Holub (1984: 53-69, particularly p. 59).

7. Snow's histories of the reception of *Celestina* are invaluable (1997, 2001), as is the work of Parrilla (2010). Lida de Malkiel provides a thorough analysis of the artistic relationships between *Celestina* and its continuations (1962). On the Italian translations, see the edition and studies by Kish (1973, 1992). On the French translation of *Celestina*, see the editions by Brault (1963) and Drysdall (1974); Serrano provides a more recent overview of its history there (2008). The German context of its reception and the two translations by Christof Wirsung have also been looked at by Kish and Ritzenhoff (1980) and more recently by Carmona Ruiz (2006, 2007). On the English translation by James Mabbe see the editions by Severin (1969) and Martínez Lacalle (1972), and more recently Pérez Fernández (2013).

8. See Bataillon (1961), Fothergill-Payne (1988), and Maravall (1964), to name only several. Lawrence's article on *Celestina's* moralité provides another socio-historic interpretation of *Celestina*. Like Maravall, he proposes that the work's moral is not religious or spiritual but social, and is concerned with issues of civic responsibility and civil order (1993b: particularly pp. 92-93, 99).

9. Canet Vallés argues that *Celestina* was influenced by and engaging critically with late fifteenth-century debate about scholasticism (2011: 30, 53, in particular pp. 83-96). Di Camillo believes that the *Comedia* responds to the contemporary issue of educational reform (2010, 2012) and intersects with debates between different schools of moral philosophy and ethics, in particular the polemic about Epicureanism (1999). For Baranda (2004), the work's morality stems from its engagement with "los planteamientos del neopiecurismo, una corriente de pensamiento menos rara, marginal o heterodoxa en su momento de lo que con el paso de los años se ha podido pensar" (2004: 37-38).

on the valuable work of these scholars but takes a somewhat different perspective, turning away from *Celestina's* moment of conception to consider its reception. It argues that such ideological context should likewise be viewed as a factor governing the popularity and significances the work held for its sixteenth-century audience, focusing on one particular philosophical strand central to medieval and Renaissance thought: namely, debates about the misery and dignity of man.

The Misery and Dignity of Man

The nature of humanity is by no means a new topic, stretching back as it does to antiquity; it is a theme that can be found in many a classical, medieval and Renaissance text, albeit approached from a variety of perspectives.¹⁰ Among the many to have been written on the subject, one work holds a particularly fundamental position in Medieval and Renaissance debates about the human condition: Pope Innocent III's twelfth-century treatise, *De miseria humanae conditionis*, also known as *De contemptu mundi*. A compendium of well-known ideas already in circulation about the misery and misfortune of man rather than an original work, *De miseria* attempts to demonstrate the worthlessness of material things and to persuade readers to flee worldly corruptions. It had an enormous diffusion and influence across Europe and survives in more than six hundred manuscripts (including twenty-three extant manuscripts in the Iberian Peninsula), many printed editions, and prose and verse translations.¹¹ Innocent conceived of the treatise as a diptych, with part one, which was devoted to man's wretched state, being countered by a second part on man's dignity.¹² This suggested second section was never written. The treatise that he did write, however, acted as a powerful point of reference in the minds of medieval and renaissance authors: over the course of subsequent centuries an intertextual discourse developed between *De miseria* and many works that sought to resolve the issues it collated.¹³ *Celestina* is fundamentally concerned with what it means to be human. I would contend that when read in the context of these debates and alongside other works that, despite varying aims and methods, were engaged in

10. Some of the foundational research on the European context of the debate about human misery and dignity has been done by Bultot (1964), Trinkaus (1970), and Kristeller (1972), whose studies provide valuable resources and bibliographic references. For more recent considerations, see Vega (2003; 2011), Clúa Ginés (2003), Granada (2003) and the essays in Cappelli (2006).

11. Rodríguez Rivas provides details about *De miseria's* manuscript and print history in Spain (1990). On its European diffusion more generally see Bultot (1964).

12. Innocent states in his prologue: "Si vero paternitas vestra suggesserit, dignitatem humane nature Christo favente describam, quatinus ita per hoc humilietur elatus, ut per illud humilis exaltetur" (Innocent 1955: 3).

13. This is noted by Murchland (1966), who juxtaposes *De miseria* alongside a response by Gianozzo Manetti, *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1452), and more recently by Vega (2003, 2011).

conscious examination of the human condition, it could also have been viewed as an interlocutor in this open-ended discourse.

Comparatively little scholarship has so far systematically investigated *Celestina's* reception using a wider ideological framework such as this.¹⁴ María José Vega's research provides one possible explanation as to why this may be. Certain texts are liable to be "misdiagnosed" or neglected by scholars because, as Vega maintains, they do not fit neatly into modern binary categorisations that relate misery with the medieval and dignity with the Renaissance.¹⁵ Vega gives the example of Fernán Pérez de Oliva's *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* (1546) as one work that has been mislabelled and too readily placed with others that make an explicit case for man's dignity (2009: 123-132) – a "misdiagnosis" that, as a result, underplays the pessimistic tone of half of the original dialogue. Her studies underscore the necessity of considering how periodisation affects the interpretation of texts, an issue previously shown by Pattison (2009) to be present in scholarship on *Celestina*. Maintaining that misery and dignity need to be thought of as "temas complementarios y no contradictorios" (2011: 5-6) – as indeed Innocent viewed them – Vega critiques traditional binary approaches that overlook aspects discernible in some sixteenth-century texts (such as the Epicurean tradition that denies Providence), and that also sideline medieval concepts of man's dignity. Her research suggests that debates about the human condition are multi-stranded because they include texts from a variety of genres and make use of different motifs at various points, and because the meaning of labels such as "misery" and "dignity" evolves as new texts become part of the dialogue. Ultimately, Vega's approach is useful because it highlights the liminal position of those literary works, such as *Celestina*, that do not easily fit into generic categories.

14. As noted, previous studies have often sought to understand *Celestina* from the perspective of its composition. Baranda (2004: 66), Canet Vallés (2011: 73-82, 83-96), and Di Camillo all underline *Celestina's* evident interest in the human condition and include debates about the misery and dignity of man in their discussions. Di Camillo argues that the phrase "dignidad del hombre" – uttered by Sempronio in Act I – is not found in a vernacular text in the fifteenth century before *Celestina*; a usage that he links directly to the circulation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* from 1486 (1999: 80; 2010: 114-15, notes 33 and 34). See also the earlier essays by Alcalá (1976) and McPheeters (1982) on Neo-Epicurean elements. Furthermore, in general scholars have tended to approach issues associated with debates about the human condition individually rather than associating them with any wider philosophical strand. For example, pessimism, fortune, man's subjected state, and the role of the divine have been dealt with, particularly in relation to Pleberio's lament – on which Corfís (2001) provides a useful summary of scholarship up to 2000. One scholar for whom the human condition and dignity form a key aspect of his work is Rodríguez Puértolas (1976), who notes that certain characters are highly conscious of themselves and their personal value. More recently, Gerli has returned to what he sees as the "disquieting and conflictive rather than consolatory, skeptical rather than believing, pessimistic rather than confident" message of the work, suggesting that Rojas anticipates later interest in these philosophical concerns (2011: 30).

15. See Vega (2009: in particular pp. 120-122).

It may be, therefore, that *Celestina* has been overlooked for the reasons Vega outlines: perhaps because it does not adhere to the formal expectations of philosophical or theological genres or because the subject does not at first appear to be an *explicit* concern of Rojas, despite his obvious interest in human nature. Whatever Rojas's intentions, when read against a new horizon created by the evolving discourse about the misery and dignity of man, certain features of his depiction of the human condition may be seen in a new light. Furthermore, taking into account the two-way, reciprocal nature of literary reception – what Jauss called the “socially formative” function of literature¹⁶ – I would suggest that *Celestina*'s position on the threshold of periods and ways of thinking allows it a unique perspective upon contemporary ideologies and conventions. Like the voices of the marginal characters in the narrative, it does not represent a main interlocutor in the debate about man's nature but interacts from the sidelines like an *aparte* or aside, glossing, critiquing or qualifying what is being said in the “central” discourse.¹⁷

As already suggested, a synchronic approach to reception looks at the textual and literary as well as ideological contexts of the “horizon” in question – i.e. what was printed, circulated, and therefore potentially read simultaneously. I propose to read *Celestina* against works that were already associated with this central discourse on the human condition. Two in particular stand out as being particularly useful for examining how *Celestina* informs and is informed by the context in which it is read, and how elements of it can be seen to surpass its medieval antecedents. These are Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (1366), a dialogue between the allegorical figures of Reason, Sorrow, and Joy, and the aforementioned *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* by Pérez de Oliva.¹⁸ The debt owed to Petrarch by Rojas has been examined in detail by Deyermond (2003 [1961]). My aim is not to develop his ideas about how Petrarch's *De remediis* shaped the meaning of *Celestina* but to consider how *Celestina* moves beyond the meanings of the discussion suggested by *De remediis*.¹⁹

16. For Jauss, literary reception entails an exchange between the horizon of a work's production and the horizon of its reception. This exchange not only produces new meanings, it is also socially formative. That is, the gap between a reader's expectations and what they encounter, which is brought to light in the process of reading, modifies perceptions and unsettles assumptions and norms (1982: 39-41).

17. In a comment that highlights the critical perspective provided by texts outside of “central” discourses, Rozzo remarks that “novellas, poems or plays narrated easily understandable ‘stories’ while also conveying unedifying, irreverent or even blatantly heterodox views on the world and traditional religious values. And they were also views that became more subversive and attractive, the more they were put forward in the ‘amusing’ and unconventional settings depicted by literary works” (2001: 205).

18. Petrarch describes the dialogue *De tristitia et miseria*, which was later included in *De remediis*, thus: “Id vero nihil est aliud, quam humanae conditionis exquirere dignitatem” (*Seniles*, XVI, 9). See Rawski's commentary in his translation of *De remediis* (1991: vol. 2, I, xviii), and Rico (1974: 170, n. 161).

19. Like *Celestina*, Petrarch's work was highly popular in the sixteenth century and circulated concurrently. On the manuscript reception of *De Remediis*, see Mann (1971) and for data about its print history see Hankins (2007-2008). Readers of *Celestina* in the sixteenth century were

In contrast there has to my knowledge been no comparative study of the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* and *Celestina*. Baranda is so far the only scholar I have come across who has linked the two works: “Las palabras de Aurelio ofrecen significativas coincidencias con el punto de vista de Rojas porque desarrollan también la primera parte del libro VII de la *Historia Natural* de Plinio. Aurelio ofrece un desolador panorama de la condición humana, desgranando los distintos aspectos de la miseria hominis en términos que coinciden con el prólogo de *La Celestina*” (2004: 66). And yet there are good reasons why this later work makes a particularly valuable interlocutor in the context of discussions about misery and dignity.

The *editio princeps* of the *Diálogo* was printed in 1546 in Alcalá de Henares by Juan de Brocar and included in a collection of works edited by Francisco Cervantes de Salazar. A second Spanish edition was printed in 1586 by Gabriel Ramos Bejarano in Cordoba, edited by Pérez de Oliva’s nephew, Ambrosio de Morales. The *Diálogo* was translated into Italian by Alfonso de Ulloa, a man also closely associated with *Celestina*’s appropriation in Italy as well as the translation of culture between the two peninsulas more generally, and printed under Ulloa’s name three times in Venice by Nicolò Bevilacqua (1563 and 1568) and Francesco Rampazetto (1564).²⁰ Thus the work was in circulation alongside the *Tragicomedia*. As with *Celestina*, the *Diálogo*’s originality rests in its use of the vernacular to address themes that had otherwise been the preserve of texts in Latin.²¹ Despite formal and generic differences, both works are interested in what it meant to be human yet do so at times from a paradoxical perspective that demonstrates at once man’s simultaneous potential for dignity and misery.²²

Furthermore, both *Celestina* and the *Diálogo* provoked responses to the problems of reading and were subject to re-writings and continuations that sought to censor their messages and smooth out their ambiguities.²³ The debate over the didactic and moral intention of *Celestina* is by no means a phenomenon of modern scholarship. Sixteenth-century audiences and critics also disagreed over its benefits and dangers; indeed, contemporary reception of the work was no less characterised by the inability of readers to agree on its value.²⁴ Yet, despite the

clearly able to make links between the two, as discussed by Lage Cotos in her article on the way in which Petrarch is used by the sixteenth-century writer of the *Celestina comentada* (2005).

20. For bibliographic documentation of the print history of the *Diálogo* see Cerrón Puga’s introduction (1995: 11-97, particularly pp. 43-57) and Vega (2009: particularly pp. 106-114).

21. See Vega (2003: 9).

22. Such differences should not prevent us from reading the two comparatively; sixteenth-century readers were accustomed to making connections between disparate texts through the practice of *compliatio*.

23. The fact that *Celestina* inspired such continuations and corrections is of course not an uncommon feature of the treatment of late medieval works of literature in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as the reception of *Cárcel de amor* or *Amadis de Gaula* shows.

24. The vacillation between vituperation and approval has been looked at by Chevalier (1976) and Gagliardi (2007). Throughout the sixteenth century there were consistent demands from

consistent opposition and criticism *Celestina* faced it escaped official censorship in Spain throughout the sixteenth century and was not expurgated until the Indexes of Zapata (1632) and Sotomayor (1640).²⁵ Though the Portuguese Inquisition prohibited it in 1581, the work was not placed on a Spanish Index of banned books in its entirety until the eighteenth century.²⁶ Indeed, it remained a best-seller in Spain throughout the sixteenth century.²⁷ In Italy, it remained a regular feature of the Italian presses until the 1560s; yet it did not appear on any list of banned books issued by an Italian office or state until 1593.²⁸ Kallendorf explains this apparent change in popularity as a consequence of a shift in market demand, which turned towards works of devotional and spiritual content, but also proposes that Inquisitorial investigations into printers and booksellers may have been influential.²⁹ This is not to say that *Celestina* did not still circulate; it would be simplistic to assume copies of earlier editions suddenly disappeared from the reading public. But it may be that despite not being prohibited until much later it had become difficult to sanction its publication in the atmosphere of increasing spirituality and religious reformation that characterised the latter half of the century.

Furthermore, a lack of official state or ecclesiastical prohibition does not preclude a work from posing questions of a potentially problematic nature to its audi-

clerics and scholars, among them Juan Luis Vives, who called it the “nequitiarum parens”, to have the work prohibited and existing copies recalled and destroyed. Nevertheless, *Celestina* was simultaneously considered a work of great style as well as moral merit: witness the dedication by Simón Borgoñón in the 1570 Salamanca edition printed by Mathias Gast, in which Borgoñón claims that it was suitable if not necessary reading material for clerics (cited in Gagliardi 2007: 69-70), presumably so they could keep an eye on “lo que passa en la vida”.

25. On the seventeenth century expurgations, which sought to expunge blasphemous material and religious references, see Green (1947) and Gagliardi (2007: 74-77).

26. Of the continuations, only the *Segunda Celestina* by Feliciano da Silva, referred to as the *Resurrección de Celestina*, appears in a Spanish Index (Valdés 1559).

27. Kallendorf remarks that there exists a double standard in the outrage the work's obscenity provoked and its simultaneous consistent appeal to audiences and position as a “best-seller” (2003: 78). Is it possible that *Celestina* managed to evade being expurgated or placed on the Index of banned books earlier because it was so commercially successful? It is known that the book industry took active steps to fight censorship and protect the businesses by appealing to the official bodies responsible and contesting the Indexes, as occurred in Venice in 1549, 1554/55, and 1559 (Grendler 1977: 85, 99-101), or in Barcelona where booksellers refused to purchase copies of the 1584 Index and continued to sell otherwise prohibited items (Kamen 1997: 117-118). It has also been noted that official censors were more concerned with the potential for heresy in religious rather than secular works, and that literary merit was an important factor (Whinnom 1980: 190) – for example, Alvar Gómez de Castro in his writings on the principles of censorship defended certain otherwise “harmful” works, such as *Celestina* or *Amadis de Gaula*, for being of good quality.

28. *Celestina Comedia di Calisto & Melibea* appears in the Roman Index of 1593, which was based on the Spanish and Portuguese Indexes of 1583 and 1581 respectively; on which see Bujanda (1994: 320, 323, 366, 906). Rozzo notes that the list of 1593 had a very restricted circulation and that certain works, such as *Celestina*, were not added to the 1596 Index of Clement VIII (2001: 206-207).

29. Kallendorf focuses specifically on the press of Gabriele Giolito, the last to print *Celestina* in Italy in the sixteenth century (2003: 82-84). See also Grendler (1977: 133).

ence. It is generally now accepted that censorship is not simply a top-down process of repression and oppression but one that traverses the public and private spheres and can become naturalized as the accepted limit or decorum of a particular discourse in which various agents – editors, printers, and readers – are complicit.³⁰ It is this type of “soft” censorship that *Celestina* is subject to in the sixteenth century. As can be seen in the translations it underwent, and also in the dialogue that it inspired with later readers who sought to amend aspects of the original work in subsequent adaptations and continuations, some of which I will address at a later point.

If we turn to the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*, we find a similar kind of response. Francisco Cervantes de Salazar was inspired by Pérez de Oliva’s ambiguous ending to “complete” the *Diálogo*.³¹ His additions, which were later purged by Morales from his 1586 edition, alter the work’s message by erasing the vagueness of Dinarco’s judgement and have Aurelio concede defeat and be persuaded by the additional arguments for man’s dignity that the former provides.³² In the title of Cervantes de Salazar’s version and the Italian translations by Ulloa emphasis is placed on the *dignity* of man as on the moral benefits brought by reading the work:

Esta presente obra y *Dialogo* de la dignidad del hombre el qual començo en alto stilo y muy profundamente el maestro Oliva y lo prossiguio con grande eloquencia summa erudicion y mucha doctrina Francisco Cervantes de Salazar todo *para reconoscer los dones y beneficios que de dios recibimos para emendar nuestras faltas y poqdades para doctrina enseñamiento de nuestras vidas*’ (1546: fol. lxxx[r]; my emphasis).³³

30. See the introduction by Vega and Weiss to *Reading and Censorship in Early Modern Europe* (2010: particularly pp. 10-14). Essays in the collection, e.g. those by Fragnito (2010) and Weiss (2010), build upon the research of scholars of Early Modern England who initiated a new perspective on “soft” censorship (for references see Vega and Weiss 2010: 10 note 4) as well as investigations by scholars of Renaissance Italy, France, and the Iberian Peninsula who have pursued a similar interpretation (see Vega and Weiss 2010: 12-14 for bibliography).

31. The title page of Cervantes de Salazar’s edition (1546) reads: “Obras que Francisco Cervantes de Salazar a hecho, glosado, y traduzido. [...] La segunda es un dialogo de la dignidad del hombre donde por manera de disputa se trata de las grandezas y maravillas que ay en el hombre, y por el contrario de sus trabajos y miserias, començado por el maestro Oliva, y acabado por Francisco Cervantes de Salazar [...]” Abbreviations have been silently expanded here and in citations elsewhere but original orthography and punctuation are otherwise preserved. Baranda remarks that his use of the term “acabar” suggests that Pérez de Oliva’s version was left unfinished; yet “completing” the work is not as straightforward as Cervantes de Salazar would have readers believe: rather than merely adding a hitherto absent ending, Oliva’s original conclusion has to be excised (“hasta aquí llegó el maestro Oliva, lo que adelante hasta el fin se sigue compuesto Cervantes de Salazar”) to make way for what is presented as entirely new but is in fact a re-working (2003: 22).

32. Baranda’s article is a useful reference point for the effects of Cervantes de Salazar’s changes on the meaning of the original work, representation of its characters, and structure which “están encaminadas a un doble propósito: hacer un elogio de la dignidad humana, pero también modificar el diálogo de Pérez de Oliva desactivando los elementos que contribuían a su ambigüedad, cegar la posibilidad de dejar en tablas una disputa sobre el hombre” (2003: 25).

33. It cannot be confidently stated whether such rubrics were added according to the wishes

Thus, in much the same way as Innocent originally conceived *De miseria*, the *Diálogo* is presented as a catalyst that enables man to recognise the truth about his nature and consequently amend his behaviour; yet in his engagement with Pérez de Oliva's original work Cervantes de Salazar simultaneously chooses to underline only one possible aspect of the human condition. While there was a tendency to resolve or gloss over the ambiguities of both the *Diálogo* and *Celestina*, the effect of reading these two works alongside one another could have been to keep alive these very uncertainties in the minds of those familiar with both texts. Rather like the subversive *apartes* of its untrustworthy marginal characters, *Celestina* provided an oblique perspective on the portrayal of the human condition in contemporary debates.

Self-knowledge and Solitude

Celestina's intersection with debates about the misery and dignity of man can be approached via various themes, among them language, gender and age. For the purposes of this article, however, I will be providing a case study of two in particular that reveal *Celestina's* hitherto underestimated role as an interlocutor in this discourse: self-knowledge and solitude. These ideas are intimately connected in medieval and Renaissance discussions of the human condition – the treatises of Innocent, Petrarch and Pérez de Oliva are obvious examples – and lie at the heart of conceptions of man as an individual and social being. Summed up by the popular Latin tag “Nosce te ipsum”, the concept of self-knowledge has its origins in Greek philosophy and involves the idea that the search for truth had to originate from an understanding of oneself.³⁴ In medieval Christian and ascetic traditions the point of this quest for self-knowledge was unity with God. In the Renaissance this aim continued to hold sway with Neo-Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino, who believed that knowledge unified the subject and the world and, to quote Ernst Cassirer, strove “to overcome the separation in the elements of being and return to the point of their original unity” (1963: 134).

By definition, then, the quest for self-knowledge thus entails the exclusion of external elements, or, as David Aers comments, “a move from the outer person to the inner” (1992: 183). Bernard Murchland conceptualizes solitude as a consequence of the failure to fully and willingly accept the truth about oneself rather than being part of the process by which it is found:

of Cervantes de Salazar and Ulloa or by the printers, who often made such adjustments, as the *argumentos* in *Celestina* attest. If the latter, this brings an additional layer of participation in the multi-stranded discourse that characterises the reception of this work.

34. Bennett (1982) and Aers (1992) provide information about the classical works and authors upon which medieval and Renaissance ideas about self-knowledge were based.

man “may *either* pursue the path of self-identity, meaning, and wholeness; *or, on the other hand*, he may continue to stumble through the ‘unending labyrinths’ of destruction and *alienation*” (1966: xix; my emphasis).

Murchland’s words suggest a familiar polarisation of available philosophical choices: man can either choose to be one thing or another. When we involve *Celestina* as an interlocutor in this debate, however, it becomes clear that this binary opposition is not so simple. One form of “solitude” may facilitate self-knowledge – as *De miseria*, *De remediis*, and the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* all suggest – but self-knowledge can also lead to another, less comforting, form of solitude: not that of the philosopher, freed from worldly affairs, but existential alienation, loneliness, and estrangement.³⁵

Innocent’s aim in *De miseria* was to show his readers the truth about human nature, thereby encouraging them to turn to the divine and find humility and, through this, salvation. Ascetic meditation of the type seen in his treatise attacks worldly distractions and vices such as pride because their effect is to make man “ignorante de su naturaleza y olvidado de su fragilidad. El copioso discurso de las miserias humanas no tendría otro fin que el de recordársela de forma incesante” (Vega 2011: 7).³⁶ In order to bring about the contempt necessary for humility, man had to be brought to a thorough understanding of the deceits of the world, but most importantly of the vileness of humanity: Innocent declares that wise men who spend their lives seeking knowledge externally, in and through the world, will seek truth in vain, because the truth (and therefore the way to exalt God) lies within: “Deficiunt ergo scrutantes scrutinium, quoniam accedit homo ad cor altum, et exaltabitur Deus” (1980: 110-111). This interiorisation of the search for truth is also found in works that responded to Innocent’s provocative treatise. As already noted, while such responses did not necessarily take the same approach, often they did share motifs. The injunction “know thyself”, for example, directly informs the message of several dialogues in both books of Petrarch’s *De remediis*.³⁷ Petrarch advocates, as Innocent does, that the only truly useful knowledge is that

35. On the idea of alienation in Renaissance literature generally, see Howard (1974: 48-49) and Vega (2009: 121-122); and in relation to *Celestina* specifically, see Rodríguez Puértolas (1976: 158-163) and more recently Gerli (2011: 23).

36. Resonances of this incessant reminder of what man is can be found in other late medieval texts, even those not traditionally associated with the misery and dignity of man debate such as Jorge Manrique’s *Coplas*, also a sixteenth-century “best-seller”, whose opening line “Recuerde el alma dormida” seeks a similar awakening. On which see Marino’s most recent work (2011).

37. An analogous work to *De remediis* in which self-knowledge features as the primary issue is *Secretum*, on which see Rico (1974). A self-conscious examination of Petrarch’s relationship with the divine, *Secretum* is an example of the author’s Christian humanism – it deals, for example, with the necessity of free will in faith. It informed Petrarch’s later thoughts on Fortune but never reached the same heights of popularity as *De remediis*. According to Deyermond, Rojas borrows only one sentence from *Secretum*, this coming from the Index, and the work itself was not engaged with directly (2003: 77).

about the self, as Reason explains in the dialogue “De Sapientia”: “Hoc est proprium sapientis, imperfectionem suam nosse ac fateri” (2002: I, i, 62).³⁸

Both Innocent and Petrarch acknowledge, albeit in different ways, that the ability to successfully negotiate the path to self-knowledge does not take place in a vacuum but is conditioned by contextual factors such as wealth, material comfort, or social ties; in other words, it cannot be separated from one’s engagement with the world and others. Innocent tends not to address these contextual factors directly in much detail but there is a sense in the work that withdrawal from the world also means retreat from society. As Murchland notes, *De miseria* displays a “solitary contempt of man and the created order” (1966: xvi). The twelfth-century cleric shows relatively little interest in man as a *social* being. On the few occasions when he depicts human relationships (such as those between master and servant, man and wife) he represents them as troublesome burdens that ensnare man in sinful passions and draw him deeper into the world; or as part of the general environment of conflict and strife, one of the many enemies that man faces, and therefore barriers to self-knowledge.

Though undoubtedly forming part of contemporary debates about the misery and dignity of man, Petrarch’s conceptualisation of the human condition responded to and was conditioned by a different social context to that of the penitential or ascetic environment with which *De miseria* is associated. We find greater consideration of man as a social being in *De remediis*, probably because Petrarch was more interested in providing guidance and consolation for situations readers could potentially face in their own lives. As such, the positive side of social relationships is acknowledged: for example, in the dialogue “De Vicinis Importunis” man is called “politicum et sociale animal” (2002: I, ii, 706), after Aristotle’s definition of man as *zoon politikon*. Nevertheless, this is countered by the admission that true understanding of self and world requires isolation. Petrarch admits in the same dialogue that of all species in the world, humans alone are defined by consistent conflict, offering a familiar list of the torments that arise from social interactions.³⁹ The dialogue ends with the advice that “Si penitus ab hac peste vis absolvi, in solitudinem te reconde” (2002: I, ii 706), a message that echoes earlier discussion in “De Viridariis”, where Reason poses the rhetorical question to Joy that “Quanto autem gloriosius arido in rure exul Scipio Africanus vixerat quam suis in voluptatibus princeps ille Romanus?” (2002: I, i, 280).

The *topos* of fleeing to the countryside to escape the chaos of the city was a literary commonplace in vernacular texts by the sixteenth century, as illustrated

38. Unless otherwise stated all citations from *De remediis* are taken from the edition by Carraud (2002); henceforth volume, book, and folio numbers will be given in parentheses in the main body of the article.

39. A common motif in works that dealt with the human condition, such torments are listed in *De miseria* and are a feature of the prologue to the *Tragicomedia*.

by Antonio de Guevara's *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza del aldea* (1539) – in Latin the *Vitae rusticae encomium*. And it provides a peaceful pastoral setting for another work devoted to exploring what it meant to be human: the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*. Here solitude is introduced at the very start as a philosophical statement that frames the subsequent discussion and underlines the message that to arrive at the truth about man's condition requires isolation from worldly distractions. This rhetorical setting is entirely conventional, and it allows Pérez de Oliva to make the link between self-knowledge and solitude even more explicit. However, having established the general context, the actual meaning of and relationship between these two concepts then varies according to the perspective of each interlocutor in the dialogue: Aurelio, who argues for man's misery, and Antonio, who argues for his dignity. For Antonio, solitude is healing and edifying; it represents a space of creativity and reflection and provides necessary respite from war and all the other conflicts that beset human life and interactions. In contrast, for Aurelio the necessity of solitude stems from the abhorrence felt towards his fellow men. By employing such a strongly negative term as "aborrecimiento" Aurelio's speech surpasses the approach of the earlier works by suggesting that there is nothing to be gained by social interactions. Interestingly, a marginal note printed in Cervantes de Salazar's 1546 edition indicates that Aurelio's statement represents the "Argumento del dialogo" (fol. ii[r]). This *ladillo*, a common device in early printed editions used as a means of guiding readers through an argument, draws readers' attention to the key ideas for them to memorise, and reinforces the centrality of solitude to subsequent arguments that seek to uncover the truth about the human condition.⁴⁰

Though direct reference to it is absent from Antonio's speech, the idea of self-knowledge is directly addressed in Aurelio's, and it is here that we find that greatest change in attitude from the type of considerations seen in earlier works such as *De miseria* and *De remediis*. For unlike Innocent and Petrarch, Aurelio does not consider self-knowledge to be a positive condition:

quien bien considerare los daños de la vida, y los males por do el hombre pasa del nascimiento a la muerte, parescerle ha que el mayor bien que tenemos es la ignorancia de las cosas humanas, con la cual bivimos los pocos días que duramos como quien en sueño pasa el tiempo de su dolor, que si tal conocimiento de nuestras cosas tuviésemos cómo ellas son malas, con mayor voluntad desearíamos la muerte que amamos la vida. (1995: 121)⁴¹

40. This marginal note also appears in Ulloa's translation in the 1563 and 1564 editions, in which *ladillos* appear throughout, as in Cervantes de Salazar's edition. For a recent study of reading practices in the Early Modern period see Nakládalová (2013).

41. Unless otherwise stated all citations from the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* are taken from Cerrón Puga's 1995 edition.

It would be much better, he believes, to “carescer de aquesta lumbre, que tenerla para hallar nuestro dolor con ella; principalmente pues tan poco vale para enseñarnos los remedios de nuestras faltas” (1995: 128-129). While Cervantes de Salazar’s 1546 edition has only the one *ladillo* at this point – “Entender el hombre su miseria es para mas miseria suya” (fol. vi[r]) – interestingly the Italian translation adds a further two: “Miserie del l’intelletto”, and “Volendo gli huomini saper piu sano manco” (1564: fol. 7[r-v]). These editorial interventions strengthen the memorable message that knowledge of man’s miserable state is not always to be desired and can in fact be harmful.

For Aurelio “ignorance is bliss” because making man aware of the misery of his situation leads not to humility and God as *De miseria* contends, or consolation as Reason argues in *De remediis*, but only to more suffering. So pessimistic is the truth about man’s nature that being made aware of the harsh reality would inspire in readers a desire to end their lives – the ultimate sin – thereby rejecting hope and salvation, and ultimately God’s providence. The misery that Aurelio describes “no se funda en el pecado, ni en la caída, ni en la parte material y corruptible del hombre” (Vega 2011: 20-21) and in fact it disregards the divine entirely. While God is a consistent presence in Antonio’s speech, in Aurelio’s he is never once mentioned, nor are other associated terms such as “afterlife”, “salvation”, “providence”, or “sin”. Aurelio speaks of an impious misery which assumes that, if God exists, he is cruel or at the very least indifferent to the minutiae of human destiny (Vega 2003: 9). Man is alone in the world, subject to the powerful creative and ruling forces of Nature and Fortune. But for the insistence of his audience that he reveal all, Aurelio would rather “meteros en tal ceguedad y tal olvido que no viérades la miseria de nuestra humanidad, ni sintiérades la fortuna, su atormentadora” (1995: 122). Ending with an image of nothingness, Aurelio claims to have “traído el hombre hasta el punto donde desvanescé” (1995: 134) and to have left “a él y su fama enterrados en olvido perdurable”; he questions whether Antonio will be able to “resusitarlo” and “dale vida [...] y consuelo” (1995: 136-137).

By the mid-sixteenth century, then, the concept of self-knowledge as it related to the misery and dignity of man had evolved: gone is the penitential and ascetic view of man’s misery, replaced by an epicurean and material perspective.⁴² It is a development that I believe could have shaped the meanings *Celestina* held for sixteenth-century audiences. Although it is informed by discourses and conventions that circulated in works that were part of this central debate about the human condition, *Celestina* moves beyond the horizon of its production and these earlier textual traditions. Instead, the horizons of its recep-

42. On this change in attitude toward the human condition evident in the *Diálogo* of Pérez de Oliva, see Vega (2003: 9). Baranda is of the opinion that the problem for Cervantes de Salazar was not the content of Aurelio’s beliefs (which were not in themselves original), but the fact that the structure of Pérez de Oliva’s version left the debate open to interpretation (2003: 22).

tion represent ever evolving, constantly moving moments that, in time, become further populated, and complicated, by other works such as Pérez de Oliva's *Diálogo*. As the literary horizon is reconfigured, and as alternative perspectives on human misery and dignity emerge, new meanings and different nuances come to light that would have been less obvious or scarcely conceivable at the point of *Celestina's* conception.

“¿Por qué me dejaste triste y solo in hac lachrimarum valle?”

In *Celestina*, too, self-knowledge is advocated as a means to truth and ultimately freedom from the world's deceptions. In his verses that frame the narrative Rojas purports to reveal the truth about the vileness of human nature and the dangers and traps laid by love, telling readers that his pen “Atrae los oídos de penadas gentes, / De grado escarmientan y arrojan su carga” (11). He also urges them to be aware of characters' sins in order to learn how *not* to live and to turn their backs on destructive and ultimately futile passions, presenting the *Tragicomedia* as a mirror in which his readers will see the truth about themselves.⁴³ The acrostic verses are directed at lovers and seek to warn readers against *loco amor*; yet as Lawrence (1993) has demonstrated, love in *Celestina* has important moral as well as social implications. These stanzas, and love in the work more generally, acquire a more profound, existential significance when read against the wider ideological context into which *Celestina* was received, namely anxiety about the dangers of vernacular fiction. Censors and critics viewed love as part of wider philosophical and theological debates, as well as part of wider fears, about the human condition: “los que amáis” could quite easily become “los que pecáis”. In her study of Gabriel Du Puyherbault's treatise on censorship, *Theotimus sive de tollendis et expungendis malis libris* (1548), Donatella Gagliardi (2006, 2010) discusses the association between love and impiety made by Puyherbault. Works dealing with amatory topics were thought to pose a more general moral danger to readers, leading to heresy as well as impropriety and social chaos:

pocos se han percatado de las amenazas que ocultan semejantes maestros de maldad, y del estrecho vínculo que une, por un lado, honestas costumbres y ortodoxia, por otro, lujuria y herejía: quien no vive castamente acabará generando cismáticos e impíos. (Gagliardi 2006: 71)

43. A commonplace image, this is found in the Italian translation of the verses by Alfonso de Ordóñez, which twice make reference to a “specchio”, and in Lavardin's translation of 1578, which borrows the phrase “un clair mirouer” (Rojas 1974: 38); it is found also in Petrarch's *Secretum* where it is linked to Seneca (*Naturales quaestiones*, 1.17.4), who explains that mirrors were invented by nature “so that humans might know themselves”, and gain “some insightful advice” (cited in Zak 2010: 138, n. 39).

Puyherbault's views were not unique. In advice to the Inquisition in 1579, another contemporary scholar, Juan de Mariana, asserts that books like *Celestina* should be banned because “no hay más cierto camino para la herejía que la corrupción general de las costumbres, ni veneno más fuerte que la lección de semejantes libros”.⁴⁴

Thus readers are advised in the verses that frame *Celestina*'s narrative to turn away from worldly vices such as love and control themselves “porque no os perdáis” (13) – a reference that gains a deeper, more serious implication in light of beliefs about the potential for impiety that resided in man's passions. The stanzas provide a focus for contemplation of the transitory nature of the world: reminding readers more generally of their mortality – “Estando en el mundo yacéis sepultados” (13) – and that ultimately, the only truth is faith in God, they display religious orthodoxy and anxiety. Rojas's ostensible position would seem to offer a straightforward ascetic characterisation of man's miserable and sinful state – witness the “muy gran dolor” provoked by the contemplation of man's condition (13). And yet, while the paratexts may proclaim a Christian message, it differs considerably from that of Antonio's in the *Diálogo*, which sees man in a wholly positive light. Rojas may reiterate the necessity of having faith in God, but his words are hardly a promotion of man's dignity.

Furthermore, the actual depiction of human conduct in *Celestina* is ironic and invites a pessimistic view, establishing an affinity with Aurelio's speech in the *Diálogo*. The pessimism of *Celestina* has long been acknowledged by scholars such as Cándido Ayllón (1965) and Alan Deyermond, the latter noting that it is now generally accepted that the tragicomedy goes beyond and deepens Petrarch's perspective (2003: viii) – a view reiterated more recently by Baranda (2004: 30-31) and E. Michael Gerli (2011: 23). Baranda argues that *Celestina* offers no positive alternative to the ideologies and conventions it questions and parodies (2004: 36); I would propose that, while not positive, an alternative perspective could have been suggested by the contemporary textual and ideological context in which it was received. When read alongside Aurelio's speech and in the context of the discourse of disbelief that emerges in the course of the sixteenth century, the notorious ambiguities and open-endedness that characterise *Celestina* acquire added layers of significance that further challenge orthodox Christian beliefs.

Rojas apparently wants his readers to see clearly, to cast off their blindness in order to save themselves from worldly traps: his exhortation to readers – “Limpiad ya los ojos, los ciegos errados” (14)⁴⁵ – appears to challenge Aurelio's

44. Cited in Gagliardi (2007: 61). The danger to both morality and faith posed by works that treated, narrated, or taught lascivious or obscene material is acknowledged in 1564 in the VII *regula* of the Tridentine index.

45. The Italian translation retains the emphasis on seeing clearly in order to avoid being deceived: “Tenete questo a gliocchi per un specchio, / A cio che amando siate men decepti” (Rojas 1973: 37).

desire in the *Diálogo* to return readers to a state of blind ignorance. However, his emphasis on enlightenment is not positive and suggests instead that the truth in fact brings pain and suffering. Thus, using a common trope of medieval authors, he confesses to concealing it within a deceptively irreverent outer layer – a “píldora amarga / [...] dentro de dulce manjar” (11). This desire to protect readers from the harshness of reality is in sharp contrast to the anxiety Rojas demonstrates about interpretive openness in the prologue to the *Tragicomedia* and about the ability of his readers to profit from his “bitter pill” of truth in the opening verses. It is a rhetorical stance that actively allows for the possibility that the ultimate truth is misunderstood, for it widens the gulf separating man from knowledge that was supposedly beneficial and leaves it open instead to misinterpretation and likely misuse.⁴⁶

Events in *Celestina* show that the truth is not only hard to deal with but hard to come by due to the conflict inherent in mankind. A study of how gatherings of people function (or not), it represents the interactions and conflicts of different social groups, ages, and genders.⁴⁷ Aside from its use as a rhetorical ploy in the persuasions of Celestina, friendship is conceived by most characters as a necessary and vital part of human interaction if not survival, and solitude, on the surface at least, is presented as something better to be avoided. And yet, as Deyermond has argued (2003 [1961]: 117-118), *Celestina* goes beyond the Petrarchan point of view to see social interactions as potentially destructive and corrupting, if not toxic. While the abhorrence towards fellow men of which Aurelio speaks in the *Diálogo* is not demonstrated here, it is certainly evident that characters struggle to disentangle themselves from the debts and duties to which relationships hold them; that they are bad influences upon one another, encouraging lust, greed, and a disregard for anything other than worldly gratification; that faced with the constant battle to assert their independence, power, and control in situations, and to resist the desires and schemes of others, the process of seeking out the truth of themselves and the world is arduous.

Set in a busy urban environment, there appears little chance in *Celestina* to escape to the sort of peaceful idyll so promoted by Petrarch and Pérez de Oliva. And yet, it is interesting that important moments of awakening, when characters explore a truth about themselves or a situation, tend to occur when they are alone. For Lida de Malkiel the monologues represent “conflictos anímicos expresados en voz alta” (1962: 124). Not only do they convey a sense of psychological realism and depth, and demonstrate characters’ desire to examine

46. Grendler notes that implicit in debates about censorship was the issue of *how* to read (1977: 63-66). More recently, Gagliardi has pointed to the fears that lay behind the condemnation of works written in the vernacular (2007: 63, 68).

47. Deyermond has highlighted the close attention paid to the concept of man as a social being (2003 [1961]: 45).

their consciences, when set in the context I am describing here they provide an ironic commentary – an *aparte* – on the conventional association between self-knowledge and the philosopher’s solitude. Two characters for whom this is particularly true are Melibea and Pleberio. Melibea’s self-conscious explorations take place when she is alone, as in Act X; she strives to find a space for reflection, actively seeking to avoid others, as in Act XX when she sends away her father and Lucrecia. Pleberio’s lament, which demonstrates the process of self-discovery, is only possible because of his experience of profound solitude (I’m assuming that Alisa is dead if not dying). Melibea’s death not only radically destabilises all that he knows of the world and himself but acts as the catalyst for a subsequent desperate search for answers and reconsideration of who he is and what his purpose in life has been.

In some instances the need for solitude is a practical necessity, such as in Act XX when Pleberio and Lucrecia would undoubtedly physically attempt to stop Melibea’s suicide, a possibility of which she is quite aware: “Quiero cerrar la puerta, por que ninguno suba a me estorbar mi muerte” (329). In others it comes unbidden, a sudden jolt of loneliness forced upon them by circumstances, as it is for Pleberio: “¿Por qué me dejaste triste y solo *in hac lacrimarum valle?*” (347).⁴⁸ In reading these solitary examinations of conscience alongside Aurelio and Antonio’s opening discussion in the *Diálogo*, it becomes clear that a new emphasis emerges upon solitude as a necessary creative space in which to find self-knowledge, whether consciously desired or not. Yet, while it is true that characters engage in moments of self-reflection when alone, the kinds of truth they reach is another matter. Rojas may not depict as directly or as openly as Aurelio does the negative impact self-knowledge may have, but his narrative radically qualifies the idea that it could lead to either the humility and salvation Innocent desired, or the consolation Petrarch envisaged – in other words, the “self-identity, meaning, and wholeness” Murchland describes. Instead *Celestina* shows how it results in physical and spiritual fragmentation and a state of estrangement that goes beyond concepts of the human condition seen in earlier medieval works such as *De miseria* or *De remediis*.

Melibea’s language is characterised by vacillation between clarity and obfuscation; I estimate that variants of the term “descobrir” occur thirty-six times in *Celes-*

48. Other characters also experience revelations when alone. See for example *Celestina*’s perambulatory musings at the start of Act IV, which betray a level of honesty and self-awareness she would never otherwise publically display. Calisto, too, experiences a sudden sense of shocked awakening, albeit momentarily. His soliloquy in Act XIV, which comes after he sends Tristán and Sosia away, opens with the comment that “¡O mezquino yo! ¡Qué tanto me es agradable de mi natural la solitud y silencio y escuridad!” (277) The need to be alone suits his melancholic state and miserable nature; the “darkness” of which he speaks is figurative as well as literal: for the moment of lucidity he experiences here, prompted by the circumstances of his servants’ deaths, is fleeting. He soon returns to carnality, having convinced himself to embrace the heady ignorance of desire once again.

tina in total. A third of these occasions involve Melibea, who employs it four times in Act X (three of which appear in her soliloquy), and twice in Act XX during the speech to her father. The use of “descubrir” corresponds to moments in which Melibea is attempting to negotiate the truth about her nature.⁴⁹ The fact that it holds such a central position in the examination of her conscience that takes place in Act X’s monologue points to the importance of solitude in this process.⁵⁰ All three times the term is used in Act X’s soliloquy share a sense of uncovering something that has been otherwise hidden or unknown: namely, the distressing reality about restrictions on women and her feelings for Calisto. Crucially, however, Melibea does not use this “descubrimiento” to bring about a positive transformation in her life, to eschew worldly dangers in favour of the divine, as Innocent suggests. If anything she does the opposite, rejecting the awakening it brings; a rejection symbolised by the “hoja de castidad”, which she uses to cover her “amoroso deseo, publicando ser otro mi dolor que no el que me atormenta” (220).

Through her experience of solitude Melibea discovers an unwelcome truth: that what she is experiencing is a repressed sexuality, a socially unacceptable desire which necessitates concealment from wider society – though not necessarily from Lucrecia and Celestina, or obviously Calisto. But it is also more than this: the truth about her sexuality is not simply unacceptable according to social norms but, on a deeper level, painful for her to admit even to herself – perhaps because even at this point in the liaison she is aware that the person to whom she will ultimately reveal these desires, and eventually surrender her honour, is an imperfect and unworthy lover far removed from her vision of the ideal courtly suitor. Thus the “hoja” is not so much a public dissimulation but a private one used to hide the discrepancy between her desires and reality. George A. Shipley remarks that “It is not unlikely that [Melibea] is more knowing – of herself and her adversary – than she lets on. She has good reason to dissemble (and she has proved she can)” (1975: 327) and observes that she negotiates the revelation of her feelings in a “conscious calculated manner” (1975: 330). A turning point in the action of the narrative, Act X’s climax is unusual because “the movement is internal and disguised” (Shipley 1975: 332). Shipley’s comment hits upon the obfuscation that Melibea practices. Even when forced to reveal all to her father in Act XX she refuses to openly admit the truth of her desire or active role in her own dishonour. Furthermore, she continues the profound self-deception in which she has so far lived to such an extent that she is unable to acknowledge its seriousness: while recognising the effects of her death upon her family (and indeed, wrongly blaming herself alone for

49. Brooks (2000) believes that “descubrimiento” represents a literal opening up or penetration of Melibea’s body and mind in the context of patriarchal control over the female body.

50. By my estimation “descubrir” occurs a six further times in monologues by Celestina (Act IV, twice), Pármeno (Act VIII, once), Calisto (Act XIII, once), and Pleberio (Act XXI, twice) at key moments during which they, too, search for self-knowledge and truth about the world.

the chaos her affair with Calisto has caused) she willingly ignores the fact that she is about to commit the one sin that will bring permanent estrangement, not only from society but from the divine. Melibea's "hoja de castidad" serves to conceal reality from herself; it is a figurative extension of the leaves of the books through which she lives out her fantasies.⁵¹ Allowing her to feign ignorance, it returns her to the state of metaphorical blindness or somnambulance described by Aurelio – the "ignorancia de las cosas humanas, con la cual bivimos los pocos dias que duramos *como quien en sueño pasa el tiempo de su dolor*".

Pleberio's engagement with self-knowledge demonstrates a similar approach. The figurative veil of blindness falls from Pleberio's eyes in Act XXI when, according to Gerli, he is newly "endowed with a profound sense of consciousness and self-awareness" (2011: 24) and perceives man's miserable, entrapped state. However, though Pleberio may be experiencing an awakening, he too, like Melibea, is far from fully self-aware. For if, as Petrarch and Innocent argue (albeit, as noted, from different perspectives), the hallmark of a wise man is to know his own imperfections and to admit them, Pleberio cannot be thus characterised. His knowledge and learning – evident in the examples from literature, legend, and history he, like Melibea, cites – are futile because while he awakens to the vileness of the world, he is unable to fully admit his own faults. Gerli believes that "Cut off from everyone, with no response to his pleas, [Pleberio] can only turn to himself in his quest for subjective understanding" (2011: 32); yet it is a pursuit in which the grieving father ultimately fails. Refusing to admit responsibility for his daughter's actions he instead looks outwards to place the blame on external forces (the World, Love, and Fortune), even skipping over the failings of other individuals whom he could blame, ignoring Calisto's lust and mentioning only briefly Celestina's machinations. Given that the work is apparently composed in reprehension of *loco amor* and untrustworthy servants and go-betweens it is surprising that the conclusion does not return to these specific problems. Instead, framed by wider debates on the human condition and by the alternative perspective on solitude and self-knowledge that the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* provides, Pleberio's awakening comes to be seen as decidedly more existential and problematic in nature.

While their speeches appear to be a quest for resolution as well as comfort, read in the light of this sixteenth-century ideological and textual horizon, what Melibea and Pleberio actually demonstrate is their inability to fully interiorize the process of acquiring self-knowledge. They are brought only to a partial state of awareness because of their unwillingness to fully embrace the truth of their natures. In this muddled awakening, the supposedly positive ends this process is meant to bring (humility, salvation, a bettering of the self, or consolation) do not

51. For the concept of "living through literature", see Severin (1989: particularly chapter 3, pp. 23-24, and chapter 7, pp. 96-100).

materialise. Instead, as Aurelio forewarns, even this half-complete state of self-knowledge leads to something far more serious: suffering, linguistic, existential and, in the case of Melibea, physical fragmentation; and an experience of solitude so profound that it brings about not the *contemptus mundi* that leads to salvation or to consolation, but estrangement from other people, the world and the divine.⁵²

John Edwards argues that attitudes of disbelief at this time were not uncommon, stating that “it does appear that there was indeed genuine religious scepticism in late medieval and early modern Europe” (1988: 21). Furthermore, in a remark about Inquisitorial statements, Edwards observes that

There is a universal dimension to some of the accusations [...]. They included generalized attacks on Christianity or attacks on specific aspects of the church’s teaching; blasphemy, which moved easily into humour and obscenity; materialistic views about this life and scepticism about an afterlife; a belief in the validity of other religions and the possibility of achieving salvation by following them; and finally, the use of magic. (1988: 13)

Similarly, Vega contends that in the sixteenth century disbelief was a *condición de posibilidad* that was, at the very least, discursive (2008: 267-268). She argues that there existed a “biblioteca del ateo, disponible textualmente en el siglo XVI, que hubiera constituido, para decirlo con los polemistas cristianos, una posible *escuela de impiedad o seminario de irreligión*” (Vega 2008: 270; emphasis author’s own). If texts provide a *formal* space in which the possibility of disbelief can be raised, there also exist *ideological* spaces in which orthodox ideas can be questioned. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, one such ideological space was

la consideración de la naturaleza humana, ya sea desde la antropología epicúrea, ya desde la experiencia de la vida social y de la ordenación del mundo. El hombre mismo, o el concepto de hombre, puede ser causa de ateísmo, o, más exactamente, puede ser la causa de una de las formas de ateísmo pleno en el Quinientos: de la negación de la providencia y de la inmortalidad del alma. (Vega 2008: 296)

Although *Celestina* is perhaps not in itself a “disbelieving” work, it can nevertheless become one, I would argue, when read in a context in which the possibility of disbelief was emerging. I propose that the pessimism and nihilism expressed by Melibea and Pleberio would have acquired even greater significance and could have been seen as an even more sharply subversive message of despair and the denial of God’s providence when read in a horizon populated by texts that espoused or at the very least opened up the possibility of such a message – texts, for example, like the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*.

52. On the breakdown in language caused by Pleberio’s awakening, see Gerli (2011: 26-27).

Neither Melibea nor Pleberio deny the existence of God but their actions and beliefs lead them to question whether man is alone in the world in spiritual or religious terms. God appears very rarely in *Celestina* as a being with power and control who directly rules over characters' lives. Jerry R. Rank argues that of the 223 times that the term "Dios" appears in the narrative over half represent conventional, formulaic usage employed to achieve certain effects within the dialogue yet which reveal little about characters' (or Rojas's) deeper religious convictions (1980: 77, 79). In her soliloquy in Act X Melibea appeals directly to God as the ultimate source of power; and yet, rather than begging his forgiveness for her transgressive desire and dishonesty, what she actually requests is his assistance in maintaining the deception that she is chaste: "húmilmente suplico des a mi herido corazón sofrimiento y paciencia con que mi terrible pasión pueda dissimular» (220). While she finally offers her soul to God and seeks protection for her parents – an act of faith and humility that jars with the sin she is about to commit – Melibea shows a distinct lack of concern for her own spiritual salvation or damnation, willingly consigning herself instead to another literary trope, that of the "infierno de amadores" where she will be re-united with Calisto.

While he bewails the transitory nature of life, the mutability of fortune, and the vanity of terrestrial pursuits such as honour and wealth, in keeping with common motifs of the *contemptus mundi* tradition, Pleberio's lament reveals a sense of isolation verging on alienation from the world, history, and other people that goes beyond that experienced by Innocent, standing alone before God in his contempt of the world, or extolled by Petrarch as a positive space of consolation. However, more than simply an estrangement from the worldly, his sense of alienation also has a philosophical if not spiritual basis.⁵³ Masked in the medieval didactic and consolatory traditions from which the lament is born is a "radical nihilism" (Gerli 2011: 24). As in Aurelio's speech there is no mention of God as a point of comfort; no sense of anxiety, either, over the gross sin his daughter has committed, or mention of salvation, the afterlife, or the role of the divine.⁵⁴ Pleberio sees death not as a transition to another life with religious significance as it was for Petrarch Deyermond, (2003 [1961]: 114) but as a final disaster (Gerli 1976: 72; 2011: 26). Without hope of a release to some state of being "beyond", he remains trapped in the metaphorical labyrinth of which Murchland speaks – an existential "nothingness". As with Melibea, the realisation of the gulf separating the truth from his

53. For Rodríguez Puértolas (1976: 158-163) and Howard (1974: 48-49) this alienation is worldly or material; they relate characters' estrangement to socio-economic factors, and human actions and institutions respectively. Vega is critical of interpretations of later medieval and Renaissance perspectives on man's misery such as Howard's, believing that it not only wrongly ascribes collective coherence to what is a state of mind, but overlooks the potential for alternative views of human misery, such as the epicurean, which posit an estrangement from or rejection of the divine (2009: 121-122).

54. See Deyermond (1990: 173-174).

“inner reality” leads only to pain, melancholy, and despair.⁵⁵ The realisation of the disjunction between what both *think* they are and reality, or as Rodríguez Puértollas puts it, “la falta de adecuación entre *esencia y existencia*, entre el *querer ser* y el *tener que ser*” is what, in his words, “produce la deshumanización y la alienación” (1976: 166-167; emphasis author’s own).

Gerli observes that “At the end of *Celestina*, Rojas confirms that it is just as impossible to live life like a Christian as it is to live it like a courtly lover” and that the work “is not followed by recantation, palinode, or enlightened understanding. We are left with a vision of a world that is never reconciled to conform to Christian beliefs” (2011: 28). But I would contend that further consideration of these points is required. Melibea’s behaviour is, as Severin has noted, inspired by books; her actions in turn inspire Pleberio’s pessimism. By the end of the lament he is left on the verge of utter despair and disbelief and does not receive comfort or answers *within the confines of the narrative*. Yet his reference to the valley of tears, with its allusion to consoling Psalms, does leave open possibilities for comfort, for readers at least if not for Pleberio himself. With the juxtaposition of Rojas’s concluding verses immediately afterwards readers are led to a stage beyond this ambivalence and pessimism that may have suggested an opportunity for salvation. It is possible that by framing the narrative in this way Rojas was attempting to mitigate the effects of any similar pessimism that Melibea and Pleberio’s joint example might inspire in readers, thereby pre-empting the sort of responses the work would provoke. However, as with Cervantes de Salazar’s continuation of the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre*, which modified Dinarco’s balanced judgement in order to provide more explicit comfort, the reception of *Celestina* demonstrates that this moralising was not sufficient to prevent attempts to control its message in the sort of “soft” censorship mentioned earlier.

Later interlocutors – editors, continuers, translators, and printers – would seek to limit the potential influence of its denial of divine providence and treatment of the ultimate sin, suicide. One such example is the translation by Jacques de Lavardin (1578), which attempted to contain *Celestina*’s pessimistic message and guide readers’ interpretation through the addition of a character, Ariston, Pleberio’s brother-in-law, whose role was to provide consolation. The grieving father responds to this intervention with the exclamation that “Tu m’as rendu la vie, tu as chassé les espesses tenebres dont la precedente douleur tenoit mon esprit offusqué” (1974: 256) – a comment that suggests a mind emerging from the darkness of ignorance and is redolent of the debate added to Pérez de Oliva’s *Diálogo* by Cervantes de Salazar, in which Aurelio renounces his earlier stance. Persuaded by the additional arguments presented to him by the now actively participating Dinarco Aurelio confesses “Quedo tan alegre, Dinarco, con el fin de

55. On which see Aers (1992: 187) and Gerli (2011: 26).

tu sabroso razonamiento [...], quedo alegre en haber nacido: mudando el parecer que al principio tenía, por liquidar bien esta materia” (1991: 136-137).

A similar process of re-writing occurs in continuations such as the *Segunda Celestina* by Feliciano de Silva (1534), *Tragedia Policiana* by Sebastián Fernández (1547), and *Comedia Selvagia* by Alonso de Villegas Selvago (1554). Not only do these works reveal an ongoing dialogue about the human condition with *Celestina* as a key interlocutor, they also provide clues as to how certain motifs and ideas were received. As with the translations, we find the elimination or modification of unpalatable elements, such as suicide, which is exorcised from many of the narratives. In only the *Tragedia Policiana* does it remain as a suitable solution to the heroine’s predicament: Philomena shows a similar lack of concern for her soul to Melibea, focusing instead on an undefined pagan afterlife where she will be re-united with her lover. In others, such as the *Segunda Celestina*, the heroine’s death is often (but not always) replaced by marriage, frequently to the lover; and we also find an increase in religious references. These modifications – responses to *Celestina*’s treatment of the human condition – mitigate the ultimate sin of suicide and the despair and revocation of God’s providence by appropriating the work’s conclusion into the realms of the socially and religiously acceptable.⁵⁶

Meaning in Movement

I have argued that *Celestina* should be seen as forming part of a network of texts that can be classified as responding to debates about the misery and dignity of man, encapsulated by Pope Innocent III’s treatise, which was a central interlocutor in these discussions – texts that sought to explore what it meant to be human and over time created an evolving series of significances. Like *De miseria* and *De remediis*, *Celestina* is presented as a way of bringing about self-knowledge in readers and purports to reveal truths about man’s nature and existence in the world. Yet the unfolding of this process is not quite as straightforward – something that reading the work through the *Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre* makes clear. The fact that Melibea and Pleberio ultimately fail to reach a position of complete self-knowledge encourages readers to engage with this existential struggle for “self-identity, meaning and wholeness” themselves, drawing them into the debate and asking that they in turn respond to the questions and issues it raises. In spite of Rojas’s attempt to intervene, via the paratexts, between narrative and audience, *Celestina*’s open-ended nature not only responds to but continues medieval discourses about mankind, inviting further questions of its own. This ongoing debate is illustrated in the sixteenth-century

56. See Lida de Malkiel (1962: 133, 440, and 457-460).

reception of *Celestina*, most obviously in translations such as Lavardin's, and continuations such as the *Segunda Celestina*, which in turn sought to contain or modify Rojas's message.

As demonstrated by his statements in the prologues, where he explains the work's development from found fragment to *Comedia* and then *Tragicomedia*, Rojas was fully aware of the latent conflict that characterizes the process by which a work is appropriated. The interpretative openness that he describes there continues to broaden throughout *Celestina*'s own reception, and in potentially troubling ways, allowing other possible meanings to emerge in light of literary and philosophical developments that appeared subsequent to the work's composition and its earlier medieval antecedents. As a comment upon the sort of abstract, idealised discussions over man's nature found in contemporary treatises and dialogues, *Celestina* demonstrates the difficulty of putting into practice this search for truth and willingly accepting the conclusions reached. It undermines the humanist notion that man is centred and in control, an idea that appears in contemporary works such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486). *Celestina* instead shows that man is de-centred and fragmented, and complete self-knowledge a humanist fantasy. The concern manifested in the prefatory materials over the effects of truth – slippery, difficult to acquire, and hard to swallow – is borne out by *Celestina*'s conclusion, which demonstrates that when finally achieved even partial self-knowledge does not automatically lead to positive outcomes. Such anxiety becomes further heightened when read alongside Aurelio's reasoning in the *Diálogo* that

“Bien sabemos que en altas imaginaciones metidos muchos han perdido el seso, y que desta manera no podemos meter nuestra alma en hondos pensamientos sin peligro de su perdición” (1995: 128).

Rojas may call for meditation upon Christ's passion and claim to reveal the sins of fellow men, but the narrative provokes a more paradoxical response by showing that the deeds of these individuals take place in a world of wretchedness in which divine providence seemingly has no sway. *Celestina* goes beyond the earlier discourse about the misery and dignity of man, which sought to increase awe before God's power and benevolence, reinforce the worthlessness of the worldly and the importance of the divine, or provide consolation. Rather than staging humility and redemption, salvation and consolation, it sets before us doubt and disbelief, fragmentation and alienation; it does not qualify but questions man's relationship with the divine. Rojas may have attempted to contain these troubling implications, but in the horizon of sixteenth-century debates about the human condition, his book continued to provide an oblique perspective on man's misery. In this particular context, *Celestina* becomes another voice that challenges confident belief in God, and dangerously posits a rupture between the human and divine.

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