

“Este diablo de vieja”: Revealing the *conversa* voice in *Celestina*

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Abstract

Due to the extraordinary socio-religious situation of the Inquisition's aggressive attempt at unification looming over late Medieval Spain, the existence of a *converso* influence in Fernando de Rojas' masterpiece, *Celestina*, is rarely up for debate. However, the way in which this influence manifests itself in Rojas' only known work remains open for discussion among scholars of the work. Despite critics who struggle to view *Celestina* as an expression of *converso* literature, arguments have been made to establish the likelihood of *converso* status for Pleberio, Calisto, and Melibea, but have yet to look profoundly to *Celestina*'s own origins. Thanks to her perceived magical abilities, the famous go-between operates within the parody of religion and its relation to courtly love. Parody and irony function as instruments that create a space for the traditionally marginalized voices rendered by the Spanish sentimental romance to be heard, notably due to gender and cultural Christian values. Interpreting *Celestina* as both a *conversa* who deviates from the proper Christian way of life and as a deviant from established gender roles further expands the realm of ironic possibilities offered by the sentimental romance genre and furthers the humoristic nature of the religious parody throughout the work. Furthermore, the transgressive nature of *converso* literature challenges Spanish conventional values related to blood purity and serves as social criticism rather than as condemnations of deviant behavior. This reconsideration of *Celestina* as a *conversa* voice expands the possibilities of understanding Rojas' response to the sentimental romance genre.

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Introduction

Fernando de Rojas' best seller, *Celestina*, was first published in 1499, during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. *Celestina* follows the deadly unfolding of a lusty "love" story gone wrong. This thoughtful balance of comedy and tragedy responds to the sentimental romance genre and challenges conventional features of *amor cortés*, courtly love. The young nobleman, Calisto, begins the story by effortlessly slipping into the literary role of the frenetic courtly lover and pursuing Melibea, a seemingly pious noblewoman of "serenísima sangre" (Rojas 55). The rich young lovers quickly take on secondary roles as the modern tragic heroine, Celestina, takes center stage. Twice accused and prosecuted by the Spanish Inquisition, the ambitious, sexually-liberated healer, Celestina, runs her own brothel and commands the Devil himself to do her bidding. She is the first courtly go-between to have such enthralling origins that reference rampant anti-Semitism during the reign of the exalted Catholic Kings, Ferdinand and Isabella.

Building up to the Monarch's period of influence, the decades prior to Fernando de Rojas' creation of *Celestina* saw mass waves of Jews converting to Christianity and subsequent rebellions rejecting the blood purity statutes. *Conversos*, or Jews and their descendants who converted to Catholicism in the Iberian Peninsula were subject to the rampant racism of legal statutes of blood purity in an attempt to unify Spain through institutional Christianity, enforced by the bloody search for heresy by the Catholic Monarchs.

The *converso* experience, which was wrought by suspicion and skepticism, has been immortalized in literature. The possibility of a *converso* influence on *Celestina* has intrigued scholars in relatively recent studies. Stephen Gilman maintains that the psychological reaction of a *converso* living in constant fear of the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the 15th century is

evident in the work through the rebellion and resignation of the characters. Others, for example Keith Whinnom, do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to classify *Celestina* as a contribution to *converso* literature. By making a case for the interpretation of the protagonist as a *conversa*, readers can unveil new revelations from the work that identify with traditionally marginalized voices. Celestina's marginalization at the hands of Institutional Christianity leads to her transgressions of social and gender norms exemplified by her various clandestine and masculine professions. Celestina's marginal socio-religious status offers insight to her deviant behavior, highlighting it as a product of her environment thanks to the realistic portrayal of a go-between juggling many stressors for survival.

Readers will find that the throughline of this project is my assertion that Celestina should be interpreted as a *conversa* character. She challenges the accepted conventional norms, which allows for the work to be a space to interpret social criticism. The characters of the lower class reflect values of equality and justice in a much more dynamic space than that of their elite counterparts. The first chapter considers irony in *Celestina* and the conversion influence on the characterization of Celestina. The transgressive nature of *converso* literature is exemplified by subverted metaphors emerging from the theoretical framework of what Kaplan has called the *converso* code. The *converso* code determines allusions to racial discrimination based on blood purity among New Christians, recognizable through "semions" or specific words and phrases that signal a concrete notion related to the *converso* identity. Identifying these metaphors in *Celestina* offers a much more profound interpretation, considering that "the imposition of Otherness often resonates in the literature of those who have been marginalized" (Kaplan 33). Celestina's connection to Claudina is considered, particularly in relation to Celestina's relationship to witchcraft and the protagonist's abuse directed at Pármeno that leads to her

eventual demise. I also dedicate attention to analyzing the implications of Manuel da Costa Fontes's assertion that she subverts the Blessed Mother/Virgin Mary type. Costa Fontes' analysis outlines the hypocrisy of being a true Catholic believer in Celestina's community that used religion to commit racially-motivated atrocities.

Furthermore, the first chapter examines the historical background of Rojas as a writer and the possible nuances behind the creative outlet that literature offers. I echo the sentiments of other scholars who feel that the ominous threat of the Inquisition took on a large role in the literature of the late Middle Ages and should be considered in scholarship. I explore possibilities of social critique and condemnation related to the church's institutional practices, as well as the economic privileges surrounding the suspicion faced by the upper class versus the lower class.

The second chapter focuses on the implications of Celestina's character deviation from the conventional intermediary through religious parody. Thanks to her perceived magical abilities, the nature of this new classification of go-between operates within the parody of sentimental romance as it relates to the religious implications of courtly love as a religion. The chapter examines some examples of subversion from conventional rules of the sentimental genre. By further exaggerating the already parodic conventions of sentimental romance, Rojas creates an innovative and original space for social realism centered on the lower class. This space provides room for details surrounding the social realities of the traditionally marginalized voices by suddenly incorporating them into the world of sentimental fiction. Rojas defies the predictable exclusion of prostitutes, persecuted witches, and poor servants by target audience, which consisted of wealthy nobles. Representing the token courtly intermediary, Celestina's use of witchcraft and astute business skills break the original go-between mold. This chapter considers the incantation invoking the Devil at the end of Act 3, which has caused much

discord among scholars, leading to a doubt of her magical capabilities and the addition of witchcraft to the literary go-between in general. I analyze how the introduction of witchcraft, which initially seems to demonize Celestina, actually provides a nuanced critique of the anti-Semitic impulses that connected Jews with the Devil in late medieval and early modern Christianity.

Celestina wears many masks that symbolize her ability to exist and exert her autonomy in the male space. In the third chapter, I consider the barriers to marginalized outsiders implemented by the Catholic Monarchs during Rojas' time relative to Celestina's profession. Laws surrounding prostitution and medical licensing particularly affected Celestina, yet she still managed to infiltrate the social elite with her business, making her an intriguing modern protagonist.

The end of the fifteenth century's ban of Jews and Muslims from practicing medicine, and the establishment of licensing boards that examined physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries (Dangler 35). Celestina represents the many *curanderas* who continued to practice and thus faced persecution by the Inquisition. The infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* played a monumental role in establishing the feminization of witchcraft, which entailed that women in Europe faced higher possibilities of being accused and prosecuted for witchcraft based on gender. In this chapter, I also investigate the history of Jewish physicians who were barred from medical licensing outside of a small number of exceptions for royal doctors at court.

Reinterpreting Celestina as a *conversa* opens a door for recognizing the experiences of recent converts and their descendants. Celestina's characterization embraces her marginalization perpetuated by the social construct of Otherness in the fifteenth century, making a case that the untold stories of such characters is indeed one to which we should pay attention. We have much

to gain by continuing to learn from marginalized literary characters, many of whom offer an essential representation of realistic experiences and still struggle to occupy artistic spotlights today.

Chapter 1: *Celestina's* Blood: Was Celestina a New Christian?

In recent studies, the existence of a *converso* influence in Fernando de Rojas' masterpiece, *Celestina*, is rarely up for debate. However, the way in which this influence manifests itself in Rojas' only known work remains open for discussion among scholars. Despite critics who struggle to view *Celestina* as an expression of *converso* literature, arguments have been made to establish a *converso* status for Pleberio, Calisto, and Melibea. In addition, Stephen Gilman's research has identified *conversos* prosecuted by the Inquisition in the Rojas family tree. What is yet to be examined is the *converso* influence of the social milieu on the characterization of Celestina. Whether or not the Rojas' personal experiences bled into his work, Celestina, the protagonist, communicates recurring themes in *converso* literature. This chapter will demonstrate how, as a *converso* character, the transgressive nature of Celestina challenges Spanish conventional values related to blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*) and serves as social criticism rather than as condemnations of deviant behavior.

The historical setting of *Celestina* takes place during a precarious period for *conversos* in Spain. Unsuccessful attempts to convert Spanish Jews in a less violent manner during the thirteenth century set the stage for two centuries of escalating institutional efforts to marginalize Iberian Jewish and *converso* populations, which culminated to form the social context of late fifteenth-century Spain mirrored in *Celestina*. Critical examples were the laws established during the reign of Alfonso X that laid the foundation for the centuries to come. Less than a century before Fernando de Rojas created *Celestina*, thousands of Jews converted to Christianity in the wake of violence from prejudiced and vengeful Christians who blamed them for economic downfalls as a result of Anti-Jewish sermons, which spread feverously throughout many large Spanish cities. This makes the question of blood purity relevant in generations to come.

During the decades that followed those mass conversions, some *conversos* found themselves occupying positions of authority, at court and in municipal governance. These positions were not previously open to Jews following the third law of Alfonso X's *Siete Partidas*, which decreed that because of their alleged responsibility in the death of Jesus, Jews were unable to possess authority over Christians (Carpenter 27). After converting to Christianity, however, they were once again afforded those privileges of influence and allowed to maintain whatever success they had achieved. Despite religious prejudice and speculation of heresy during the fifteenth century, educated *conversos* maintained a status that was relatively equal to upper-class non-*converso* Christians, secured by the integral role *conversos* played in civic and commercial life. At the same time, many other *conversos* were members of the working class (Baer 273-274). It is enriching to consider this perspective to read *Celestina* through a *converso* lens, given background for the older generation of the characters in *Celestina*. This would have been the world in which Pleberio and Alisa grew up, the parents of Melibea, as well as Claudina, mother to Pármeno, and Celestina herself.

Relative social harmony endured until the late 1440's, when the religious uniformity and legal statutes of blood purity inspired a much more repressive version of institutional Christianity, enforced through mechanisms like the Inquisition. *Conversos* occupying prestigious positions suddenly found themselves in the middle of racial conflicts with fanatical Old Christians calling into question family lineage and the purity of one's blood (Baer 278). Those suspected of heresy were burned, persecuted, and branded as unfit for positions in public office that could hold power over Old Christians. Such acts foreshadowed inquisitorial trials, which were most violently active during the first 15-20 years (Kaplan *The Evolution* 30), that is, during Fernando de Rojas' lifetime. Scholars deduce that Rojas was born sometime between 1465-1476

(Costa Fontes 35), meaning that regardless of personal involvement, the Inquisition, which was formally established by Catholic Monarchs in 1480, would have been a glaring part of everyday life for conversos subjected to this repressive state apparatus.

Citing records from the Inquisition, Stephen Gilman connects Rojas' family tree to crypto-Jewish relatives as close as first cousins. He details whether or not members of the Rojas and Montalbán families were "reconciliados en tiempo de gracia por judayzantes" (498). Notably, there is a possibility that Fernando de Rojas' father was executed for Judaizing in 1488, along with some of his relatives in 1485, according to the records from his place of origin, La Puebla de Montalbán (502). Considering the possibility of such a close personal connection to the perils of the Inquisition, Rojas' subjectivity was defined and marginalized by the mechanisms of institutional control at the time and therefore situates his artistic expressions within this social context.

Prior to the Inquisition, *conversos* could freely express thoughts about discrimination and doubts about their new faith (Costa 53). Purity-of-blood statutes later on led to a decline in social status of the people as well as restriction of literary expression. Nevertheless, although subtle, *converso* writers left trails for their community to follow. For example, as revealed Act XII, Scene V of *Celestina*, Sempronio is from Rojas' native town. He works at a garden, Molléjar, which Stephen Gilman asserts was part of the Montalbán property and that it represented an actual memory of the author (103). Dorothy Severin also suggests that Pármeno could be the alter ego of Rojas due to the trauma he conveys about the death of his mother by the Inquisition (423). The complexity and detail within the relationships of Rojas' characters who are all interconnected, however, suggests that he is telling a story with which the collective community can identify and relate. The particular details of memories may be his own or those of friends and

acquaintances experiencing life in such a traumatic time. While it is up for debate whether or not Rojas personally inserted himself in the work, there exists viable evidence that the main protagonist, Celestina, is meant to be a *conversa* and represents the challenges presented from living in the shadows and the struggle to prove oneself.

In order to establish Celestina's identity as a *conversa* character, I rely on Gregory Kaplan's concept of semions, which he defines as a way to explain the complex diversity apparent in *converso* literature. This theoretical approach is extracted from broad-ranging works from authors and developed from the theoretical method of semiotics. Specific signifiers related to the *converso* code, or a collection of words and phrases that relate specifically to the *converso* experience, serves to identify significant metaphors by authors and to expose their socio-cultural religious status as *conversos*. Meaning is assigned between identified semions, or symbolic words or phrases, apparent across many literary works (*The Evolution* 34) and anti-*converso* hostility in the 15th century. The use of the term "code" is meant to identify terms associated with larger concepts relevant to both Old and New Christian readers (37).

The preoccupation with a pure, Old Christian lineage posed problems for New Christians after a revolt in Toledo in 1449. Kaplan explains that *conversos* were viewed as crypto-Jews simply because of the impurity of their blood that could be traced back to previous generations ("The Inception" 26). The first purity of blood statute, the *Sentencia-Estatuto*, was issued as a result of the aforementioned revolt and equated *conversos* with Judaizers. It was meant to "exclude those who were not Old Christians from entering certain professions or social circles which were open only to Old Christians" (Aronson-Friedman 30). Because conversions and racial-religious intermixtures were common in all Jewish families (Baer 273), "it was difficult to ascertain exactly who possessed a Jewish lineage" (Kaplan *The Evolution* 20).

Labels such as *conversos*, New Christians, and even *marranos*, a derogatory term referring to pigs that remained even if one only had a remote Jewish ancestor (Manuel da Costa Fontes, ix), followed many generations. The suspicion cast on *conversos* resonates in *Celestina* as early as the first auto when Sempronio refers to Calisto's divine adoration of Melibea as blasphemous (Rojas 61). Rojas addresses the blood purity statute directly by his consistent yet masterfully dispersed use of signifiers. Kaplan identifies the word "claro" to be a semion in Sempronio's observation below:

"Y dicen algunos que la nobleza es una alabanza, que proviene de los merecimientos y antigüedad de los padres; yo digo que la ajena luz nunca te hará claro, si la propia no tienes. Y por tanto, no te estimes en la claridad de tu padre, que tan magnífico fue; sino en la tuya" (87).

Sempronio is suggesting that Calisto does not possess the required "antigüedad de los padres" and therefore cannot be made "claro" by "la ajena luz," or lineage. Kaplan finds a correlation between "claro" and ancestry, which creates a metaphor for an Old Christian. This is not to say, however, that Sempronio is completely in the clear. Perhaps the fact that he comments on Calisto's open blasphemous thoughts related to worshiping Melibea speaks to the freedom associated with economic privilege. Sempronio, or any of the other servants, would not have the same noble connections to potentially help clear their name if accused.

Doubts surrounding Calisto's lineage additionally surface when Melibea reacts doubtfully to Celestina's claim that Calisto is a "gentilhombre de clara sangre" (Rojas 108). She responds "¿Si me hallaras sin sospecha dese loco con qué palabras me entrabas?" (109). The signified "clara sangre" is also referring metaphorically to Calisto's Old Christian lineage, but Melibea's doubtful retort insinuates that his blood is not pure and he is *converso* (Kaplan 122).

These are only two of several semions identified by the *converso* code, but they reflect the effects of deep feelings of suspicion among the public, portrayed by the characters of *Celestina*.

Much of *Celestina* is ironically portrayed through the eyes of characters that dramatically deviate from medieval Spanish Christian values. In a world where suspicion of heresy was a suffocating part of daily life, New Christians had to conform to conventional restrictions of activities such as medicine, finance, and administration (Gilman 117). Ironically, Celestina thrives in her community from rumors of her abilities rather than living in fear of persecution, insisting until the very end that her intentions are sincere: "Una sola soy en este limpio trato... vivo de mi oficio . . . muy limpiamente" (Rojas 202). Her constant reemphasis of her purity is not found among the other characters. Manuel da Costa Fontes sees in *Celestina* a "multi-pronged attack against Christian prayer and the central dogmas of Christianity" (103) and advances the theory that Celestina might represent "a deliberate antithesis of the Blessed Mother" (109). The motherly role of Celestina is a key aspect in the development of Melibea, Calisto, Elicia, Lucrecia, and Areúsa, that is, nobility and their servants alike. Celestina's "celestial" name suggests benevolent intentions that enable Calisto to see her as his Savior when she promises to cure his sin of lust (118). Celestina's continuous support of extramarital sex upon Melibea's rejection of marriage, lying, cheating, and scheming along with the frequent summoning of the Devil easily cancel out the "limpios motivos" she claims to have, therefore creating a possible parody of the Virgin Mary's role (115). Celestina's intentions are clearly meant to be ironic here, begging that they are interpreted as anything other than "limpio".

Costa Fontes offers an undeniably intriguing insight in understanding this complex character. The portrayal of Celestina as the antithesis of the Virgin Mary supports the argument that Rojas was criticizing the hypocrisy of being a true Catholic believer in a community that

used religion as a veil to commit ethnic-based atrocities. The Virgin Mary is the most famous impossible achievement for women: to be pure and chaste, but also fertile mothers. In considering Celestina to be the anti-Mary, Rojas implies in his prologue that the end of the story rights the wrongdoings: "si bien queréis limpio motivo, . . . buscad bien el fin de aquesto que escribo" (46). Da Costa Fontes views this dark ridicule of Mary by her antithesis prostitute as somewhat culturally acceptable and speaking to Rojas' questioning of Catholicism. He identifies several aspects alluding to the Marian cult, among them being that last words of *Celestina* (uttered by Pleberio) coincide with the seventh canonical hour, the *Salve, Regina*.¹ He offers the reason for the attack on Mary to be that although "officially Christian, some converts did not accept the dogma of Mary's virginity" (137). He later goes on to attribute the Inquisition to causing Rojas to "lose faith in any God, Christian or Jewish, who allowed such great injustices to come to pass" claiming that Rojas himself may have been a crypto-Jew (141). Costa Fontes' identification of Celestina's as parody of the Mary alludes to the hypocrisy of being a true Catholic believer in a community that used religion to commit ethnic-based atrocities.

Despite Rojas' status as a New Christian or heretic, Celestina is not necessarily condemned as a crypto-Jew because she expertly portrays her wrongdoings as benevolent and essential acts for the community and operates directly under the eyes of the clergymen. She finds creative ways to conceal her sins. Muttering to herself, she manipulates the other characters based on her knowledge of their vulnerability and gullibility. In this spirit, when presented with Calisto's case by Sempronio, she says:

"Y como aquellos dañan en los principios las llagas y encarecen el prometimiento de la salud, así entiendo yo hacer a Calisto. Alargarle he la certinidad de remedio,

¹ "¿Por qué me dejaste triste y solo in hac lachrymarum valle?" (Rojas 259)

porque como dicen, el esperanza luenga alige el corazón y cuanto él la perdiere, tanto gela promete. ¡Bien me entiendes!” (Rojas 70)

If all had gone to Celestina’s original plan, Sempronio and Pármeno may have prospered along with Celestina by helping her fulfill the needs of the clients. This does not mean that Celestina represents a good Christian, but it does allow her to be a complex character rather than a villain who is evil to the fullest extent. The Sunday mass is her hunting ground for people in need of services, and she recounts to Sempronio her younger days when she would receive the very church tithes from the clerics. Celestina’s careful avoidance of openly committing heresy is related to her relationship with Claudina.

Celestina’s relation to Claudina may appear to be a sinister way to manipulate Claudina’s son, Pármeno, to do her bidding. He is clearly uncomfortable at the mention of the two women, who seem to have been attached at the hip. Celestina describes them as “vña e carne... comíamos, juntas dormíamos, juntas auíamos nuestros solazes, nuestros plazerres, nuestros consejos e conciertos. En casa e fuera, como dos hermanas” (Rojas 134). The consistent mention of this relationship in Acts I, III, VII, and IX reflects Claudina’s importance in Celestina’s narrative.

In the midst of a heated argument with Pármeno, Celestina reveals that Claudina is condemned by the Church to be tortured or put to death: “¿Poco sabes de achaque de iglesia...que mil veces le oía decir?” (Rojas 135). This revelation coupled with the nature of the execution offer evidence for Celestina’s status as a *conversa* treading carefully around the Inquisition.

While the Inquisition was also interested in witch-hunting, Claudina’s death described by Celestina seems oddly embellished and out of place. Brian Pavlac concludes that witches

received much lighter treatment when compared to heresy committed by *conversos* and *moriscos*. It is estimated that only 3,500 victims were accused of witchcraft out of about 100,000 total people caught by the Inquisition. While a few dozen witches were executed, the first witch was not burned to death until 1498 in Zaragoza. A larger witch hunt did not escalate until 1526 (153).

Given the timing of *Celestina*, with the first 16 acts appearing in 1499 and the rest following in 1502, the execution of Claudina for being a witch is within the bounds of possibility. What is more likely, however, is instead that Claudina's fate is due to committing heresy as a crypto-Jew, and a criticism of the Inquisition's unjust torture methods. This criticism is made evident by a heated argument between Celestina and Pármeneo on the subject of forced confession by the Church. Pármeneo recalls a memory from his childhood in which he witnessed Claudina and Celestina being arrested together by the tribunal. Celestina reveals shortly thereafter that his mother was arrested four other times for witchcraft. While emotionally defending Claudina's memory, she tells Pármeneo "Poco sabes de achaque de iglesia y cuánto es mejor por mano de justicia que de otra manera." The "otra manera" must refer to the Church, because she also mentions that just before Claudina's execution, a priest quoted Mathew 5.10: "bienaventurados eran los que padecían persecución por la justicia, y que aquéllos poseerían el reino de los cielos." ("Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven") (Rojas 140). This quote was commonly used by persecuted *conversos* ultimately seeking a happy ending in Heaven (Severin 422). It is ironic that it is the priest who cites this passage in Matthew, rather than the tortured Claudina. The "persecución por la justicia" signified by the priest implies that Claudina is being forced into confession, forming another semion which alludes to the final *converso* confession.

Dorothy Severin considers that the passage about Claudina's death "is meant as a criticism of Church penalties and confessions obtained under torture" (422). I interpret Celestina's bitterness here towards the Inquisition to indicate that she did not believe Claudina's sentencing to be fair. David Gitlitz offers insight on the perceived threat of Jewishness to the Inquisition, and summarizes what Christian jurists would have considered to be blasphemy perpetuated by crypto-Jews:

These attitudes and acts ranged along an escalating scale of overt negative actions: (1) denial, or expressions of disbelief, often coupled with philosophical refutation or assertion of Jewish counter-beliefs; (2) verbal disparagement, ridicule, or scorn, often heavily tinged with irony; (3) parody [of Catholic sacraments, religious ceremonies, or dietary practices]; and (4) physically aggressive actions. (137)

The subjectivity of the basis for accusations investigated by the Inquisition highlight how terrifying it would be to live in fear that one's neighbor could misinterpret and report to the Inquisition, resulting in an untimely death. Claudina may have been arrested for witchcraft at least once, but it is more likely that her execution is a result of one of the reasons stated above by Gitlitz. Celestina claims that she cannot speak of Claudina without her eyes filling with tears (Rojas 138). The effects of Celestina's arrest are divulged by the way in which Celestina presents herself to all of the characters when she cannot speak candidly. For example, when Celestina introduces herself to Alisa and Melibea, she utters many good religious phrases, as if she is accustomed to constantly proving her devotion to Christianity to the public.

Señora buena, la gracia de Dios sea contigo e con la noble hija. Mis passiones e enfermedades han impedido mi visitar tu casa, como era razón; mas Dios conoce

mis limpias entrañas, mi verdadero amor, que la distancia de las moradas no
despega el querer de los coraçonos. (Rojas 99)

It is especially ironic to use these phrases when the audience knows Celestina is crafting a master plan full of un-Christian actions, which speaks to the insincerity of the phrases as well as to her sarcasm and inconspicuous rebellion against living in fear of being persecuted again. The term “limpias entrañas” refers to blood purity, and by suggesting that the thing that is pure are her “insides” insofar as what first appears to be a term to mean “through and through” or “unquestionably,” but also refers to her digestive tract. Denying dietary restrictions based on religion was a popular way for *converso* to prove that they were not secretly practicing Judaism by following kosher dietary standards.

Asking for confession is ironic when Celestina dies in Act XII Scene X, due to her grave mistake of bringing up Claudina’s past and driving Pármeneo to show an unusual amount of violence and hatred apparent in the multiple stab wounds he inflicts on her. Pármeneo suffered greatly from growing up watching Claudina and Celestina regularly be honeyed and feathered for witchcraft by the Inquisition (Rojas 89).

Through murder, Pármeneo chose to condemn Celestina as a heretic who dies without confession and whose sins did indeed continue to wreak havoc. He did not have sufficient evidence for this, but rather acted in response to her greed. In the words of Joseph Snow, “even after Celestina’s voice and mediating powers are silenced, the chain of events she sets in motion proceeds relentlessly” (453). After the deaths of the characters, many issues relating to a decline in moral, religious, and social values remain without solution.

In terms of a social critique, the characters of *Celestina* experience the frustration of concealment and skepticism that characterized the lives of *conversos* in Inquisitional Spain

(Shepard 368). Specifically, Amy Aronson-Friedman distinguishes Rojas' socially inferior characters as those who “serve to demonstrate the author's ironic inversion of classes” (92).

These are the characters who most directly influence or are influenced by Celestina.

Celestina's philosophy significantly influences her workers, Areúsa and Elicia. As Aronson-Friedman points out, the members of this class in *Celestina* feel compelled to express their disdain for the divide between classes and religious origins. Elicia's beliefs are expressed through her comments: "también se muere el que mucho allega como el que pobremente vive, y el doctor como el pastor, y el papa como el sacristán, y el señor como el siervo, y el de alto linaje como el de bajo" (Rojas 149), and Areúsa echoes her sentiments later with “que al fin todos somos hijos de Adán y Eva. Procure de ser cada uno bueno por sí, y no vaya a buscar en la nobleza de sus pasados la virtud” (Rojas 163).

The ironic distinction between the virtuous ideals of the lower class versus the more superficial pursuits of Calisto and Melibea can be explained by turning to one of the defining features of the Hebrew *maqamat*. David Wacks points out that this genre flourished in Christian Iberia by addressing a “competing set of cultural discourses” (186), which in this case would be the culture of the Old Christians and the New Christians. The adventures of Celestina made a lasting impression on *conversos* who could identify with her. The figure of the harlot in the *maqamat* clearly influenced Celestina, and found its way into later works that filled in some of the ambiguity left in Rojas' work from tiptoeing around controversial subjects. Michelle Hamilton additionally draws links between Celestina's role and characters from the Arabic *maqamat* genre, notably between procuress Umm ‘Amr in Al-Saraqusi's *Maqama* 9. Umm ‘Amr and Celestina demonstrate greed, pride in their work, and are highly regarded for their healing skills and persuasive rhetoric (218). The stark comparison of the two alludes to a

profound history and preserved memory of the Mediterranean roots behind *Celestina*, and makes a case that this particular history of go-betweens should be considered.

An example of the impact on literature of the *conversa*-harlot role is *La Hija de Celestina*, by Alonso Jeronimo de Salas Barbadillo. The book was published in 1612, following the expulsion from Spain of *moriscos*, or Muslims converted to Christianity. Electra Gamón Fielding identifies Elena as symbolic of the fate of *morisco* culture in seventeenth-century Spain (128). Other marginalized voices during Inquisitorial times, such as the *moriscos*, could identify with Celestina, an impure character trying to prove herself clean. Physically, cleanliness meant the absence of even a drop of Jewish or Moorish blood, but pure or chaste when it was applied to morals (Costa Fontes 83). Additional proof lies within later picaresque novels, which according to Shepard “gave a fleeting recognition of the social situation in which the *conversos* lived” (371). The allusions to *Celestina* by subsequent works suggest that many identified with the *converso* voice present in Rojas’ work, and that readers have much to gain by reading the characters as such.

Celestina’s life as a *conversa* and prostitute produced a complex, hardened character that can identify with others who have lived through atrocities against humanity such as living in fear of persecution. Through Celestina’s wit and confidence, the work as a whole challenges the culture of blood purity and serves as social criticism rather than as condemnations of heretic behavior. The comedic irony serves as a careful, lighthearted way to bring *conversos* and other marginalized voices together, and lends itself to a relatable theme and warning that “moral drift can lead to chaos” (Snow 455). By interpreting Celestina herself to be a *conversa*, this lesson more likely pertains to the atrocities committed by the Inquisition rather than those living in fear of persecution.

Chapter 2: The Devil's Intermediary: Parody of Religion in *Celestina*

In *Celestina*, Fernando de Rojas subverts the conventions of sentimental romance to create a parody of courtly love. He does so by employing religious images that would have been easily recognizable by the general public, and although he did not expect for it to escape the eyes of his peers, *Celestina* avoids being marked as a heretical piece by the intentions stated during the introduction. Rojas claims that he is warning against “los locos enamorados que, vencidos en su desordenado apetito, a sus amigas llaman y dicen ser su dios. Assí mismo hecha en aviso de los engaños de las alcahuetas y malos y lisonjeros sirvientes” (53). His condemnation of the intermediaries and servants can be interpreted through by the untimely deaths and murders of the subversive characters. However, by considering that some (if not all) of the characters in the work are recent or descendants of converts from Judaism to Christianity living in fear of persecution of the Inquisition, the humorous nature of the parodic elements takes on a more profound meaning. Celestina, as the courtly intermediary, is especially responsible throughout most of the work for perpetuating blasphemous ideas, hidden by brilliantly manipulative rhetorical strategies and her use of witchcraft. In this chapter, I consider how interpreting Celestina herself as a demonized *conversa* adds to the humorous overtones found in the religious parody, as well as a subtle allusion to the injustice that converted Christians faced at the hand of the Inquisition.

The sentimental romance genre has remained in “a state of constant flux” by repeatedly challenging and reconfiguring the language and conventions of their antecedents (Gerli xiv). Keith Whinnom's bibliography, published in 1983, *The Spanish Sentimental Romance 1440-1550* identified twenty works establishing a canon for the sentimental genre. *Siervo de amor*, *Cárcel de amor*, and *Grisel y Mirabella* build the parameters of Whinnom's list. César

Hernández Alonso identifies the features of the genre as including unrequited love that leads to desperation and pain in solitude, idealization of the woman who is the object of desire, courtly love, the linguistic fusion of religious and profane elements, the presence of a narrator, and the story is intended to be received by the noble public (12-14). Dorothy Severin asserts that the sentimental romance genre was parodic at its earliest beginnings, and that the use of humor and parody is an “essential feature” (16). Francisco Márquez Villanueva poses the idea that the sentimental romance genre can also be used to make a political statement through his analysis of feelings of bitterness toward an anti-*converso* government (198). *Celestina* deviates from many of the sentimental features listed by Alonso, yet maintains an essence of socio-political critique from Márquez Villanueva’s analysis of *Cárcel de amor*. Michael Ruggerio classifies the work as an enriching “response” to sentimental romance literature, rather than an addition to the genre. *Celestina*’s role as an intermediary is an essential piece in the pursuit of courtly love for the purpose of Rojas’ parody (54).

The two wealthy nobles cross paths in a garden at the beginning of the first act. Melibea rejects Calisto’s advances, and sends him spiraling into despair. He anguishes from lovesickness and deep sorrow until his faithful servant, Sempronio, recommends the services of the local go-between, *Celestina*, to retrieve a cure. The first Act of *Celestina*, supposedly written by an anonymous author, closely follows the beginning of a familiar storyline following the classic signs of a Spanish sentimental romance. Courtly love is the distinctive exaggerative feature of the sentimental romance genre that *Celestina* most clearly challenges, and *Celestina*’s singular take on a go-between inspired subsequent “Celestinesque” works that associated the role with witchcraft and magic. The parody of religion and courtly love in *Celestina* functions as an instrument to create a space for the traditionally marginalized voices rendered by the Spanish

sentimental romance to be heard, notably due to gender and cultural Christian values by analyzing the religious parody considering the ever present terror of the Spanish Inquisition, which famously prosecuted, tortured, and burned suspicious Christian converts and witches.

Ivy A. Corfis notes that in the places where *Celestina* deviates from a typical courtly manner, it instead follows Ovid's poem, *The Art of Love*, which provides advice on how and where to find women to marry in Rome, how to seduce them, and how to prevent others from stealing them. Much emphasis in previous studies is placed upon Calisto and Melibea's role in the courtly situation, but it is worth also considering Celestina's unparalleled interpretation on the go-between more profoundly than the two lovers. In her analysis of Calisto as a courtly lover, June Hall Martin points out Calisto's "heresy and excessive rhetorical discourse and the sacro-profane hyperbole" serve as superficial criticism of fifteenth century Castilian poetry (26). Furthermore, the traditional courtly love story is quickly infiltrated by realism and realistic reactions. When Melibea faints at the mention of her soon-to-be-lover's name, Celestina says "¡O, por Dios, señora Melibea! ¿qué poco esfuerço es este?" Celestina fails to acknowledge the courtly reaction of a delicate, feminine swoon, thinking instead that her masterful manipulation went unfortunately awry. She goes on to panic:

¿Qué descaecimiento? ¡O mezquina yo! ¡Alça la cabeça! ¡O malaventurada vieja!
¿En esto an de parar mis passos? Si muere, matarme an; aunque biva, seré sentida,
que ya no podrá sofrirse de no publicar su mal y mi cura. Señora mía Melibea,
ángel mío, ¿qué as sentido? ¿qué es de tu habla graciosa? ¿qué es de tu color
alegre? ¡Abre tus claros ojos!—¡Lucrecia, Lucrecia! ¡entra presto acá! Verás
amortecida a tu señora entre mis manos. ¡Baxa presto por un jarro de agua! (Rojas
177)

Celestina's thin patience for the drama of the courtly lover is a parody of the lack realism of the swooning damsel. Celestina responds in a more relatable way to Melibea's faint, unlike what occurs in the sentimental romances. In the above passage, Rojas is not only ridiculing the incredulous reality of courtly lovers, but also the unequal social reality installed by religious institutions whereby the noble, wealthy, and Old Christian doesn't have to fear for their identities. As per courtly rules, the male lover is typically inferior to the woman he desires (Alonso 16). Yet, readers know very little about Calisto's background and overall position in society. His parents are never mentioned, his lavish payments to Celestina suggest wealth, and it is simply said that he is of "noble linaje" (Rojas 55) or Old Christian lineage. If Melibea is also belonging to noble lineage, they would seem to be on the same level. If we interpret both Calisto and Melibea to be *conversos* enjoying the power afforded to their status as nobles, the marginalized characters of the lower class points out the unfair advantage that wealth perhaps had in terms of being called to question by the Inquisition.

Rachel Scott notes the linguistic self-fashioning in Calisto's exaltation of Melibea, drawing on Stephen Greenblatt's theory of Renaissance self-fashioning, or the fashioning of human identity in accordance with a "cultural system of meanings," or in other words, what is acceptable to fit the status quo (Greenblatt 19). Calisto is attempting to transform himself into the ideal courtly suitor with a very obvious mention of the importance of lineage (Scott 80).

Greenblatt also clarifies that "self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed" (28). Calisto's description of Melibea highlights her piety in terms of her moral high ground and racial origins, which becomes famously controversial when Sempronio poses the question: "¿Tú no

eres cristiano?” to which Calisto replies “¿Yo? Melibeo soy y a Melibea adoro y en Melibea creo y a Melibea amo” (Rojas 60). Calisto’s blasphemous exaltation of Melibea is not only a nod to the forlorn male lover chasing a pious woman from earlier examples of sentimental romance who are blinded by the sin of passion, but also to the sociocultural weight carried by the ever present fear of being associated with the Other. Sempronio’s concern for his master’s heresy is a gesture toward the political situation of the era; the fear that the Inquisition would prosecute on the slightest deviation from the Catholic faith. By deifying and idolatrizing any being besides the Christian God, Calisto proves his own self unworthy of Melibea’s perceived holiness due to her apparent Old Christian lineage and good virtues. *Celestina* portrays a world in which the courtly love no longer applies (102). Christian virtues, Christian relics, and the religious ideas of demonization particularly stand out in terms of religious parody presented through courtly love, notions which would have been unmistakable to the audience and would later have an effect on readers interpreting the situations presented. Dorothy Severin explains that sentimental texts containing religious parody “were essentially aimed at the court or occasionally at the academy, and only later were revised for printing and a wider audience which understood them differently” (8). Aside from the intended educated audience, the text’s realism also greatly appealed to those of other social statuses. *Celestina*’s invocation of the Christian Devil through witchcraft particularly stands out due to the wide medieval acceptance of the Devil as a reality. The medieval mentality with regards to the Devil and those following him was quite literal, with sin and social disruption closely correlated (Gregg 25).

Rojas’ innovative addition to the literary go-between type is witchcraft. The traditional representation of the intermediary was of a secondary character who makes romantic matches from the sidelines of the narrative, whereas in *Celestina* the figure takes on a central role thanks

to the introduction of witchcraft as one of her defining characteristics. Suddenly both the go-between *and* the witch were interested in seduction for personal gain. Celestina is referred to as both a sorceress and a witch, but what seals her fate as the latter is her summoning of the Christian Devil to aid her pursuits as a procuress. According to Michael Ruggerio, if we read her as a sorceress, she would not believe herself to have the powers to summon the Devil and we would be dealing with demonic possession instead. Making this distinction speaks to her individuality and autonomous choice to improve her situation by enlisting evil help (55).

Interestingly, Celestina calls upon Plutón, ruler of the underworld and god of precious gems who is often mistakenly associated with the Devil because of his underground dwellings, but not directly tied to sins. Celestina calls upon him with total confidence, ending her request with:

“Si no lo haces con presto movimiento, ternásme por capital enemiga; heriré con luz tus cárceles tristes y oscuras; acusaré cruelmente tus continuas mentiras; apremiaré on mis ásperas palabras tu horrible nombre. Y otra y otra vez te conjuro; así confiando en mi mucho poder, me parto para allá con mi hilado, donde creo te llevo ya envuelto” (Rojas 99).

The request has become threat and an assumption that she wields the power of dark magic. Celestina is not afraid to use insincere religious words and allusions to maintain her disguise as a pious, benevolent, and harmless old woman, but uttering Pluto’s name rather than Satan’s betrays a temporary lack of confidence, and that the situation may require additional intervention. The image of the Devil is the most symbolic out of Celestina’s involvement with the blasphemous pursuits related to pagan gods. The courtly element of love as a sickness has roots in the Venus and Cupid gods, and Celestina has additionally taken it upon herself to fulfill

Cupid's role by awakening Melibea's sexual desire (Ruggerio 44). It is difficult to assume that Celestina is invested in paganism or even Ovidian love when ancient deities are known to be ever present in Spanish Renaissance art and literature. Celestina's actions of seducing Melibea and calling upon the Devil can be interpreted as evil and blasphemous, but considering her deep understanding of the religious fervor of the time offers an insightful understanding of the text if we read her to be a relatively recent convert to the Christian faith. Converting to a faith out of fear perpetuated by the Inquisition rather than autonomous conviction, and would have taught Celestina the importance of keeping up with religious appearances. It is clear that Celestina knows how to exaggerate her piety to attract naïve clients and to hide her possible desire of serving the Devil. She invokes the Devil for the prime focus of overcoming Melibea's chaste intentions and good religious virtues, yet her worship and wielding of the power of the him as something she truly believed in is questioned by scholars; both Micheal Gerli and Dorothy Severin claim it to simply be a clever use of rhetoric.

To offer another perspective, in *Celestina's Brood*, Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría agrees that if characters are motivated by witchcraft rather than their own autonomy, the meaningfulness of their actions is largely diminished. On the other hand, Echevarría acknowledges the perplexing incantation at the end of Act 3, and ends up deciding not to question the meaning of Celestina's witchcraft, particularly during her invocation of the Devil (13). Jean Dangler interprets Celestina's spell as part of a traditional woman healer's methods, and identifies the association with demonic powers as Rojas's attempt to denigrate women healer practices: "The demonization of traditional women healers and their practices by those who held the means to establish regulatory norms...constituted one significant way in which such authorities justified women's prohibition from professional medicine and other fields" (89).

While the extent of Celestina's magic seems to purely be rhetorical, her private summoning of the Devil suggests that at least she herself believes she deals directly with him, which I find to be the most significant. If Celestina's demonic power wielding is meant to be understood as far-fetched, then her conversations with Pluto serve as a subtle reference to the unfounded comparisons of *conversos* with the Devil. The incantation appears to be out of place and a blatant display of anti-Christian behavior, which may have ended up as the demise of her death. Alan D. Deyermond points out the changes in Pármeno and Sempronio that lead to the murder of Celestina, citing the fact that they may have been influenced by the spell. It makes more sense that Pármeno and Sempronio would have experienced moral decline by participating in the murder of Celestina as a result of the spell, when Melibea's not-so-sudden interest in avoiding marriage seems to be rooted in beliefs she harbored before ever meeting Celestina. She admits to Alisa during their final encounter that she is uninterested in a seemingly mundane life offered by marriage:

Déjenme gozar mi mocedad alegre, si quieren gozar su vejez cansada; si no, presto podrán aparejar mi perdición y su sepultura. No tengo otra lástima sino por el tiempo que perdí de no gozarlo, de no conocerlo, después que a mí me sé conocer. No quiero marido, no quiero ensuciar los nudos del matrimonio ni las maritales pisadas de ajeno hombre repisar, como muchas hallo en los antiguos libros que leí o que hicieron más discretas que yo, más subidas en estado y linaje. Las cuales algunas eran de la gentilidad tenidas por diosas, así como Venus, madre de Eneas y de Cupido, el dios del amor, que siendo casada corrompió la prometida fe marital. (Rojas 227)

Although this technically did occur long after the incantation, her rejection of marriage bore no mention of Calisto and Celestina, but rather seemed rooted in the idea that she was unimpressed by the married life her parents led and wished to lead a different one. Echevarría's assertion that understanding the witchcraft as true denigrates the autonomy of characters may have only been true for some, and not all.

An additional way to understand the invocation of the Devil is to rely on an extensive medieval history of anti-Semitism that suspected those connected to the Jewish faith with demons and Devil-worshippers. François Soyer identifies a link that was held suspicion by Christians during the period between the two:

Just as witches and heretics were accused of making pacts with the Devil and seeking to harm Christian society, Jews would likewise come to be systematically accused in popular folklore and the writings of some churchmen from the twelfth century onwards of seeking to achieve the same ends. (52)

Celestina's status as a woman and a witch contribute to the sinister outwitting of the characters that are noble. Celestina's prostitutes and the greedy Pármemo and Sempronio openly understand and accept her meddling, while ironically referring to her as "madre" and "madre bendecida." This new breed of go-between addresses more directly the distinctive religious and secular situation during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs and the Inquisition, therefore necessitating a more complex and involved character to fill this position. If Celestina is indeed a *conversa* character, this means that she would have some Jewish blood, which would follow the anti-Semitic trope of associating the Jewish race with the Devil and tendency to summon him when needed. Celestina's open confidence in commanding the Devil is ridiculous, given her demonstrated level of intelligence.

The audience of *Celestina* would have been familiar with the association of the Jew and the Devil, perpetuated largely by art, literature, drama, and sermons. In *The Devil and the Jews*, historian Joshua Trachtenberg describes the medieval European depiction of the Jew as “not a human being but a demonic, a diabolic beast fighting the forces of truth and salvation with Satan’s weapons” (18). Such dehumanization carried dangerous implications not only for Jews, but also for their converted Christian descendents. Jessica De Luca determines that the anti-Semitic language that is found in the Gospel of John as to why the Jew was considered to be a “faithful partner to the Devil” created an irrational panic that led Christians to fear Jews for planting doubts in their faith, namely because of their disbelief in Jesus (4).² The conspiracy of attributing the Black Death to murderous plots triggered immediate accusations of Jewish leaders in Toledo scheming to kill Christians, which inspired confessions obtained under torture that spread throughout Europe. Acts of poisoning are notoriously related to those well-versed in witchcraft, and are considered to be a weapon wielded by women. Joan Young Gregg establishes links between the Devil, women, and Jews specifically by identifying nearly one hundred medieval sermons pertaining to the topics, and proclaims them a triangular “unholy trinity” of Christian doctrine (4). Demonic figures, unchaste women, and Jews were “tempters, deceivers, and corrupters” by nature were popularly condemned by the sermons available to the public which largely founded the beliefs of medieval European Christendom (21).

Celestina herself checks many of the boxes in the “unholy trinity” identified by Young Gregg if considering that she should have been rejecting Jewish blood as a Christian convert. However, this implication of her origins needed to be subtle and not overtly recognizable. Celestina’s summoning of Plutón’s assistance seems extreme in contrast to her other demonstrations of witchcraft. She speaks familiarly with him and ends her request with a threat.

² “You [the Jews] are from your father the Devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires.”(John 8:44)

Her confidence may suggest that she herself does believe that she wields the power of the Devil, but aside from this isolated incident, much of her magic is related to her rhetorical or medicinal skills. Instead, this somewhat out of place scene can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the trope used in literature and sermons to demonize and dehumanize Jews and their converted descendants. Instead of perpetuating the trope, Rojas ridicules it.

Another jab at Christian beliefs relates to the parody of the obsession with religious objects. When Celestina is summoned by Sempronio upon hearing Calisto's heretical proclamations, she immediately identifies a situation to exploit. Ludicrously, Melibea does not require much convincing by Celestina to discard her lifelong commitment to chastity. Celestina coats her request for Melibea to aid Calisto with his lovesickness in a language by which they can communicate secretly. Celestina requests a simple prayer of Melibea that she learned from Saint Apollonius. Melibea is wary, but together they create a code to speak about mischievous ideas under religious overtones. Celestina requests Melibea's girdle, which has apparently touched religious relics, to cure a mere toothache (Rojas 111). The prayer presents an opportunity for Melibea to openly agree to Celestina and Calisto's request without openly betraying her true desires. By handing over the girdle without question, Melibea shows that she understands the true meaning behind the request. Celestina is well-known in the town to be a successful healer, and she gambled by openly requesting a cure that has nothing to do with a toothache that Melibea could easily understand (Shipley 327) and that can simultaneously protect Celestina's integrity if discovered. Melibea's sudden, amplified eagerness to solve Calisto's troubles marks her deviation from God and the beginning of her participation of service to her lover.

The girdle, which not only came into contact with religious relics but eventually becomes a religious relic itself when presented to Calisto, serves as a reference to the Christian cult of relics, or at least the socio-religious significance of relics (López-Ríos 194). The frenzied obsession with material relics is made arbitrary most obviously when Celestina presents it to Calisto as “el mismo [cordón] que en su cuerpo ella traía” (Rojas 128). By mentioning that the girdle has touched Melibea’s body, Celestina knowingly introduces sexual appeal to the garment. Celestina takes advantage of the religious ignorance surrounding the relics that Fray Hernando de Talavera addressed later in 1507, declaring it a sin to maltreat sacred items (López-Ríos 201). The humorous aspect to this exchange is that when the girdle is passed from Melibea to Calisto through Celestina for a sexual pursuit, it loses its value as a Christian relic and instead ends up as a “Melibeic” relic. Calisto’s over-the-top reaction to his new treasure invokes another realistic response from Celestina. He exclaims, “¡Oh mi gloria y ceñidero de aquella angélica cintura! Yo te veo y no lo creo” to which Celestina replies “Cesa ya, señor, ese devanear, que a mí tienes cansada de escucharte y al cordón, roto de tratarlo” (Rojas 130). Celestina’s blunt response deviates from any form of respect one would expect her to treat the one paying her and reminds the audience that Calisto’s obsession is ridiculous and heretical.

As a lower-class go-between, Celestina opens the plot so far past its traditional boundaries that complex issues are bound to arise. Antonio Cortijo Ocaña comments on Rojas’ realistic approach to the sentimental genre, saying that the sphere traditionally centered on nobility (213). Nobles had much to lose in terms of their reputation, and could relate and identify with the dangers of falling victim to lovesickness that an escapade of courtly love suggested. When opened up to the upper and lower classes, the rules relax and chaos ensues. It is precisely this space that a persecuted marginalized voice fits, living as and among servants and prostitutes

in the lower class. There are arguments for Pleberio and Calisto being *conversos* at the elite status, but readers gain additional perspective if they read about *conversos* operating in a different social class that had less access to use wealth to secure ties to Old Christian blood and therefore had to take different measures to edge past the Inquisition by continuing their livelihoods. With regard to audience perception and thus subsequent literary interpretations of this, Ocaña states:

En efecto, parece que o el proceso de amor a la vida rufianesca ocupan la atención de los autores, señalando así dos propuestas de recepción de la realidad hasta ahora no conocida, cuyo tono crítico y paródico podía ser explotado en varias maneras, y la de quienes la leyeron como historia de un proceso de amor, al modo como las obras sentimentales habían hecho con anterioridad (219).

Celestina creates a revolutionary, multi-dimensional, and far more interesting intermediary sprung from the lower class. The exaggerated parody of courtly love perpetuated by Celestina between Calisto and Melibea offers a realistic space to develop the perspective of marginalized voices in the lower class. Celestina's use of witchcraft and dealings with the Devil are explained as a facade that symbolizes her ability to exist and exert her willpower in the male space. The parody of the cult of relics and original sin were subtle enough to evade being halted by the Inquisition for almost a century, presenting a new challenge for subsequent works following Celestina's fictional lineage and inspired go-betweens to tackle.

Chapter 3: The Hardened Healer: Marginalization of the *curandera* in *Celestina*

Perhaps the most famous intermediary of all time juggled several professions to stay afloat. Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* explores the complexities of the working class, most intimately through Celestina and the servants who help her navigate the courtly love scene. The spell-casting go-between is not reduced to a simple villain, but instead a complex rebel who behaves outside the bounds of gender and socio-religious expectations. Celestina's side professions are salient for her concern with her business reputation and financial independence. She embodies all the gossip, crime, deception, chaos and disruption of a good procuress, and also introduces witchcraft to the trade to provoke fear and a certain respect among everyone else in the town, which includes members of the social elite, like Alisa, Melibea's mother, and assures her indispensable role in the community. Her status as a *conversa* and witchcraft teach her to be crafty and discreet under the watchful eye of the Inquisition, lending her additional skills to effectively navigate her world. In this chapter, I examine the roots of Celestina's profession in the context of the late Middle Ages. Celestina's success as an outsider to society is attributed to her ingenuity and financial independence despite the restrictions imposed on women operating in medieval professions related to procuring, prostitution, and the art of healing. I will examine the restrictions placed on brothel managers and women healers as Celestina relates to them.

Celestina's intimate and detailed perspective into the medieval working lower class begins when Celestina is hired by Calisto for her procuring abilities. We are then submerged into to Celestina's world dictated by her profession as a *madre* running a brothel, staffed with Areúsa and Elicia who are consistently present characters. Prostitution was a controversial legal topic at the time of the creation of the *tragicomedia*. The Catholic Monarchs Queen Isabella and King Fernando institutionalized prostitution in the late fifteenth century, enforcing earlier attempts to

collect taxes on public prostitution in a more organized manner. In her study on legal and illegal prostitution in late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Spain, Eukene Lacarra Lanz describes this attempt to profit from prostitution as a political instrument used to reward fealty and military services (172). Reward possibilities included owning the brothel, or the right to exploit all the brothels of a kingdom, which would have generated large profits for those doing royal bidding and recondition the profession from a religious perspective. Religious authorities saw prostitution as a threat to matrimonial order (265), and the danger of the sins of extramarital fornication is woven throughout medieval sermons and literature. Yet, prostitution was widely tolerated in order to curb desires. Lanz quotes Ruth Mazo Karras:

The prevalence of unmarried men leads to prostitution only within a culture that privileges masculine heterosexual desire. Only because of the gendered structure of power in medieval culture could women be made into prostitutes to meet the perceived demand – ‘made into prostitutes’ in that they were forced into the job by violence, deception, or lack of attractive alternatives. (266)

Celestina’s position as a procuring owner of a brothel afforded her a deep understanding of how to find and exploit sexual desire. Her success as a *madre* is also attributed to her rhetorical ability to lure in and employ trusting young women who are new to navigating urban life. Celestina’s business did seem to skirt the law and taxes through clandestine prostitution rather than legal prostitution regulated by the government. Historically, *alcahuetas* enjoyed the protection of nobles and city officers who circumvented the laws. Because of this, Lanz notes that there are extremely few documented cases of accusations against procuresses (275). Celestina’s business of operating in the shadows was supplemented by additional illegitimate job titles, which

operated effectively due to her powers of persuasion and what she perceived as aid from the Devil.

As previously demonstrated by Michael Ruggerio's analysis of Celestina as an *alcahueta* in *The Evolution of the Go-Between*, the main innovation is the addition of the healer profession. Celestina is a multivocational free-lancer described by Sempronio as "hechicera, astuta, sagaz en quantas maldades hay" (Rojas 67) and later by Lucrecia as one who "conoce mucho en hierbas, cura niños, y aun algunos la llaman la vieja lapidaria" (102). Both descriptions highlight her medical knowledge while hinting at her reliance upon dark magic. Lucrecia only adds at the very end of her description to Alisa that she is a woman who sells charms, clearly adding importance to healer professions. Lucrecia's articulation of Celestina having no less than thirty professions is significant because "in the minds of people such as the uneducated servant girl, Pármene, and Alisa, the old woman represents a myriad of professional skills, many of which touch directly on the sciences of healing" (Rouhi 28). In her seminal work on medieval healers, Dangler defines the *curandera* as the "illiterate medicine woman" though among those consistently "sought to heal illnesses as diverse as eye ailments, skin diseases, and love sickness, and were typically expected to exercise surgical procedures, and employ logotherapies such as conjurations and incantations" (20). Celestina's ability to convince clients to purchase her services was due to what Olga Lucía Valbuena attributes as "linguistic sorcery" and describes as:

Eroticized prayers and spiritual 'cures,' not straightforward diabolical intervention, assist Celestina in her "enchantment" of Melibea. Still, love magic explores three of the culture's fundamental tenets regarding physical pleasure: the categorical sinfulness of nonmarital, nonprocreative sexuality; the wrongfulness of inducing desire by external agency (whether that of a saint or that of a Devil);

and the covalence of ecstasy and misery, together with the power of redemption through suffering. (210)

Celestina's spells and charms were cleverly developed according to the parameters of Spanish Catholicism, which in turn justified her illegal businesses to the right clients. Exemplified by Melibea, Celestina profited from the desperate courtly lover and the proper noblewoman wishing to preserve her honorable status while proceeding with her honorable status at the same time. Along the way, it is Celestina's greed and the untimely death of Calisto that leads to her failure in her final mission, but her confidence and expertise in navigating the situation allude to a much more successful history of procuring.

It is also relevant to note the trials healers were facing when Rojas was writing the work. A uniform standard of healing practices was not yet in place until the professionalization of medicine occurred in the high Middle Ages (Rouhi 42). The professionalization of medicine consisted of requiring individuals wishing to practice healing would need to acquire a medical license from a university. The beginnings of this phenomenon can be traced to as early as the twelfth century and lasted through the sixteenth century, and its purpose was to reduce the number of individuals who could offer health care. (Efron 15). Traditional women healers who were well-sought out in urban and rural areas alike were majorly affected by the professionalization of medicine. Concerns with uneducated practicing physicians and lack of standardization of medical legislations among the Iberian Kingdoms led the Catholic kings to regulate practitioners on a wider scale at the end of the fifteenth century by requiring university study, laws barring women, Jews, and Muslims from practicing medicine, and the establishment of licensing boards that examined physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries (Dangler 35). The

university rule was especially unaccommodating towards women. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English regard this as an outstanding deterrent in the history of women healers:

The establishment of medicine as a profession, requiring university training, made it easy to bar women from legal practice. With few exceptions, the universities were closed to women (even to upper class women who could afford them), and licensing laws were established to prohibit all but university-trained doctors from practice. It was impossible to enforce licensing laws consistently since there were only a handful of university-trained doctors compared to a great mass of lay-healers. (31)

Another element working against *curanderas* was the introduction of the fifteenth century association with witchcraft largely with women rather than with men, which started around 1437 with the Dominican theologian Johannes Nider (Bailey 120). Nider preached that women were more susceptible to become witches than men. These clerical arguments served as an early guide for witch-hunting, and heavily influenced *Malleus Maleficarum*, which was published 50 years later in 1486 by Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in Germany. Kramer enjoyed the support of Pope Innocent VIII, who appointed Tomas de Torquemada as an Inquisitor in Spain to disseminate the book's content (Mckay 4).

Inspired by Nider, *Malleus* features a much more expansive analysis of feminine tendencies toward evil (120). *Malleus* is particularly brutal towards midwives and declared that such a profession was dedicated to causing miscarriages and offering newborns to demons, while refusing them an opportunity to defend themselves (Kramer 211). Since “a larger number of sorcerers is found among the delicate female sex than among men, it would certainly not be helpful to cite arguments to the contrary” because “experience itself makes such things

believable more than do the testimony of words and of trustworthy witnesses” (160).³ These deeply rooted notions on women contributed to the oppression of healers, and especially branding the lower-class healer as superstitious and malevolent, discrediting her among the emerging middle classes (Ehrenreich and English 33).

Celestina’s unique place in *alcahuetería* serves as one for someone whose science is “heretical yet necessary” (Gossy 35). General social tolerance for illegal clandestine prostitution and procuring, coupled with popular demand for a healer, kept Celestina’s livelihood afloat. Educated physicians were scarce compared to the abundance of healers, and there was a lack of expertise in women’s medical issues. Physicians completed approved practices based on their university education, and *curanderas* gained knowledge through oral tradition. Celestina cites Claudina as the source of her knowledge base: “De ella aprendí todo lo mejor que sé de mi oficio” (Rojas 94). Celestina describes her range of skills here under the blanket of “oficio,” which means that Claudina was responsible for teaching her the art of running a brothel and *alcahuetería* in addition to the healing practices.

The establishment of university faculties of medicine was seen as a more legitimate form of learning, so female healers lacked the prestige to back up their expertise. Women, especially menopausal women, were considered unable to attend university according to medieval theories of medicine: “A woman's inability to expel excess fluids by menstruation gave her a cold, dry complexion, which in turn reduced the size of her brain” resulting in “diminished powers of recall” (Calatrava 205). Old *curanderas* like Celestina who, despite accusations of lack of intelligence continued to earn a living by practicing healing, were assumed to be dabbling in magic and other superstitious activities in the eyes of the Inquisition. It is ironic, but not

³ English translation from original Latin by Christopher S. Mackay.

unexpected that in such religiously dominated times, sexism led to these practices being considered heretical rather than miracles performed by uneducated, illiterate healers.

The feminization of witchcraft in healers drew the parameters for Celestina to be marginalized, yet her confidence and self assurance is ever present. Fernando de Rojas likely wrote *Celestina* when he was a law student and the implementation of laws regulating prostitution and the professionalization of medicine was sweeping through cities. It is notable that he chooses Celestina to take center stage, because while she commits and causes others to commit immoral sins, one cannot help but admire her wit and astuteness. She appears to have earned her place in society, demonstrated as she says gleefully to herself:

Todos los agüeros se aderezan favorables o yo no sé nada de esta arte. Cuatro hombres, que he topado, a los tres llaman Juanes y los dos son cornudos. La primera palabra que oí por la calle, fue de achaque de amores. Nunca he tropezado como otras veces. Las piedras parece que se apartan y me hacen lugar que pase. Ni me estorban las haldas ni siento cansancio en andar. Todos me saludan. Ni perro ha ladrado ni ave negra he visto, tordo ni cuervo ni otras nocturnas. Y lo mejor de todo es que veo a Lucrecia a la puerta de Melibea. Prima es de Elicia; no me será contraria. (Rojas 87)

Celestina believes that even the stones themselves recognized her as important and untouchable. She is well known in the town, but passersby still feel it appropriate to wave to her publicly without fear of shame, which speaks to her capacity to operate openly and fearlessly. Dangler's impression of Celestina's profession is that "Rojas tries to portray Celestina as a destructive, pagan sorcerer" and that the work intentionally "reviles *medianeras* by negatively associating them to all *alcahuetería* and by extension, womankind in general becomes whorelike" (91). In

her opinion, this dangerously leads to the idea that “multivocational women workers threaten social integrity and well-being because their biology and biological functions are inherently suspect” (127). Dangler interprets *Celestina* as a false and misogynistic representation of the healer, yet Dorothy Severin paints a slightly different picture of Rojas’ intentions. She maintains that due to Rojas’ marginal status as a *converso*, Celestina’s digression paints a “seductive view” of a world in which social order is challenged by women (“Magical Empowerment” 13). Leyla Rouhi also views Celestina’s profession as one that serves to empower her rather than denigrate her existence as a woman by offering “invaluable clues on the perception of shifting and indeterminate space inhabited by women with some medical authority” (31). The space created by Rojas is indeed unique. Celestina’s absolute confidence in her skills, whether they be magical or rhetorical, is fundamental to her success. Rather than being caught in the dichotomy of benevolent and malevolent, Celestina seems to be caught in the middle as a product of the societal restrictions placed on women. Celestina finds herself to be a valuable supplier of an economic demand, and her hard work directly contributes to her earnings since she does not receive a steady paycheck.

Perhaps initially not by choice, Celestina’s profession requires her to be more “spacially liberated” than the other female characters (Gabriele 164). We know little about Celestina’s beginnings and how she ended up with her various means of survival, but in her old age Celestina herself declares that Lucrecia, Melibea’s nursemaid, lives a restricted life by being subject to the confines of a domestic space: “su mucho enterramiento le impide el gozo de su mocedad” (Rojas 166). This quote demonstrates Celestina’s high value placed on navigating society without the confines of the domestic space, which would have been a masculine luxury at the time.

In her book, *The Untold Story*, Mary S. Gossy describes Celestina as “falling between the cracks in the patriarchal platform” for being a woman who is all at once wise, powerful, and undesirable (38). Celestina’s multivocational nature is not comparable to the male model of a lifelong career, yet she is ironically referred to multiple times as “*barbuda*,” an augmentative form of the adjective “*barbado*.” While this is meant as an insult, the symbol of the beard represents masculinity, power, and honor. Gossy equates Celestina’s elevated sense of self to that which was masculine and noble. She also navigated male, noble spaces with considerable grace in order to keep her brothel under the radar.

In addition, Celestina’s surgical sewing skills actually contributed to her dismantling of patriarchal fictions related to virginity. At a time when chastity and purity was of utmost importance in women pending Catholic socio-religious standards, Celestina was mending thousands of hymens (Rojas 67). Gossy interprets this to be a way of cancelling out masculine power: “Stitching up a torn hymen ... annuls evidence of the phallus’s action and renders that action irrelevant” (Gossy 46). Such an act is clearly symbolic and significant to Celestina, revealed when she says to Sempronio: “Pocas vírgenes, a dios gracias, has tú visto en esta ciudad que hayan abierto tienda a vender de quien yo no haya sido corredora de su primer hilado” (Rojas 95). Celestina keeps a hand-written record of all of the hymens she has repaired, which could speak to the social importance in the city of honor and interdependence between women (Dangler 121). Conversely, this could be record for blackmail purposes for a woman whose reputation is more important than her relationships based on how she cheats Pármeno and Sempronio out of their share of Calisto’s payment.

This analysis is enriched if we consider Celestina to be practicing medicine not only while discreetly operating an illegal brothel and practicing medicine without a university

education, but doing these things as a New Christian. John Efron describes the profound association between Jews and medieval medicine as “proto-racial” stereotype, largely due to their major contribution to the translation of important medical texts from Arabic to Latin. Medical students would rely on these translations, despite exclusion of Jews from universities decades before their expulsion from Spain (17).

The racial aspect comes from the overrepresentation of Jews in the medical field in Southern Europe and the belief that Jews had an inherent aptitude for the profession. A *converso* physician reported in 1575 that “a combination of geography, climate, diet, and historical experience created among ancient Israelites a specific kind of temperament and imagination that made them superior physicians” (27). The expertise of Jewish physicians was sought out by royal courts in Europe yet forbade from the Christian population.

Their intimate proximity to seats of power served to expand the role played by Jewish doctors. They were not only called upon to heal, but soon became royal confidants, advisors, and even shapers of policy. In addition, when necessary, they were able to use their positions to intercede on behalf of the Jewish community. To a great extent, their role as communal advocates mitigated the resentment fellow Jews expressed toward physicians as a result of the royal privileges they enjoyed, such as exemption from communal taxes, or special dispensation from wearing the distinctive and humiliating clothing and markings other Jews were required to display. (19)

If we consider Celestina to be meant to harbor these supposedly inherent tendencies, it may explain why Celestina does not classify as a typical *curandera*. Her diagnosis of Areúsa in the seventh act stands out to scholars as exceeding the expectations of healer knowledge. When

Areúsa is complaining of what we would consider today as menstrual cramps, Celestina concludes:

Lo que he visto a muchas hacer y lo que a mí siempre aprovecha te diré. Porque como las calidades de las personas son diversas, así las medicinas hacen diversas sus operaciones y diferentes. Todo olor fuerte es bueno, así como poleo, ruda, ajénjos, humo de plumas de perdiz, de romero, de mosquete, de incienso.

Recibido con mucha diligencia, aprovecha y afloja el dolor y vuelve poco a poco la madre a su lugar. Pero otra cosa hallaba yo siempre mejor que todas y ésta no te quiero decir, pues tan santa te me haces. (Rojas 143)

Areúsa's condition was classified by medieval society as "suffocation of the womb" and the most effective remedy considered by educated physicians at the time would have been sexual intercourse (Calatrava 210). Celestina's awareness of this is demonstrated by the fact that she openly suggests natural remedies and then discreetly mentions what is "siempre mejor que todas". Areúsa follows up by confirming that she has not had sexual intercourse recently due to her lover being away, correctly interpreting the second suggested cure. Celestina's quick diagnosis and recommended remedies follow what was taught in universities across Europe, rather than traditional, folkloric practices for women's health. I find it interesting to consider this to be an acknowledgement of the stereotype associating the Jewish race with physicians. While it could also speak to Rojas' male perspective on female health, Celestina expertly cites multiple traditional healer advice before offering advice rooted in institutional medicine.

In a similar fashion, Celestina's medical knowledge enables her to communicate with those outside her social circle. While Calisto takes on the conventional role of a lovesick courtly lover, Melibea's careful communications with Celestina are presented under the guise of medical

advice, which culminates during their second encounter in Act X. In order to avoid the awkwardness Melibea is feeling due to having to seek out the procuress on behalf of her desire for Calisto rather than being sought out by the go-between.

¡Cuánta más ventaja tuviera mi prometimiento rogado que mi ofrecimiento forzoso! ¡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 acostumbré a tener! No sé si habrás barruntado de dónde proceda mi dolor. ¡Oh, si ya vinieses con aquella medianera de mi salud! (171)

Melibea recognizes her lovesickness and the need for a medicinal remedy, and laments that her “honestidad y vergüenza” is at stake if she were to seek out the intermediary instead of Calisto. Instead, she is left to wait around for Celestina to arrive. This passage offers an interesting perspective into Melibea’s desire to operate autonomously and outside the boundaries imposed by her gender expectations. She goes on to imply that if she had more control, the situation would perhaps be less aggravating.

¡Oh género femíneo, encogido y frágil! ¿Por qué no fue también a las hembras concedido poder descubrir su congojoso y ardiente amor como a los varones? Que ni Calisto viviera quejoso ni yo penada. (Rojas 172)

When Celestina does finally arrive in Act X, the dialogue takes on a professional nature. Celestina comforts Melibea by noting that “al médico como al confesor se hable toda verdad abiertamente” (173), implying that Melibea is simply describing her afflictions to a trusted doctor. Celestina picks up on her discomfort thanks to her experience in tactfully handling delicate matters at her brothel, and can also rely on her collection of medical buzzwords to gently

explain the courtly affliction: “Es un fuego escondido, una agradable llaga, un sabroso veneno, una dulce amargura, una delectable dolencia, un alegre tormento, una dulce y fiera herida, una blanda muerte,” attempting to convince Melibea that her health is seriously at risk (177).

Celestina empowers Melibea to engage in a physical encounter through a careful but obvious veiling of religious and medical overtones. However, Melibea picked up on Celestina’s religious rhetoric in Act IV, when Celestina originally requested her girdle for the purpose of curing Calisto’s toothache (Rojas 111). The suggestion was ridiculous enough for Melibea to understand and accept Celestina’s proposition without openly mentioning her true desires and therefore maintaining her chaste and pious reputation.

Despite the familiar sound of courtly lovesickness riddled through the dialogue between Celestina and Melibea, I tend to agree with George Shipley when he asserts that “Melibea and Celestina accomplish a radical renovation of commonplaces... It would be an impoverishing distortion to suggest that Rojas is 'going back to the courtly conventions' to find material for his pivotal scene” (332). Melibea’s reception of Celestina’s detailed explanation of lovesickness as a physical medical condition is clever. She joins in seamlessly, despite not having years of practice in “linguistic sorcery” like Celestina. Because of her willing participation, Melibea appears to be sexually empowered by Celestina rather than completely shrouded in deception. Although Celestina accepted the job with every intention of deceiving those around her out of greed, she doubted the success of the outcome. This becomes apparent early on when she mutters to herself en route to Melibea’s house:

Agora que voy sola, quiero mirar bien lo que Sempronio ha temido de este mi camino. Porque aquellas cosas que bien no son pensadas, aunque algunas veces hayan buen fin, comúnmente crían desvariados efectos. Así que la mucha

especulación nunca carece de buen fruto...Pues amargas cien monedas serían éstas. ¡Ay cuitada de mí! ¡En qué lazo me he metido! (99)

Celestina rightly questions the plausibility of such an attempt to deceive Melibea's noble parents, but Melibea's positive affirmation to the situation is what contributed to the success, which by courtly standards, was to engage in extramarital sexual relations. The eventual demise of nearly all of the characters was not necessarily a product of ill-planning and poor execution of Celestina's profession, rather, other unprecedented sins and human emotion got in the way.

The amalgamation of Celestina's many masks as *alcahueta*, *madre*, *barbuda*, *curandera*, and finally "linguistic sorceress", makes her a compelling character who provides insight for the social situation of working women in the medieval ages. The looming threat of government-regulated prostitution, medical licensing, and potentially deadly accusations from the Inquisition created formidable obstacles to Celestina's professions. The legal distinction between the physician and the *curandera* functioned as a categorization tool for the Inquisition, meaning medical practices left unregulated were then practiced by social outcasts such as Jews and witches (Gossy 36). Undeterred, Celestina's unique rhetorical skills and insight allowed her to economically sustain herself through her unconventional life as an outsider.

Conclusion

Celestina's experience provides a literary example with which other marginalized readers through the ages can identify. By interpreting her to be a *conversa* existing at the height of institutional persecution of heretics, her character becomes much more complex, thought-provoking, and relatable. Framing Celestina as a victim to the stressors of the Inquisition offers insight into her Devil summoning and deceitful behavior. The aspects of realism offered by the character development among the other lower class members in the work also aid in assigning meaning to the deaths of the transgressive characters as a social criticism or a punishment. Celestina's insight and detailed description of her life as an intermediary juggling many jobs reconstructs the conventional courtly definition. Parody and irony serve as tools to add levity and even obscure social critiques. The subtle opinions masked by humor allowed for Rojas to safely comment on the radical practices of the church as well as the limited options for working women in the medieval world.

The historical context is essential in interpreting Celestina's marginalized status, and should be considered and properly introduced. This can be applied to other texts that allude to topics of racism and sexism, including centuries-old works such as *Celestina*. Therefore, *Celestina* should continue to be interpreted through the *converso* code based on the theory's capacity to single out specific allusions and identify the marginal characters. Terms and phrases such as "limpio" and "claro" directly related to racial discrimination against *conversos*, and can reveal the statuses of characters not typically considered to be part of the *converso* experience and read them in a new light. The case has been made for Pleberio, Calisto, Melibea, Claudina, and Pármeno to be *converso* by various scholars. The accumulating evidence of the *converso*

experience present in the work has opened an opportunity for me to contribute an analysis of Celestina as *conversa*.

Celestina's close relationship with Claudina is relevant to determining if she should be read as *conversa*. It is likely that Claudina is sentenced by the Inquisition for heresy instead of witchcraft. Dorothy Severin identifies the quoting of Mathew 5:10 as historically being recited during the sentencing of persecuted *conversos*, and the fact that Celestina cites this as being quoted at Claudina's sentencing infers that readers should interpret her as a *conversa*. If we interpret Claudina as *conversa*, it is also reasonable to consider Celestina's background as contributing to her marginalization. Celestina does not enjoy a wealthy and comfortable place in society and must work hard by using her linguistic talents to uphold her *alcahuetería*, so the struggle to maintain her livelihood deepens if she is also to suffer from constant suspicion that Old Christians in similar lower-class positions do not experience.

Parody via exaggeration as a distinctive sentimental and courtly feature that challenges and reconfigures meaning in literature. Celestina's innovative representation of the go-between infiltrates conventional rules of courtly love with realism. The sentimental genre is a space for such rule-bending, as scholars have pointed out the difficulty of finding an overarching canonization of sentimental works. *Celestina* should be considered when thinking of the sentimental genre, though not a part of it. Another salient example is Calisto's exaggerated idolization of Melibea, which serves as a criticism of superficiality. Celestina aids in Calisto's transformation into an extreme courtly lover, and his blasphemy alludes to the social awareness that Inquisition would prosecute on the slightest deviation from the Catholic faith. Sempronio's anxiety surrounding his master's open blaspheming makes reference to sociocultural weight carried by the ever-present fear of being associated with the Other. Calisto regards her *cordón* as

a religious relic, ironically proving himself unworthy of Melibea's pious virtues. Calisto's transformation of the *cordón* into a pseudo-relic is a parody of *el culto de las reliquias*. Celestina's hand in this unhinged behavior and Sempronio's admonishment suggest that many characters were aware and acknowledging the social pressures by the church. Celestina's confidence even wavered momentarily on her way to Melibea's home for their initial encounter as a result.

Celestina's momentary falter in confidence, however, is outshined by her bold invocation of the Devil. At the end of her *conjuro*, she even threatens her wrath if things do not go to plan. The incantation has been questioned by scholars as to whether or not it is performative, and I deduce that it should be interpreted as a reference to the association with the Jew and the Devil. This association was a common tactic in both literature and sermon to dehumanize Jews and their converted descendants. Rojas is acknowledging the dangerous trope perpetuated by medieval anti-Semitic sermons, which led Christians to blame converts for planting doubts in their faith. Interpreting this scene in this way develops Celestina's use of witchcraft and Devil summoning in a way that matches Rojas' realistic tone. This scene also speaks to Celestina's autonomy as a woman surviving in a male-dominated profession as an entrepreneur.

Celestina's economic position as an *alcahueta* stretches beyond the limitations of the sentimental genre. Her character demonstrates the realistic struggles of a woman in the position, which included the regulation of prostitution and the professionalization of medicine. The latter led to medical licensing, which was unavailable to both women and Jews. Celestina was able to avoid repercussions of the regulation of brothels thanks to the protection of nobles and city officers who circumvented the laws, and medical licensing did not halt the demand for knowledgeable *curanderas* who were local and affordable. The Catholic Monarchs were

concerned with the legitimacy of traditional healer women, but also with the association with witchcraft with the profession. Celestina was able to outwit this as well by disguising her spells and charms, which were cleverly developed according to the parameters of Spanish Catholicism. This is exemplified in her dialogues with Melibea, in which she masterfully uses religious and medical advice to enshroud what would have been considered to be the pursuit of lustful desires. Melibea's reception of Celestina's diagnoses is also significant. Assuming that she represents a typical client, she understands Celestina's rhetoric and appears to willingly participate. This portrays Melibea's journey to be sexually empowered by Celestina rather than fooled by her.

Celestina's unique interaction with *alcahuetería* was successful because of general social tolerance for illegal clandestine prostitution and procuring, coupled with popular demand for a healer. An enriching addition to why Celestina's expertise at illegally practicing medicine while discreetly operating a brothel is to consider that she was doing these things as a *conversa*. The overrepresentation of Jewish physicians in Southern Europe created a racial stereotype. There was also a common belief that Jews had an inherent aptitude for the profession. If Celestina is meant to harbor these supposedly inherent tendencies, it explains why her diagnosis of Areúsa in the seventh act stands out to scholars in terms of matching traditional, folkloric healer knowledge and offering additional consideration to institutionalized medicine, nodding to the aforementioned racial stereotype. Celestina's many masks as *alcahueta*, *madre*, *barbuda*, and *curandera* exemplify the unregulated space for social outcasts such as Jews and witches to operate. Celestina's outstanding rhetorical skills are what allow her to be successful as a marginalized outsider, and her untimely demise warns of the dangers she was regularly forced to endure as a *conversa*.

It is a question of future research to investigate whether or not Rojas intended for all of characters, regardless of socio-economic status, to be marginalized *converso* figures.

Considering this trait more carefully for the other characters would certainly enhance research on the *converso* experience in the future. Future research could also consider the potential sociolinguistic implications of Celestina's invocation of the Devil more carefully, specifically by looking into her uncanny threat to him that she will wreak havoc upon his dwelling should he refuse to respond in a timely manner.

Celestina's wit and cunning implore us to admire her. The nature of the medieval obsession with blood purity becomes arbitrary if something such as racial background could be enough to diminish her intelligence, which is why Rojas made her a difficult villain to despise. Some scholars, such as Amy Aronson-Friedman consider the socially inferior characters to be the ones on moral high ground, which is an inversion of traditional portrayals of the classes (92).

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