

**DISCOVERING MELIBEA:
CELESTINA'S UNCONTAINABLE *DONCELLA*
*ENCERRADA***

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Celesti[na], *libro, en mi opinión, divi[no], si encubriera más lo huma[no]*.
—Cervantes, introductory poem to *Don Quijote*¹

In Fernando de Rojas's twenty-one act closet drama, *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* or *Celestina* (~1502), Celestina, a bawd and a supposed sorceress, woos the virginal Melibea on behalf of Calisto, and the two noble young lovers carry on a secret affair, which results in multiple deaths. Two of Calisto's servants kill Celestina for her profits from her services as go-between, and shortly thereafter, in order to escape the authorities, they leap out the window to their deaths. Later, Calisto smashes his head falling from a ladder, in a hasty departure from Melibea's house, after which Melibea locks herself in a tower, makes a long speech explaining her affair to her father, and then, in order to join Calisto, casts herself to her death. *La Celestina* ends with the lament of Pleberio, the patriarch of the play, who has been left greatly wounded by his daughter's death, by her revelations, and by the multiple ruptures articulated in her speech and literalized by the fragmentation of her body. Rather than asking whether Rojas's play is protofeminist or whether his representations of women and of female rebellion are positive or pessimistic,² this essay deals with the play's representation of patriarchy's failure to control the minds and bodies of those subjects it constitutes as either possessions or outsiders. By focusing on the bodily and spiritual opening up of Melibea, the *doncella encerrada* or enclosed maiden of the play, this essay shows the ways in which *Celestina* represents early modern patriarchal social order as vulnerable to resistance both from within and from without.

The integrity of a noble (or ennobled) household such as that of Pleberio in depended, ultimately, on the integrity of the female bodies its head worked to contain.³ In medieval and early modern Europe, a noblewoman's body was, as Peter

Stallybrass puts it, “[e]conomically [...] the fenced-in enclosure of the landlord, her father or husband” (127). However, while a wife or daughter was a symbolically and often materially valuable possession, this property was potentially dangerous, for it could breach and bring down the household from within. An adulterous wife, for example, would, if found out, bring shame on her husband and destroy his honor. Secondly, she might adulterate her husband’s line, bringing a bastard into the family under the cover of legitimacy. And thirdly, she might serve as a “leaky vessel,” passing her husband’s wealth out of the household to her lover, as Falstaff hopes Mistresses Page and Ford will in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.⁴ Although less powerful than a wife, an unruly daughter could also disrupt the economy and destroy the honor of her father’s household; like an adulterous wife, she could accomplish this primarily by refusing to submit to patriarchal control of her body, which sought to enforce demands that she maintain her virginity (and the appearance thereof) until marriage and that she marry according to her father’s will.

The integrity—the economy, honor, and “purity”—of a patriarchal household, then, depended on the bodies of its females remaining properly closed and enclosed.⁵ Thus, heads of households worked to maintain control over what had been conceived of for ages as dangerous orifices—women’s mouths and vaginas—as well as to keep female bodies out of circulation. As Stallybrass explains:

women’s bodies were [...] the object of policing by fathers and husbands. [...] The surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house. These three areas were frequently collapsed into each other [...]. Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman’s enclosure within the house. (126)

In *Celestina*, however, an old procuress transgresses patriarchal order by manipulating the opening and closing of female bodies, as well as the traffic in them.⁶ Not only does Celestina operate a brothel under the cover of a sewing school, but, in addition to several other occupations, she is a “maestra de hacer ... virgos” (60), a master at making artificial hymens, so that women who have had intercourse appear to their next partners to be virgins.⁷ As Sempronio points out, Celestina is an authority at both making and unmaking hymens: “pasan de cinco mil virgos los que se han hecho y deshecho por su autoridad en esta ciudad” (Rojas 56) (“in this city, more than five thousand maidenheads have been broken and repaired under her auspices” [Cohen 32]). Further, Pármemo says she has worked such marvels at this trade that “cuando vino por aquí el embajador francés, tres veces vendió por virgen una criada que tenía” (62) (“when the French ambassador was here, she sold one of her girls three times over as a virgin” [Cohen 39]).⁸ What is particularly subversive about this is that Celestina is able to fabricate many times over the “natural” sign of a woman’s “purity,” that which, once broken, is believed to be irrevocably lost. As Mary Gossy points out, Covarrubias’s dictionary and his book of emblems—two

authoritative texts—insist on the irreparability of virginity, yet Celestina can replace that “Preciosa joya [...] Que para repararla no son parte,/ Cielo, ni tierra, por natura, o arte” (*Emblemas Morales* 5) (Precious jewel [...] That to repair it may be found nowhere, not in Heaven, nor earth, by nature, nor art).⁹ Additionally, the case of the French ambassador shows Celestina’s success in playing upon men’s belief that the ultimate truth about women’s purity lies in the hymen, for he ignores the more obvious truth that he has slept with the maid twice before and is convinced instead by the more hidden truth spoken by her blood.¹⁰

While Celestina does pose a certain threat to the social order, *Celestina* frames Melibea’s resistance to it as, paradoxically, both more disruptive and less powerful. By exercising a craft that positions women’s bodies beyond the control of men, Celestina successfully corrupts the social order *from within*. She profits and enables other women to profit from manipulating the truth about female bodies, yet does so without disrupting the patriarchal narrative about these bodies and about who controls them, operating, in fact, *precisely by* keeping the surface of the hegemonic narrative intact. Celestina does not topple the order of things, yet she manages to operate successfully within it and profits from her very corruption of it.

While Melibea is never as closed or contained as she pretends or believes herself to be, initially, she works to conceal the fact that she is not inviolable and performs the role of *doncella encerrada* or enclosed maiden. At first, Melibea’s resistance to this role takes a form similar to Celestina’s transgression; she protests her role only in soliloquy, and once she abandons it, she conceals her abandonment and continues to keep up appearances. In the end, Melibea’s direct articulation and reenactment of her abandonment of this role are framed as highly disruptive to patriarchal order, for they reveal its narrative about the *doncella encerrada* as a fiction and directly counter what a patriarch would like to believe about the integrity of his daughter and his household and his own power to police their boundaries. Melibea’s final speech and suicide reveal both to Pleberio and to de Rojas’s audience that, although the play foregrounds the “opening up” of the “*doncella’s* body and soul, ultimately, Pleberio’s household and the patriarch himself are irreparably breached as a result of two plots—a love plot orchestrated by Celestina and a suicide plot orchestrated by Melibea herself—both aimed at the disintegration of his daughter, and in both of which she performs not only willingly, but with passion. Despite their radical disruption of order, however, Melibea’s final performances are clearly framed as inviable strategies of resistance, for they necessarily annihilate the subject who performs them.

In her role as what she herself refers to as a “*doncella encerrada*” (153), Melibea must defend the boundaries of her own body, for the body of an honorable maiden must be, as Stallybrass says of Bakhtin’s “classical body,” “rigidly ‘finished’: her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house” (127).¹¹ The honor of Melibea’s family depends on her playing this role properly, on her remain-

ing enclosed within the walls of the household and keeping her “dangerous” orifices closed, abstaining from both verbal and sexual intercourse with men. In fact, the enclosure of a *doncella* and the closedness of her body are so closely linked that the phrase “*doncella encerrada*” seems either emphatic or needlessly redundant; the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, for example, speculates that “*doncella*” originates from “*Domicela, por estar recogida y encerrada en casa*” (Domicile, on account of being secluded and confined in the home.) Melibea, however, does not play her role properly from the start, although she does cling to it. She enters into verbal exchanges with Calisto and Celestina that she recognizes as assaults on her virtue, reveals to outsiders thoughts and desires she has intended to conceal from her intimates, and, by entering into an affair with Calisto, not only directly rejects her role as a “*doncella encerrada*,” but is transformed so that, without the help of Celestina or other wily women, she can no longer play that role convincingly.¹²

In the pages that follow, I examine the way in which *Celestina* figures the opening up and closing of Melibea’s psyche and soma, focussing particularly on the language of *descubrimiento*—in the sense of uncovering, laying bare, or opening up something previously hidden, closed, or unknown.¹³ *Celestina* dramatizes the breaching of the psychic and bodily integrity of the noble Melibea, a “*doncella encerrada*, [whose duty is to] sustain her family’s honor by maintaining her purity and avoiding any acquaintance with the opposite sex” (Swietlicki 2). The play links this penetration with social disorder and with disintegration of the social fabric, particularly of Pleberio’s household, which stands in for a larger social order. Yet, as I argue, *La Celestina* suggests that the ideal of the *doncella encerrada* is an impossible patriarchal dream, for although the play foregrounds the breaking of the boundaries that contain Melibea, it also reveals that these boundaries were *never* fully intact.

From the start, Celestina’s designs on Melibea are framed in the language of discovery; at the end of Act III, as she prepares for her initial assault, the bawd conjures Pluto to occupy the yarn she plans to sell the *doncella*, so that “cuánto más lo mirare, tanto más su corazón *se ablande* a conceder mi petición, y se le *abras* y *lastimes* del crudo y fuerte amor de Calisto; tanto que, despedida toda honestidad, *se descubra* a mí y me galardone mis pasos y mensaje . . .” (85, emphasis mine) (“the more she shall behold it, the more may her heart be mollified, and the sooner wrought to yield to my request: That thou wilt open her heart to my desire, and wound her very soul with the love of Calisto; and in that extreme, and violent manner, that . . . casting off all shame, she may discover herself unto me and reward both my message and my pains” [76]).

While Celestina speaks first of mollifying Melibea’s heart, it is clear that she has a more serious assault on the maiden’s integrity in mind; she asks Pluto to *open* Melibea up and *wound* her with Calisto’s love, so that she will abandon decorum and *discover herself* to the old bawd. Clearly, Celestina uses “*descubrirse*” here in the common sense of “to reveal oneself,” yet her use of this term in a different context

suggests that this word has to do not simply with revealing one's identity or secrets, but also with a more profound opening up of the self, a letting down of one's boundaries in order to let another in.¹⁴

The quintessential example of this sort of *descubrimiento* is found in Celestina's reminiscence about her relationship with Claudina, Pármene's mother, with whom she says she shared all aspects of life: "Juntas comíamos, juntas dormíamos, juntas habíamos nuestros solaces, nuestros placeres, consejos y conciertos. En casa y fuera, como dos hermanas..." (81) ("We ate together, we slept side by side, we took our pleasures and amusements together, we consulted together and made our plans together. Indoors and out, we were like two sisters" [Cohen 64]). Celestina describes Claudina and herself as so intimate that they are almost one, "uña y carne" (81) (literally, "nail and flesh"), two separate, yet interwoven, indivisible parts of a whole.¹⁵ This sounds like a relationship that knows no limits, in which two individuals are so completely open to one another that the boundaries between them dissolve; they become interconnected, almost merging with one another. Later, Celestina describes this interpenetration in terms of a *descubrimiento* of the heart:

¿Y tuve yo en este mundo otra tal amiga, otra tal compañera, tal aliviadora de mis trabajos y fatigas? ¿Quién suplía mis faltas; quién sabía mis secretos; a quién descubría mi corazón; quién era todo mi bien y descanso, sino tu madre, más que mi hermana y comadre? (122)

O! had I in all this world, but such another friend? Such another companion? Such a comfortress in my troubles ... [and] heart's heaviness? [Who covered up my faults?] Who knew my secrets? To whom did I discover my heart? Who was all my happiness ... [and] quietness but your mother? She was ... [more] than my gossip or mine own sister. (129)

Celestina's use of "descubría" in this context suggests, then, that her hope that Melibea will discover herself ("se descubra") to her indicates an aim to provoke Melibea both to reveal about herself something previously hidden, secret, or unknown, as well as, in a more figurative sense, to open her soul up to the bawd, an opening that has erotic implications similar to those of Claudina and Celestina's relationship, with the difference that Celestina will remain closed.

Otis Handy has argued convincingly that in Act X, Celestina accomplishes a "psychic deflowering" (17) of Melibea through a masterful rhetorical performance. He and others, particularly those focusing on the bawdy language associated with stitching, have emphasized Celestina's piercing of Melibea's psyche and shown that this "penetration" is figured in rather graphic sexual terms.¹⁶ Yet this climactic exchange—which is permeated with the language of *descubrimiento*—both is and is *not* figured as an opening up of Melibea. While both Celestina and Melibea figure

their encounter in Act X as a crucial point in the *descubrimiento* of the damsel, the truth is that before Celestina's second visit, the *doncella's* boundaries have already been breached; in Act IV, the bawd entered her home and through her magical and/or rhetorical powers opened (or aggravated) in the *doncella* a love wound and seduced her into participating in the "healing" of Calisto's "toothache."¹⁷ Further, the *doncella encerrada* herself is always already open, from the moment she appears on stage. When, at the beginning of Act I, Calisto enters Pleberio's garden in pursuit of his falcon and utters the first line of the play, "En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios" (46) (In this, Melibea, I see God's greatness), rather than remaining silent and retreating into the house, Melibea keeps open her eyes and ears, leaving herself vulnerable to assault through the "doors of the senses" (Vives 103). Worse, she opens her mouth and responds, "¿En qué, Calisto?" (In what, Calisto?), thus opening up a space for a flirtatious—if ambiguous—exchange between the soon-to-be lovers.¹⁸

Melibea herself sees her affairs with Celestina and Calisto in terms of *descubrimiento*; she both longs to reveal her desire and fears the consequences of doing so. In her soliloquy at the opening of Act X, Melibea regrets not having revealed her "wound" to Celestina when she first visited, which she sees as better than "venir por fuerza a descubrir [su] llaga" (153) (having been forced to discover [her] wound). Melibea laments society's demands that women contain themselves: "¿Por qué no fue también a las hembras concedido poder descubrir su congojoso y ardiente amor, como a los varones?" (154) ("[W]hy was it not granted as well unto women, to discover their tormentful and fervent flames, as unto men?" [174]). Yet, at the same time, she recognizes that opening herself to Celestina, "publishing" her desires, will lead to a certain kind of self-destruction, to a rupture:

Oh mi fiel criada Lucrecia, ¿qué dirás de mí; qué pensarás de mi seso, cuando me veas publicar lo que a ti jamás he querido descubrir? ¡Cómo te espantarás del rompimiento de mi honestidad y vergüenza, que siempre como encerrada doncella acostumbé tener! (153)

No se desdore aquella hoja de castidad que tengo asentada sobre este amoroso deseo, publicando ser otro mi dolor, que no el que me atormenta. (154)

[O my faithful servant Lucrecia, what wilt thou say of me, what wilt thou think of my judgment ... when thou shalt see me to publish that, which I would never discover unto thee?] (How astonished wilt thou be by the rupture of my chastity and shame, which I have always kept till now as an enclosed maiden should.) (174)

[Let not this Leaf of my chastity lose its gilting, which I have laid upon this amorous desire, publishing my pain to be otherwise than that which indeed tormenteth me.] (174)

After this soliloquy, Celestina appears on the scene, reminding us that her

aim is the *descubrimiento* of the not-so-resistant Melibea. Promising to heal Melibea's wound, Celestina encourages her to discover everything about it to her, "abiertamente," "[como] se habl[a] toda verdad" "al confesor" (155) (Openly, as one tells the whole truth to the confessor). Eager for relief from this "enfermedad" (156) (illness), Melibea describes to the "médico" (155) (doctor) the location of her wound, how long ago she was wounded, and how intensely she longs for a cure, but what she most desires and most resists is naming the source of her wound, the object of her desire. Celestina convinces Melibea that the only way to heal her wound is to submit to further penetration:

Pues si tú quieres ser sana y que te descubra la punta de mi sutil aguja sin temor, haz para tus manos y pies una ligadura de sosiego, para tus ojos una cobertura de piedad, para tu lengua un freno de silencio, para tus oídos unos algodones de sufrimiento y paciencia, y verás obrar a la antigua maestra de estas llagas. (157)

And therefore, if you be willing to be cured, and that I should discover unto you, the sharp point of my needle, without any fear at all, frame for your hands and feet a bond of [tranquility]; for your eyes, a veil of [piety]; for your tongue, a bridle of silence; for your ears, the ... stuffing of [suffering and patience]; and then shall you see, what effects this Old Mistress in her Art will work upon your wounds. (178)

In what Handy perhaps exaggeratedly calls "piercing cries of surrender" (22), Melibea submits, calling on Celestina to damage her honor, her reputation, even to rend her flesh: "Agora toque en mi honra, agora dañe mi fama, agora lastime mi cuerpo; aunque sea romper mis carnes para sacar mi dolorido corazón, te doy mi fe ser segura y, si siento alivio, bien galardonada" (157). ([T]hough it touch upon mine honour, though it [damage] my reputation, though it [wound] my body, though it rip and break up my flesh, for to pull out my grieved heart [,] I give thee my faith, to do what thou wilt securely; and if I may find ease of my pain, I shall liberally reward thee" [178]).

Yet still, Melibea resists talk of Calisto. Finally, after Celestina diagnoses her as suffering from "[a]mor dulce" (158) ("Sweet Love" [180]) and again utters Calisto's name, calling him "la flor que de todo esto te delibre" (159) ("the flower ... that will free you from all this torment" [181]), Melibea falls in an "orgasmic" (Handy 24) swoon. After recovering, Melibea declares that the barriers society demands she maintain have been broken down: "Quebróse mi honestidad, quebróse mi empacho ..." (159) ([M]y honesty ... is broken; ... my modesty is broken" [181]). This breaking down suggests not only Melibea's symbolic loss of chastity, her "psychological deflowering," but a self-discovery: both a revelation of her "secret" desires and an opening up and yielding of herself to Celestina. The truth of her desire for Calisto already revealed by the swoon itself—a bodily response outside of her own control—Melibea is relieved not to have to conceal it any longer, and for the first time,

openly proclaims it:

¡Oh, pues ya, mi nueva maestra, mi fiel secretaria, lo que tú tan abiertamente conoces, en vano trabajo por te lo encubrir! Muchos y muchos días son pasados que ese noble caballero me habló en amor. Tanto me fue entonces su habla enojosa, cuanto, después de tú me tornaste a nombrar, alegre. (159-60)

But now (my good Mistress, my faithful Secretary) ... that which thou so openly knowst, it is in vain for me to seek to [conceal from you]; many, yea many days, are now overpast, since that noble Gentleman motioned his love unto me; whose speech and name was then as hateful, as now the reviving thereof is pleasing unto me... (182)

Although she had been eager from the start to articulate her desire, here Melibea emphasizes the force of Celestina's discovery of her, declaring that in provoking this involuntary bodily revelation, Celestina has wrested a secret from deep inside her: "... has sacado de mi pecho lo que jamás a ti ni a otro pensé descubrir" (160) ("... thou hast gotten that out of my bosom, which I never thought to have discovered unto thee, or to any other whosoever" [182]). Additionally, Melibea suggests that, as in the consummation of a marriage, Celestina's figurative penetration and subsequent sealing of her results in a more profound submission of herself to the bawd: "Cerrado han tus puntos mi llaga, venida soy en tu querer" (160) ("with thy [stitches] thou has [closed] my wound; I am come to thy Bent" [182]). After Melibea yields to Celestina, the bawd continues to deploy the language of discovery:

Y pues así, señora, has quesido descubrir la gran merced que nos has hecho, declara tu voluntad, echa tus secretos en mi regazo, pon en mis manos el concierto de este concierto. (160)

And since, Madam, you have been willing to grace me with the discovery of so great a favour, [...] declare your will unto me, lay your secrets in my lap; put into my hands the managing of this matter [...] (183)

Here, Celestina links Melibea's self-revelation with intimacy and eroticism, urging the young woman to "echa [s]us secretos en [su] regazo" ("lay [her] secrets in [her] lap"). Yet, she links it also with a yielding of control, which is, of course, part of what this entire exchange has been about.

The conversation between Melibea and Lucrecia at the end of Act X reminds us that, despite what Melibea believed, her *descubrimiento* was, in fact, no revelation at all. Melibea begs that Lucrecia "se cubra con secreto sello" (161) ([conceal] with [a] seal of secrecy" [183]) the fact that she is captive to Calisto's love. Lucrecia responds by explaining that Melibea's desire was no secret to her and that she has been keeping quiet and covering for her all along:

Señora, mucho antes de agora tengo sentida tu llaga y callado tu deseo... Cuanto más tú me querías encubrir y celar el fuego que te quemaba, tanto más sus llamas manifestaban en la color de tu cara, en el poco sosiego del corazón, en el meneo de tus miembros, en comer sin gana, en el no dormir. Así que continuo se te caían, como de entre las manos, señales muy clares de pena... [C]allaba con temor, encubría con fieltad [...]. (161)

Madam, long afore this, I perceived your wound, and [kept secret] your desire... [T]he more you sought to hide from me the fire which did burn you, the more did those flames manifest themselves in the colour of your face, in the little quietness of your heart, in the restlessness of your members, [...] in eating without any appetite, and in your [sleeplessness]: So that I did continually see ... as plainly as if I had been within you, most manifest and apparent signs of your [pain.] ... [I kept quiet with fear; I] concealed with fidelity [...]. (184)

This speech suggests that the ideal of the closed body of the *doncella encerrada* is an impossible patriarchal dream. While Melibea believes she has control over her own boundaries, that she has control over knowledge about her inner self and can conceal what is inside her from the outside world, the truth is that, unbeknownst to her, her body articulates her desire clearly to those who know how to interpret its signs. In fact, Melibea has so little power to contain her own desire that, as Lucrecia reports, the more she worked to conceal it, the more it manifested itself. Even before she let down her guard, Melibea's psychic boundaries were already permeable; Lucrecia continually witnessed "very clear signs of pain" falling out of her mistress, *as if she were within her* ("como de entre las manos").¹⁹

While the language of *descubrimiento* is foregrounded in this scene, the truth is that there is no discovery to make. Melibea's desire for Calisto was apparent from the start not only to her intimate, Lucrecia, but also to the bawd Celestina, who recognized "las señas de su tormento en las coloradas colores de [su] gesto" (154) (the tokens of [her disease's] torment in [her] maiden blushes" (175). Thus, while the entire encounter seems to be directed at getting Melibea to reveal her "secret" desire to Celestina, what is important in this encounter is not the *content* of her discovery, but the *fact* of it. Melibea's discovery does not reveal any truth previously hidden from Celestina, but rather signals her willingness to abandon her role of *doncella encerrada* in order to play the game of *loco amor*. After Celestina urges Melibea to "declare her will" and to turn the reigns over to her, the two speak plainly for the first time, arranging the tryst in a few short lines.

Even though Melibea abandons the role of *doncella encerrada*, she must continue to *perform* it in order for the "Comedia de Calisto y Melibea," to continue, a plot she is eager to conceal. She tells Calisto to come on the appointed nights "por este

secreto lugar” (192) (“by this secret place” [226]) and adds, “Y por el presente te ve con Dios, que no serás visto, que hace muy oscuro, ni yo en casa sentida, que aun no amanece” (192) (Farewell (my Lord) my hope is, that you will not be discovered, for it is very dark; Nor I heard in the house, for it is not yet day” [226]). After Calisto’s death brings an end to the love story, Lucrecia prompts Melibea to continue to perform the role of *doncella encerrada*, instructing her wailing mistress to go inside and feign some other malady in order to conceal the nature of her pain:

Avívate, aviva, que mayor mengua será hallarte en el huerto que placer sentiste con la venida ni pena con ver que es muerto. Entremos en la cámara, acostarste has. Llamaré a tu padre y fingiremos otro mal, pues éste no es para se poder encubrir. (225)

Up, up, Madam; for it will be a greater dishonour unto you, to be found thus here in the garden, than either the pleasure you received by his coming or [the pain on learning of his death.] Come, let us into your chamber. And go lay you down on your bed; and I will call your father. We will feign some other ill, since to hide this, it is impossible. (271)

Melibea, however, refuses to perform this role any longer, and instead stages a tragic performance for her father, who had been the anti-audience of the “Comedia de Calisto y Melibea” (revealing it to him would either have prevented it or brought it abruptly to an end). In her final speech and her suicide, Melibea both reveals to her father her prior abandonment of the role of *doncella encerrada* and dramatizes an even more radical abandonment of this role, seizing a control over her own body and the “truth” it speaks that she did not exercise when, as a *doncella encerrada*, she attempted to keep intact the boundaries of her self, or at least the appearance of being contained. In a striking reversal of the order of things, Melibea insists that her father contain himself—letting escape neither words nor tears—if he is to hear her story:²⁰

Si me escuchas sin lágrimas, oirás la causa desesperada de mi forzada y alegre partida. No la interrumpas con lloro ni palabras; si no, quedarás más quejoso en no saber por qué me mato, que doloroso por verme muerta. Ninguna cosa me preguntes ni respondas, más de lo que de mi grado decirte quisiere. Porque, cuando el corazón está embargado de pasión, están cerrados los oídos al consejo y en tal tiempo las fructuosas palabras, en lugar de amansar, acrecientan la saña. (229)

If you listen without weeping you’ll hear the desperate cause of my forced but happy departure. Do not interrupt me with words or tears, or you’ll suffer more by not knowing why I have died than by seeing me dead. Ask me no questions, and do not demand to know more than I wish to tell you. For when the heart is heavy with grief, the ears are closed to counsel, and at such times good advice rather inflames than allays passions. (Cohen 239)

Having silenced her father, Melibea goes on to reveal to him what before she had worked to conceal from him and others: the *descubrimiento* of her soul and the breaching of her body, which as she emphasizes, meant the breaking of the integrity of his (patriarchal) household. Telling him she wishes to clarify for him the deed, (“te quiero más aclarar el hecho” [229]), Melibea summarizes for him the plot of the story of her and Calisto’s love, which begins with discoveries—revelations of secrets, openings of bodies and souls—and ends with ruptures of the walls of Pleberio’s garden, of Melibea’s resolve, and of her hymen:

Era tanta su pena de amor y tan poco el lugar para hablarme, que [Calisto] descubrió su pasión a una astuta y sagaz mujer, que llamaban Celestina. La cual, de su parte venida a mí, sacó mi secreto amor de mi pecho. Descubrí[a] a ella lo que a mi querida madre encubría. [...] Vencida de su amor, dile entrada en tu casa. Quebrantó con escalas las paredes de tu huerto, quebrantó mi propósito. Perdí mi virginidad. (230)

So great was his love-torment, and so little [the space] to speak with me, that he discover[ed] his passion to a crafty and subtle woman, named Celestina [who] coming [to] me [o]n his behalf, drew my secret love from forth my bosom, and [I discovered unto her] that which I concealed from mine own mother[.] [...] [B]eing overcome with the love of Calisto, I gave him entrance into your house. [He tore open with a ladder the walls of your garden; he broke my resolve. I lost my virginity.] (277)

For her grand finale, Melibea casts her body from the tower before her father’s very eyes, while he stands impotent below. Her final speech directs her father (and us) to read her suicidal act as a repetition of the bodily rupture undergone by Calisto, as well as a final literalization of the *descubrimiento* she has undergone and performed throughout the play. She speaks of the spilling out of Calisto’s brains as an opening up and a public display of his insides: “De la triste caída sus más escondidos sesos quedaron repartidos por las piedras y paredes” (230) (“That sad fall scattered his innermost brains all over the pavestones and walls”);²¹ it is, as Roberto González Echevarría puts it, “as if she were referring to his very soul, rendered visible, and divisible, by this accident” (18). Thus, in repeating this fatal act of discovery, Melibea not only kills herself, but both performs and literalizes her status as *not a doncella encerrada*, a closed and enclosed female body, but as what Bakhtin calls a “grotesque body,” an open body, a “body that ‘transgresses its own limits’ and negates all those boundaries without which property could not be constituted” (Stallybrass 128). Thus, in casting her words and body out from within an enclosed space (out of which she has locked her father), Melibea flies in the very face of the patriarchal figure of the play; she recounts and demonstrates her own uncontainability and her father’s failure and inability both to contain her and to keep the borders of his own household intact—to keep her from discovering herself to Celestina and

Calisto, to keep Calisto from jumping over his walls, or, in this moment, to silence her, to prevent her from “publishing” her deeds, or from throwing herself to her death.

In the end, Pleberio is left with Melibea’s fragmented body (“hecha pedazos” [232] [broken into pieces]) and an irreparable wound in his heart. His lament, which comprises most of the final act of *Celestina*, articulates and dramatizes the breaching of the father through the *descubrimiento* of the daughter.²² Pleberio emphasizes the singularity of the damage done him by this loss of his only daughter. He seeks to console himself by comparing his loss with stories from antiquity of fathers who lost sons, quickly dismissing those who lost one son but had others and those who were not witness to their children’s deaths, then determining that his grief is greater even than that of Anaxagoras, who lost his only son:

Porque mi Melibea mató a sí misma de su voluntad a mis ojos, con la gran fatiga de amor que le aquejaba; el otro matáronle en muy lícita batalla. ¡Oh incomparable pérdida; oh lastimado viejo! Que cuanto más busco consuelos, menos razón hallo para me consolar. (234)

For my Melibea killed herself before my eyes, of her own free will, driven to it by the cruel love that tortured her, whereas his son was killed in righteous battle. There is no loss like mine. A stricken old man, I seek comfort but find nothing to comfort me. (Cohen 245)

It is not simply the fact of Melibea’s death, nor even that he witnessed it, that causes Pleberio such grief. Rather, it is the illicitness of what has led to her death: “... yo no lloro triste a ella muerta, pero la causa desastrada de su morir” (234) (“[I] do not so much grieve at her death, as I do lament [the wretched cause] of her death” [284]). While a father who has lost a son in war may be consoled by the honor gained through his death, there will be no consolation for Pleberio:

Porque todas éstas son muertes que, si roban la vida, es forzado de complir con la fama. Pero ¿quién forzó a mi hija [a] morir, sino la fuerte fuerza de amor? Pues, mundo halaguero, ¿qué remedio das a mi fatigada vejez? (235)

All these deaths were suffered in the cause of honour. But what forced my daughter to slay herself [except] the mighty power of love[?] False world, what comfort can you give me in my tired old age? (246)

In a slightly liberal translation of the last phrase above, which brings in from a few lines below the idea that Pleberio’s heart has been wounded, translator James Mabbe captures the sense of the father’s lament very aptly: “Who can stop up that great breach in my heart which thou [Melibea] hast made?” (284).²³

In conclusion, although much of *Celestina* focuses on the *descubrimiento* of

Melibea—the breaching of her psyche and soma—the ultimate target of this discovery is Pleberio, the figure of patriarchal order in the play. As Melibea understands, her discovery of herself to Celestina and her penetration by Calisto are ultimately a breaching of her father's household. For example, rebuking Celestina early on, Melibea asks, “¿[Querrias] [p]erder y destruir la casa y honra de mi padre... ?” [96] (“Wouldst thou have me overthrow, and ruin my father's house and honour...?” [91]) and refers to Calisto as a “saltaparedes” [96], a leaper over walls. Similarly, after losing her virginity to Calisto, she exclaims: “Oh mi padre honrado, cómo he dañado tu fama y dado causa y lugar a quebrantar tu casa! ¡Oh traidora de mí, cómo no miré el gran yerro que se seguía de tu entrada, el gran peligro que esperaba!” (192) (“O my most honoured father, how have I [marred] thy reputation! And given both opportunity and place to the [tearing open] of thy house!” [225]).

In the end, *Celestina* leaves the patriarch himself as an open body, his heart irreparably wounded by the loss of his *doncella encerrada*, a loss resulting more from her love than from her death. Melibea's speech and suicide “clarify” to Pleberio and the audience that her *descubrimiento* has, in effect, “deflowered” her father, who curses the world for having plucked from him “esta flor” (233) (this flower). It is as if the *doncella* Melibea is, in a certain way, her father's hymen, and his irrevocable loss of his *doncella* leaves him with an open wound that will never heal; it is less the *doncella* than the patriarchal body itself that has lost its “Preciosa joya ... Que para repararla no son parte,/ Cielo, ni tierra, por natura, o arte.”

Celestina foregrounds the rebellion of the maiden daughter as the greatest threat to the patriarchal household, a microcosm of patriarchal order, both because she can breach the household from within and because by articulating and dramatizing her absolute refusal and negation of the role of *doncella encerrada*, she shatters Pleberio's view of her, of the world, and of himself. Yet, although Melibea's rebellion dramatically disrupts the patriarchal narrative, revealing its fictionality and its vulnerability to theatricality and taking control once and for all of her own *descubrimiento*, this sort of rebellion is not figured as a viable strategy of resistance, for it leaves the rebel literally fragmented, in pieces (“hecha pedazos” [232]). Perhaps, then, it is forces outside the patriarchal household, such as Celestina and other underworld figures truly outside his purview, that pose the greatest threats to figures such as Pleberio. Or perhaps it is not a question of who transgresses patriarchal order, but of *how* one transgresses—secretly, under cover, and from within, taking care to keep intact the surface of the narrative that figures the patriarchal body as inviolate and of the noble patriarch as in control over the integrity of his own household.

Notes

* I would like to thank Jorge Aladro Font and Deanna Shemek for their helpful comments on drafts of this essay.

¹ “*Celestina*, a divine book, in my opinion, if it concealed more the human.”

² On these sorts of feminist issues, see Hartunian, Hathaway, Severin, and Swietlicki. On feminine space in *Celestina*, see Arias.

³ José Antonio Maravall has argued that “the social world to which [the “noble” characters in *La Celestina*] belong is not that of the traditional nobility ... but that of the ennobled rich” (43, trans. mine). On enclosed spaces as sites of both female containment and resistance, see Perry.

⁴ Falstaff’s primary motive in plotting to make love to these two is to make his way into their husbands’ purses; he declares that Mrs. Ford “has all the rule of her husband’s purse” (I.3.50-51) and that Mrs. Page “bears the purse too” (I.3.66) and thinks of the women as colonies to be “occupied,” treasures in themselves, but even more, as sources of revenue for his personal empire: “She is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty. I will be cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me. They shall be my East and West Indies and I will trade to them both” (I.3.66-70). On women as leaky vessels, see Paster.

⁵ It would be productive to explore the relationship between the gendered discourse of enclosure and discovery I examine in *Celestina* and early modern discourses that worked to keep racial and class boundaries intact, particularly given Rojas’s status as a *converso* and the critical discussion about how this plays out in his text. While some might seek evidence of this relationship in the apparent impossibility of a marriage between Melibea and Calisto (neither one of them ever brings it up) and in Melibea’s concern with concealing their affair, I would look for it in relation to the language of *limpieza* in *Celestina*, through which Manual da Costa suggests Rojas ridicules his society’s concept of *limpieza de sangre*. This seems an especially intriguing avenue, given the interpenetration of gender, religious, and racial ideologies during the Counter-Reformation: “Enclosure and purity developed as strategies for defending the faith at this time, for separating the sacred from the profane, and also for protecting the social order. [...] *Limpieza de sangre*, or genetic purity free from intermarriage with other religious groups, determined who could hold office or enjoy privilege, and it depended directly on female chastity” (Perry 6). See Melveena McKendrick for connections between “the obsession with *limpieza* in life and the obsession with sexual honour on stage” (322) during the Spanish Golden Age. On the question of a racial/religious divide between the lovers, see da Costa Fontes for a list of entries from Joseph T. Snow’s annotated bibliography; see Cardiez Sanz for a survey of arguments. See Gilman’s book for an exhaustive study of Rojas’s *converso* status, also for a refutation of the “racial Romeo and Juliet” theory (364-367).

⁶ Similarly, Mary Gossy argues that *Celestina* subverts the man/woman hierarchy “through her willingness to encourage sexual intercourse outside matrimony—thus avoiding the legitimizing and controlling power of the church and the economic influence of the patriarchal family” (39). Additionally, “As José Antonio Maravall illustrates in *El mundo social de LC*, the lower-class characters of the text participate in a subversion of the economic structures that control them: the servants rebel against their masters as a cash

economy displaces the old order” (Gossy 125 n. 56). By trafficking in noblewomen such as Melibea, Celestina and her cohort short-circuit the patriarchal system in which women are objects of exchange between moneyed men; “[b]y means of the servants, ... [whom] she has both enticed and comprised [Celestina manages] to penetrate into their houses [and corrupt]” even the most enclosed maidens (“las más encerradas” [60]) (Herrero “Celestina’s Craft” [344]). Through the body of the unchaste *doncella encerrada*, then, money leaks down into the lower class and into the underworld.

⁷ Fernando de Rojas, *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea (La Celestina)*, ed. D. S. Severin (Madrid: Alianza, 1988). Henceforth all parenthetical references to the Spanish playtext refer to this edition. I mainly use Mabbe’s 1631 translation, despite its verbosity, because it makes clear the language of discovery on which I focus. I have silently modernized spelling and some punctuation, and I occasionally revise, in brackets, to correct mistranslations or to make more precise. Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references to *Celestina* in English refer to Mabbe’s translation. I occasionally use Cohen’s translation [and note it] where his syntax are closer to the original or where Mabbe’s is inaccurate or unclear. Translations not in quotations are my own.

⁸ The fabrication, performance, and marketing of virginity is often discussed by prostitutes in early modern literature. See, for example, Middleton’s *A Mad World, My Masters*, in which the courtesan’s mother has sold her maidenhead fifteen times in order to amass a dowry for her. See also Arentino II,1, Nanna’s lessons to Pippa on the art of being a whore esp. 226. In Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, Marina metaphorically fabricates hymens in order to keep her own intact.

⁹ See Gossy 43-45. While, in González Echevarria’s mind, Celestina’s procedures “provoke pain and constitute an assault on the integrity of the body” (24), I see Celestina’s art as *restoring* integrity to bodies opened up as a result of penetration.

¹⁰ Gossy emphasizes the destabilization of meaning performed by Celestina’s art: “Hymen mending sets the hymen free from definition because it confounds meaning. Stitching the hymen confuses the interpretive, naming function of phallic penetration; it makes ownership of meaning uncertain” (45).

¹¹ On instructions for women in maintaining the integrity of their minds and bodies, see Vives, especially Ch. 6, “On Virginity,” Ch. 9, “On the Solitude of the Virgin,” and Ch. 11, “How She Will Behave in Public” (1523); see also Luis de León (1583). Vives recommended that men prevent their wives from reading such “pernicious” books as *Celestina*, lest they become “addicted to vice through reading” (Ch. 5).

¹² I maintain that despite Celestina’s death, Melibea could have maintained the appearance of honor, although, if she were to have married, she would have needed some assistance in executing a bedtrick or some other theatrical device.

¹³ This concept of *descubrimiento* or discovery is comprised of definitions of “descubrir” such as: “Quitar la cubierta de alguna cosa, destaparla, ponerla de manifiesto” (To take the cover off of something, to open it, to put it into view) and “revelar ò manifestar lo que estaba secreto” (to reveal or show that which was secret) (*Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, Real Academia Española [1732]). In order to use this concept to include the breaching or opening up of bodily and household boundaries, I put a slight pressure on definitions such as “Quitar lo que defiende ò ampara; dejar sin defensa ò amparo” (To remove that which defends or shelters; to leave defenseless or without shelter) and “Abierto, en que la vista se explaya libremente” (Open, in the sense that the

view extends freely) (*Diccionario de Construcción y Regimen* 1c and 1d).

¹⁴ The *Diccionario de Construcción y Regimen* notes a reflexive use of “descubrir” similar to that I describe here, which comes from phrases such as “descubrir el pecho”: “Hablar con entero confianza manifestando lo más secreto que uno sabe ò siente” (3d) (discover one’s bosom: To speak in complete confidence, revealing the most secret things one knows or feels). The 1732 edition of the Real Academia Española’s dictionary defines “descubrir su pecho” as a “Phrase con que se explica que alguna persona hace confianza de otra, revelandola intención, determinación, ù otra cosa que tenía mui oculta” (Phrase with which one expresses that one person confides in another, revealing to him an intention, decision, or something else he has kept very hidden). Although it is meant in a rather different sense, one definition cited above (“Abierto, en que la vista se explaya libremente” [see previous note]) points to the meaning I sense in *Celestina*, in that “se explaya” means not only “to extend,” but also “to unbosom oneself, to confide in” (*American Heritage Larousse Spanish Dictionary* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986]). Similarly, a modern dictionary (Ramón García-Pelayo, *Larousse diccionario usual* [Barcelona: Larousse, 1985]) gives “abrirse” (to open oneself, to confide in) as a figurative definition of “descubrirse.”

¹⁵ On the significance of the relationship between *Celestina* and Claudina, see Gossy 51-54. Noting the similarity between the relationship between these two women and Irigaray’s description of the “communion of the vulva with itself” (52), Gossy describes the two “as perpetually indivisible (in their nevertheless interwoven individuality) as the word *finger nail* is in English, although in Spanish the unity of phrase and signified, matched with different nouns joined by a conjunction in the signifier, perhaps more fully communicates the ‘neither one nor two’ of the imaged relationship” (52). She also notes that “‘Como uña y carne’ is a simile for closeness at least as old in Spanish as *Poema de mio Cid*” (52). *Celestina*’s representation of her relationship with Claudina also resembles those of Shakespeare’s (formerly) erotically invested pairs, such as Rosalind and Celia (*As You Like It*), Helena and Hermia (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), and Emilia and Flavina (*Two Noble Kinsmen*, Fletcher and Shakespeare) (see Traub). See Bruster for a framework that might prove useful in analyzing *Celestina*’s erotic engagement with other female characters, such as Melibea and Areúsa. See Snow for a reading that emphasizes Claudina as an invention of *Celestina*’s.

¹⁶ On the metaphors associated with stitching in *Celestina*, see da Costa Fontes, Ferré, Handy, and J. Herrero (“*Celestina*’s Craft”).

¹⁷ On the symbolism of the “toothache” and the language of healing in Act IV, see J. Herrero (“Stubborn Text”) and Shipley. Critical interest in *Celestina*’s role in the seduction of Melibea has focused primarily on her witchcraft and/or on her linguistic strategies. There has been some controversy over the role of magic in this seduction and in the playtext as a whole. Objections have been raised both to arguments that disregard the impact of magic on the dramatic action and to those that emphasize it to the point of denying the characters’ agency and neglecting Rojas’s development of “an alternate, natural interpretation for every event which was ostensibly produced by *Celestina*’s dealings with the Devil” (Sánchez 483). See A. Herrero and Sánchez for extended considerations of this debate. For a brief overview of scholarship on the role of magic in *Celestina*, see J. Herrero (1984) 166 n. 2; Russell’s essay is the most influential on this topic. On *Celestina*’s linguistic strategies, see Handy, Morgan, and Shipley. Gifford,

Read, and Valbuena bring together the linguistic and magical approaches by dealing with the “magical” powers of language in *LC*. J. Herrero’s essays also deal with both language and magic, with an emphasis on diabolical intervention. For a different view, see González Echevarría, esp. 12-14.

¹⁸ Her comments later on suggest that either this was the moment in which she was struck by Calisto or that she was already in love with him before.

¹⁹ While Lucrecia’s claim to have divined Melibea’s inner state by her body’s signing is complicated by the fact that she overheard and understood her mistress’s conversation with Celestina in Act IV and was bribed into silence by the bawd, there is no reason to doubt that she did also observe and know how to interpret Melibea’s “body talk.”

²⁰ Here Melibea sounds very much like the authoritarian Prospero, who charms Miranda to sleep after he has told her what he wanted to about her origins (*Tempest* I.ii) and who, before the wedding masque, demands of his audience “No tongue! All eyes! Be silent” (IV.i.67).

²¹ Translation from *The Celestina: A Novel in Dialogue*, Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971), qtd. in González Echevarría 18.

²² For a review of commentaries from the 1960s and 1970s on Pleberio’s speech, see Dunn 407-409; for a more recent list of studies of this act, see Deyermond 170 n. 3. Deyermond and Dunn both discuss Pleberio’s emphasis on his loss of Melibea as an economic one. As part of his argument on the process of the ennobling of the wealthy bourgeoisie, Maravall focuses on Pleberio’s emphasis on his *acquired* wealth and honor (32-58, esp. 46-51). These arguments could support a case for the body of *doncella encerrada* as a site not just for gender struggle and for anxieties about lineage, but also as a site for class struggle. (See notes 5 and 6 above.)

²³ The line to which I refer is “Sana dejas la ropa; lastimas el corazón” (235) (“Thou leavest our clothes whole, and yet most cruelly woundest our hearts” (285).



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