

RELIGION AS MAGIC IN THE *TRAGEDIA POLICIANA*

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Claudina, in Sebastián Fernández' *Tragedia Policiana*, like her counterpart Celestina, in Rojas' masterpiece, is adept at the manipulation of her victims and clients through occult practices, and, again like her more famous predecessor, she is equally ready to seek divine intervention when the occasion warrants. It is this relationship between magic and religion in the *Policiana* that I will examine in what follows.

María Rosa Lida de Malkiel noted in *La originalidad artística de "La Celestina"* that the elements of witchcraft present in the imitations lack the subtle treatment given them by Rojas, and that imitators like Fernández portrayed witchcraft more openly and without the pretense or sham of coverup occupations. In the *Policiana* it determines the behavior of the heroine, Filomena, at the expense of the psychological verisimilitude so vital to Rojas' *Celestina*.¹

With the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1484 came the rejection of the orthodox doctrine that devils could work on their own without the help of the *hechicero*. This of course makes the *hechicero* vitally important for the devil's work, and the general opinion at the time of the *Celestina* was, as P. E. Russell points out, "que los hechizos tenían eficacia especial en lo que atañía a las cosas amorosas."² Russell explains that, according to the *Malleus*, the most important activity of the *hechiceras* was to "producir por medios *mágicos* una violenta pasión hacia una persona determinada en la mente de la víctima del hechizo."³ This effect--called *philocaptio*⁴--is the ultimate goal of the *conjuros* of both Celestina and Claudina, and explains the close relationship between *alcahuetería* and *hechicería* in Rojas' time. Since the *Tragedia Policiana* is, according to Menéndez Pelayo, the closest imitation of the *Celestina*, these points are pertinent to the study of the *Policiana*.

The problems of distinguishing between "magic" and "religion" is a recurrent one which was dealt with at length in ancient times in Pliny's *Natural History* and Plato's *Book of Laws*.⁵ Confusion persists even today, and dissociation of the two terms has always been a dilemma for the Christian church. In the fourth century "Jesus himself was looked upon as a magician and was, in fact, represented in all his older pictures with a

magic wand in his hand."⁶ Christian writers, disturbed by such images, took up the task of separating magic from miracle. In *The City of God*, Saint Augustine denied that Christ's miracles were magical, emphasizing that they "were wrought by simple confidence and devout faith, not by incantations and spells." He associated miracle with divine influence and magic with demonic intervention.⁷ For our purposes this distinction is inadequate, since it does not identify a structural or functional difference to help those of us who have difficulty distinguishing between angels and devils. Saint Thomas affirmed the reality of magic, as did other fathers of the Church, but he denied that the magicians possessed any supernatural powers. It was not the *hechicera* who had the power, but the devil who was performing the "magic," deceiving the witch into believing she had performed it.⁸

In the late nineteenth century, Sir James Frazer provided a classic distinction: "Magic," in his words, "attempts to compel the powers of the universe; religion supplicates them."⁹ Or, as Paul Tillich explains, religion is to be identified with ultimate concern, and with *response* to the revelation of God, as opposed to magic, which reaches out and seizes in order to possess or control.¹⁰

An even sharper distinction was drawn by Bronislaw Malinowski in *Magic, Science, and Religion*. Malinowski defines magic as "a practical art consisting of acts which are only means to a definite end," and religion as "a body of self-contained acts being themselves the fulfillment of their purpose."¹¹ Freud pointed out in *Totem and Taboo* that sorcery "is essentially the art of influencing spirits by treating them in the same way as one would treat men in like circumstances: appeasing them, making amends to them, propitiating them, intimidating them, robbing them of their power, subduing them to one's will--by the same methods that have proved effective with living men. Magic, on the other hand, . . . disregards spirits and makes use of special procedures and not of everyday psychological methods."¹² Both of these practices are found in the *Policiana*, and for our purposes of distinguishing them from religion they can be considered together.

The most comprehensive and specific separation of the characteristics of magic and sorcery, on the one hand, from those of religion, on the other, is that of William J. Goode, who assigns the following characteristics to magic as opposed to religion: 1) concrete specificity of goal; 2) a manipulative attitude; 3) emphasis on the professional-client relationship rather than that of prophet and follower; 4) emphasis upon individual rather than social ends; 5) practice mainly by individuals rather than communal worship; 6) a ready change of technique in the event of failure; 7) a lesser degree of emotion; 8) - 10) emphasis on evading or bending the nature of the universe, as opposed to accepting and implementing it; and, finally, 11) instrumental use for the attainment of specific goals.¹³

If we look at the ostensibly religious practices in the *Policiana*, it soon becomes evident that they are "magical" acts as performed by the characters in this work: Policiano and Claudina both pray for Philomena's surrender--this is their "specific goal." Similarly, Claudina attempts

to assure the efficacy of her manipulative *conjuros* through prayer. She charges Parmenia, her daughter, and Libertina: "Mochachas, rogad a Dios que yo salga con ella a luz, que no me acuerdo auer intentado cosa de que tanto aya desconfiado."¹⁴ Claudina includes religious practices in her professional rituals. Her prayers are part of a "package deal" included in her professional-client relationship with Policiano and Philomena. Obviously Claudina's religious practices do indeed "emphasize the individual rather than the social end," and they are practiced by her alone rather than communally. The ready change of technique is evident when Claudina prays for success in her *brujerías*. If religion doesn't work she resorts to magic. Policiano does likewise, going first to God and then to Claudina (p. 8). Claudina performs her ostensibly religious acts in a businesslike manner with "a lesser degree of emotion." Even on her death-bed, her pseudo-confession appears matter-of-fact. She uses her petitionary prayers, blessings, and confession, like her occult practices, to force the free will of Philomena and thus bend the moral nature of the universe. Claudina's "religious" acts are, then, thoroughly instrumental, and used in pursuit of specific goals.

So it is that what initially appear to be religious practices in the *Tragedia Policiana* are in reality only instances of religion in the service of magic. This is precisely the type of religion corrupted by magic and superstition that Cervantes satirizes in *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, when one of the prostitutes associated with Monipodio's gang "le encargó [a la beata Pipota] que pusiese . . . dos candelicas a los santos que a ella le pareciese que eran de los más aprovechados y agradecidos."¹⁵ Monipodio expects his thieves to be pious, in such practices as "no [tener] conversación con mujer que se llame María el día del sábado."¹⁶

Although the non-magical practice of religion is not in evidence in the *Policiana*, except perhaps when the father asks to be left alone "a rezar [sus] acostumbradas devociones" (pp. 47 and 51), there is indeed a moral or religious framework of sorts as revealed in the author's preface, when he states that his first purpose in writing the work is "para alumbrar a los amadores del mundo de una ceguedad tan notable . . ." (p. 2).

Evidence of a moral framework is also to be found in Theophilon's advice to his daughter, Philomena:

Siempre, hija mía, trabaja de estar noblemente ocupada porque el demonio, enemigo de la naturaleza, no halle entrada en tu corazón. (p. 20)

The servant Dorotea's discovery of her dead mistress, Philomena, and of Policiano, provokes a loud lament:

O amor mundano. O loco mundo. O variable mundo, lleno de tantos desatinos. Loco es quien en ti confía . . . Sin seso quien tus pisadas sigue . . . Plega a Dios, amor, que a quien te creyera lo mejor de la

vida le falte Vete amor, vete
 mundo, . . . que quien vanamente ama,
 vanidad es su salario. (p. 58)

The work ends with Theophilon's non-Christian *planctus*, similar to Pleberio's lament at the death of his daughter. Fernández, however, ends this desperate plaint on a somewhat different note from that of Rojas: "Omnia pretereunt preter amare Deum" ("All things pass except to love God") (p. 59).

The moral intention in the *Celestina* appears to be more sincere than in the *Policiana*. A key difference is in the death scenes of the respective protagonists. When Celestina calls for confession at the end of the work, she seems to be sincere¹⁷; although her life has been filled with sin, she hopes at the last minute to be saved. Her tragedy and the moral lesson come, as in *El burlador de Sevilla*, through this unfulfilled request. In the *Policiana*, Claudina, having fallen victim to the wrath of vengeful servants, also asks for confession, but instead of sending for a priest she sends for Celestina. It is taken for granted that she will go to Hell, and thus her "assassins" feel little or no remorse. Pamphilo says over her body: "Ora a nosotros perdone Dios, pues a la Claudina se llevó el diablo" (p. 54). The death scene is a clear parody of Catholic confession. When Celestina arrives, Claudina, in a mock confession, bequeaths her all the items of her trade, including her house and business.

This confession is rendered all the more ridiculous when Celestina herself delivers a sermon to Claudina's family: not once does she mention God, Heaven, or the soul, nor express hope that the departed sorceress may rest in peace. She says only: "Aparejad de dar sepultura al cuerpo de mi madre . . ." (p. 55). She is resigned to the fact that death must finally come to all, and, being a witch, there is no hope for either Christian salvation or religious consolation. Claudina has lived her life in sin and accepted death without remorse. The author fails to achieve the artistry of Rojas, for there is no tragedy, no hope, and thus no lesson to be learned.

In the *Tragedia Policiana*, the symbiotic relationship between magic and religion is apparent. Fifty years after the *Celestina* the heresy of witchcraft still retained its artistic appeal, and the *alcahueta* and the *bruja* continued to exercise very real attraction in literature. Claudina's occult and pseudo-religious practices are mutually complementary, as are Celestina's, in an attempt to reap maximum benefits from each, but Claudina seems more hardened spiritually than Celestina in her wholehearted addiction to sin¹⁸ and in her clear lack of any hope for salvation, all of which keeps the work from attaining the humanity of the *Celestina*. This persistent resignation from beginning to end is perhaps part of the reason why Claudina fails to develop those traits which might make her a more sympathetic and engaging character. Her total devotion to magic leaves her, in comparison to Celestina, a pale and flexible, somewhat dehumanized figure, a stereotype lacking the complexity that makes her counterpart in Rojas' masterpiece so alive and real.



NOTES

- 1 *La originalidad artística de "La Celestina"* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1962), p. 245.
- 2 P. E. Russell, "La magia como tema integral de la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*," in *Homenaje a Dámaso Alonso*, III (Madrid: Gredos, 1963), 342.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 For a discussion of *philocaptio* in *La Celestina* see also Frederick de Armas, "La Celestina and Love Melancholy," *Romanic Review* 66 (1975), 288-95. De Armas bases his work on Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York, 1927). *Philocaptio* is also discussed in detail in James F. Burke, "Metamorphosis and the Imagery of Alchemy in *La Celestina*," *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos* 1 (1977), 129-52.
- 5 Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), I.
- 6 "Magic as a Key to the Interpretation of Religion" (anon. rev. of H. R. Evans' *The Old and the New Magic*), *Current Literature* 41 (1906), 315.
- 7 Mario N. Pavia, *Drama of the "Siglo de Oro": A Study of Magic, Witchcraft, and other Occult Beliefs* (New York: The Hispanic Institute in the United States, 1959), p. 18.
- 8 Russell, p. 340.
- 9 *The Golden Bough* (new ed.) (London: Macmillan, 1958), I, 120.
- 10 Cited in Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 10.
- 11 *Magic, Science, and Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), p. 68.
- 12 *Totem and Taboo* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 78.
- 13 *Religion and the Primitive* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 53.
- 14 Sebastián Fernández, *Tragedia Policiana*, in Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, *Orígenes de la Novela*, III (Madrid: Casa Editorial Bailly y Baillère, 1910), 19.
- 15 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Obras completas*, ed. Angel Valbuena Prat (Madrid: Aguilar, 1946), p. 844b.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 839b.

17 María Rosa Lida de Malkiel seems to contradict herself as to the sincerity of Celestina's request: In one chapter she calls this last plea for confession "la llave *mágica* para la vida eterna" (p. 512, emphasis mine); in a later chapter she says that this cry for confession is "el mismo de cualquier cristiano de la época [para] la confesión que asegura la remisión de los pecados y la vida eterna." (p. 366).



Argument der Sibensprechenden Wirkung.
 Manglendt Elicia der Keüschait Penelope verlaßt vñ
 laub zú geben d' beerübung vnd klag klaydern so sy vñ
 die todten erüg/lobend den rat Xreufe/gat in sollichem
 fürsatz zú dem hausz irer basen dahin Sosia kam wöb
 lichem Xreufa alle haymlicheit Calixti vñ Melibea
 auß erfáret.

[Argumento e ilustración del XVII auto de LC.
 De la traducción alemana de C. Wirsung, 1520.
 Areusa finge amor a Sosia y le saca el secre-
 to de la hora del encuentro de Calisto y de
 Melibea.]

