

## «Girls Gone Wild» Medieval Spain Edition: A Cognitive, Evolutionary Approach to the Presentation of Female Sexuality in *La Celestina*

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One of the most widely analyzed masterworks of Spanish literature is without a doubt Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina*. Since its publication in 1499 at the evening of the medieval era and the dawning of the early-modern one critics have poured over the pages of this seminal text, hoping to shed more and more light on its various intricacies and complexities. The initial strands of *Celestina* criticism focused primarily on the aesthetic and literary aspects of Rojas' work. In recent years, however, critics have begun to concern themselves more with the socially responsive function of *La Celestina*.

Consequently, much of the most current *Celestina* criticism grapples over «the problematical connection between literature and life, text and context» that underlies Rojas's text (Gerli 371).

Perhaps the first *Celestina* critic to shift the focus of the study of Rojas' text to an explanation of the social concerns expressed within it was José Antonio Maravall. His groundbreaking analysis of *El Mundo Social de La Celestina* (1976) paved the way for other innovative studies of the social implications of the text. These subsequent literary analyses used Maravall's initial investigation of the populist, egalitarian concerns of late medieval Spain's lower class members, such as its servants and prostitutes, as a stepping stone on which to embark upon a thorough exploration of the numerous other «real world» themes expressed in *La Celestina*, such as Deyermond's acerbic criticism of the corruption brought about by capitalism and mercantilism. As the new millennium drew near, however, a younger generation of *Celestina* critics began to study the late me-

dieval text with what Antonio Pérez-Romero, author of *The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing* (2005), would call a «popular, subversive, literary stance» (103) for the ultimate purpose of helping modern readers better understand the text's place in the long and difficult road toward equality that is the history of humankind.

Since throughout history women and ethnic and religious minorities have had to travel farther on this road to social freedom and acceptance than most, it comes as no surprise that much of the recent critiques of *La Celestina's* subversive aspects revolve around both the woman and the *converso's* struggles against the biologically-based forms of societal oppression and exploitation that prevented them from prospering. They have, however, for the most part done so separately, in two different camps: Jewish studies and Gender studies. (An exception to this would be the work of Alan Deyermond and Dorothy Severin.) Consequently, although Rojas's social criticism, his role as a *converso* (Castro, Gilman von Beysterveldt), and his either denigration or empowerment (both proposed) of women (Hartumian; Severin; Switlicki) have all been subjects of academic inquiry, because the *converso* question and the woman question within the text have hitherto been asked separately, a principal underlying message that would hold the promise of thematically structuring *La Celestina* based upon the struggles of both groups has proven illusive.

Manuel da Costa Fontes came close to finding this unifying theme when he analyzed «The idea of *limpieza* in *La Celestina*» in 1988. By highlighting the numerous times that the *pureza de sangre* concept is ironically invoked within *La Celestina*, Fontes signaled how the continued use of the phrase in some form or another to describe people or actions that are not at all pure, for example the «*limpio trato*» de Celestina and her «*limpio motivo*» for visiting Melibea or the «*limpieza de servicio*» de Sempronio. He concludes his examination of the ubiquitous appearance of the word «*limpio*» and its various derivatives by claiming that Rojas ironically invokes the word *limpio* throughout *La Celestina* in order to problematize the idea of the ethnic purity that «automatically and cruelly denied him [Rojas] and his fellow converts the very opportunity for a '*limpio vivir*' because of its unequivocal assertion that they were 'impure' just for being born, while extending the same fate to all their descendants» (Fontes 29).

Thanks to Fontes both thorough and insightful analysis of the ironic utilization of the concept of purity within *La Celestina*, we now have a far clearer understanding of the text's attack on social privileges based on a supposed clear-cut distinction between the «races» within Spain (Fontes 27). Unfortunately, however, the connection between Rojas' ironic presentation of the very possibility of ethnic purity within late medieval Spain and the ever-outrageous and never-unforgettable women that populate his text remains under-examined. This study attempts to make

up for this critical lapse by using evolutionary criticism (a critical lens that bases its analytical stance on evolutionary psychology's view of the mind as a «collection of mental modules adapted over the course of human evolution to various tasks and operations, all of them geared toward 'fitness'» [Richardson 553]) combined with a cognitive critic's view of the human mind's most adaptive characteristic—its cognitive flexibility—to first investigate and then subsequently elucidate how the atmosphere of uncontrollable female sexuality in *La Celestina* constitutes the platform on which Rojas constructs his discursive denunciation of the agonizing social implications of his *converso* heritage. Its first phase highlights the crucial role that the text's numerous decidedly «impure» women play in Rojas' ironic problematization of the very idea that one's biology, in the form of their *pureza de sangre* (freedom from any and all Jewish and or Muslim roots), could unproblematically establish one's claim to societal privilege in the late medieval Spanish world. The second part then explains how Rojas' textual exposure of the uncontrollable sexuality of all classes of late medieval Spanish shatters the myth of the «Old Christian claim to God-given superiority based on biological purity. And how, therefore, the production of *La Celestina* constitutes a «powerful tool or even weapon in the fight against a dominant authority» (Hutcheon 96) that formed the basis of Rojas' own particular engagement with the evolutionary doctrine of the survival of the fittest. A doctrine that, despite the powerful differentiating influences of both culture and tradition, speaks to the existence of an «underlying human nature, universally valid and characteristic of all Homo sapiens» that ever propels human beings such as Rojas to seek out a better existence for themselves and their progeny (Barash 3). Ultimately, by looking at the above information in combination, this analysis proves how *La Celestina* represents a window through which to contemplate the human mind's amazing ability to constantly generate novel strategies for engaging with the physical and social world and in the process constantly revise the winding course of humanity (Richardson 55). Consequently, its summation helps the readers to first understand, and then better appreciate, literature's role as a portal into the cognitive processes of the evolved human mind.

Before discovering the promise that cognitive criticism holds for a much needed, refreshing new approach to the reading of *La Celestina*, it is essential that we understand exactly what is involved in an evolutionary and cognitive evaluation of Rojas' important text. To achieve this level of understanding, it is essential that we first define the basic parameters of said theories and then follow up the formulation of this definition with a synopsis of what they have enabled as regards the study of literature.

Standing at the convergence of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, evolutionary psychology and biology, artificial intelligence, the philosophy of mind, and literary criticism, both evolutionary and cogni-

tive literary theory have in recent years contributed significantly to our engagement with the understanding of literary texts in their social, cultural and historical contexts. They have done so principally by providing twenty-first century literary critics with a host of new neuroscientific, computational, and evolutionary paradigms through which to better recognize literary texts as historically-specific records of human minds in action. These nascent systems of thought have transformed the site of literary analysis. More specifically, they have turned it into a kind of social, cultural and scientific laboratory in which works of literature are studied as instances of human mental capacities at work rather than completely self-contained and self-referential discursive worlds completely and inexorably disconnected from the promises, consequences and limitations of both human culture and biology. Most especially as they relate to perception, metaphor, concept formation and discursive avenues for resisting subjugation.

We, as twenty-first century literary critics, owe a lot to the innovators of evolutionary and cognitive literary theory working within this figurative critical laboratory. Principally because the ideas formulated therein have freed us to use logic and reason to speculate on the relationship between a given author's evolutionary drive towards survival and self-improvement, the cognitive processes that he or she must formulate to arrive at new avenues for obtaining both, and the discursive text that serves as a site on which he or she confronts and grapples with the largely inevitable constant and continuous disconnect between his or her strategies for personal success and society's dictates. Once liberated from the constraints of a deconstructionist mind-set that viewed authors and their distinctive life situations as only tangentially related to the production of their texts. We can, finally, without apology, speculate on the motivations behind the production of literary texts that are not divorced from the realities and consequences of the age-old human quest for self-improvement. But, rather, are closely connected to the conflict between the instinctive and often individualistic human drive to better one's place in life and the rules and regulations that societies often enact to constrain it. This speculation can then —hopefully— help us to demonstrate that authors write for reasons that are simultaneously situated, formulated and projected from the embodied human mind. This, in turn, will guide us to the conclusion that the flexibility with which the human mind mentally negotiates and destabilizes meanings in order to ultimately textually transform their reality, is not only adequate for personal survival, it is responsible for our collective success, such as it has been, in building and revising human cultures (Spolsky 43). And, furthermore, that what instigates cultural change and guarantees a certain amount of negotiation within, and resistance to, any cultural system is the intractable and stubborn materiality of the human brain itself.

Because he was unfortunate enough to be born a *converso* in a decidedly anti-Semitic late-medieval Spain, for Fernando de Rojas, these survival-induced negotiations involved the textual transformation of a biologically based social reality: the state of one's ethnic identity. Since said identity was based solely on one's possession, or rather lack thereof, of a so-called *limpieza de sangre*, and absolute assurance of one's blood purity depended on unassailable female chastity. The daunting task for *La Celestina's* esteemed author was to use the site of textual creation as a platform on which to plant within the readers' minds and through them society's shared reality, the idea that women were intrinsically wanton by nature and thus inherently incapable of remaining chaste. Hence purity of blood was a myth and claims to privilege based upon its existence were negated by reality.

Rojas proves that he is more than capable of this difficult endeavor when he continually reminds his readers of the many fallen women that have walked the earth, much to the detriment of mankind. His reminders consist of numerous copious references to the many *mujeres malvadas* mentioned in the numerous didactic treatises of his time. Rojas invokes the cultural symbol of the «wandering woman» into *La Celestina* to warn of the evil «nature» of women. Some of the most readily apparent places where he does so can be located within the often-critiqued misogynist diatribes of Calisto's servant, Sempronio. In the first act Sempronio rails against women such as Pasife and Minerva who, because of «su inconstancia y su suziedad se sometieron a los pechos y resollos de viles azemileros y otras a brutos animales.» In his final analysis their actions have propelled the entire human race «en el infierno» (225-226).

Sempronio is not the only mouthpiece through which Rojas inveighs against the contemptible immorality of the female half of the human race however. On the contrary, he uses a loud cacophony of textual voices, including female ones, to rail against women's wanton behavior. While speaking through the voice of Melibea in the following act, for example, Rojas continues on in the same vein as before and describes the many women «más subidas en estado y linaje» as well as those «tenidas por Dioses como Venus, Mirra, Cánasce y Pasiphe quienes ensuzia[ron] los ñudos del matrimonio» by committing the following laundry list of deplorable adulterous, sometimes even incestuous sexual acts (537). According to Melibea these acts were all especially egregious given that all of the women that committed them were of even higher birth than her; some were even goddesses. However, as the following passage makes clear, in Melibea's eyes, divinity and nobility are not enough to insure proper female sexual comportment; women's inherent, unstoppable and insatiable appetites will always cause society's moral dictates to be completely disregarded in the name of physical satisfaction:

[Estas mujeres] Las quales algunas eran de la gentilidad tenidas por diosas, assí como Venus, madre de Eneas y de Cupido, el dios del amor, que siendo casada corrompió la prometida fe marital. Y aun otras, de mayores fuegos encendidas, cometieron nefarios y incestuosos yerros, como Mirra con su padre, Semíramis con su hijo, Cánasce con su hermano y aun aquella forçada Thamar, hija del rey David. Otras aun más cruelmente traspasaron las leyes de natura, como Pasiphe, muger del rey Minos, con el toro. Pues reynas eran y grandes señoras, debaxo de cuyas culpas la razonable mía podrá passar sin denuesto (537-8).

The ease with which Melibea thinks of examples of female rebels underlines the rather large number of examples from which she had to choose when she was contemplating the both the possibility and possible consequences of a potential liaison with her admirer, the young, handsome yet tragically impetuous Calisto. The audacity of the behavior of the chosen women speaks to the outrageousness of females guided by their sexuality rather than their moral compass. After all, what could possibly be worse than sexual relations with one's own father or brother or bull? The failure of these models to dissuade Melibea from her subsequent course of action, her entrance into an illicit relationship with her suitor, demonstrates the seeming inability of women, even the most highborn and «decent» ones, to resist the siren call of their inherent powerful sex drive. Thus, when he places these nefarious women in the thoughts of his young and virginal protagonist, Rojas turns on its head the very notion that a woman's purity, even one supposedly beyond reproach, could ever be guaranteed. Thus, pure bloodlines were always and forever shrouded in doubt and uncertainty.

While it could be assumed that these words are simply a reflection of Rojas's own personal misogyny (Swietlicki 10), we should compare these diatribes against mythic female figures to the presentation of the many other scandalous female figures such as Celestina, Areúsa, and others. Et al that Rojas never criticizes but rather allows to «wander» without critique through his text, wreaking havoc in their mist. In doing so, we stumble upon the following inevitable conundrum: If Rojas was just expressing his own personal fear and distrust of women—or even if he is using his text to warn others of their «wiles»— why is it that he never really criticizes the actions of these women? Furthermore, why does he not rail against the actions of Melibea who—in agreeing to meet with Calisto at night in her garden— shows a complete lack of regard for her all important «honor» and «chastity?» Instead of moralizing against these women's scandalous actions (as was certainly done in other important

texts of his time that featured scandalous, out of control women, among them *El Corbacho* and *El libro del buen amor*), Rojas simply reports them and their nefarious actions in a factual manner. That makes sense, since he is not using them as a moral example to teach young girls about the dangers of illicit behavior. Instead, they are used to cast doubt on female chastity and through this doubt enact a social critique that «appropriates and reformulates —with significant change» the dominant ideologies of the day that assigned women to the private sphere in order to maintain the façade of a moral, social and hierarchical order based primarily on one's supposed lack of non-Christian blood. This is done for critical purposes, but also to ultimately bring about a re-evaluation of «that which is different and off-centered,» which is, in this case, the *converso* living within late medieval Spain (Hutcheon 130). As he uses cultural, discursive tools to renegotiate the parameters of a perceived biologically based pre-assigned formulation of social identity, Rojas makes apparent cognitive criticism's supposition that the amazing ability of the human brain to remake conceptual systems make cultural norms and social norms unstable and susceptible to enforced change. This instability makes a certain amount of subjectivity flexibility inevitable —even within the most authoritarian and/or rigidly stratified societies.

Perhaps Rojas' best discursive tool is Celestina herself. As an example of the archetype of the wandering woman «por excelencia» Celestina, like her forebear Claudina, marches freely throughout the «city» (curiously unidentified yet supposedly Toledo) causing problems and «social disturbances» wherever she goes. Most importantly for Rojas's purposes, Celestina deploys the most effective means possible to undermine the power of the masculine authorities that would seek to control her and the «unruly» women that she serves to symbolize.

First of all, by acting as a go-between, Celestina does her utmost to both encourage and facilitate illicit sexual encounters between «innocent» young women such as Melibea, who embody «las quatro principales cosas que en los casamientos se demandan, conviene a saber: lo primero, discrición, honestidad y virginidad; segundo, hermosura; lo tercero, el alto origen y parientes; lo final, riqueza,» and «noble» young men such as Calisto (539). In doing so, she destabilizes the markers of identity that had been put in place to separate the upper-class from the rest of society. And, as we see in the following passage, she is really quite brazen about doing so. So much so that she not only keeps a written record of her corruption of young virgins, but also quite openly brags about its existence when she brags that: «Pocas vírgenes, a Dios gracias, has tú visto en esta cibdad, que hayan abierto tienda a vender, de quien yo no aya sido corredora de su primer hilado. En nasciendo la mochacha, la hago escrivir en mi registro, para saber cuántas se me salen de la red» (283).

This next passage shows how Celesina exhibits no qualms about ruining these previously pure young women because she feels that she is actually improving upon young people's lives when she flits around among them like a bee, fostering endless new opportunities for young lords and ladies who, like flowers, lack the power to instigate these encounters themselves. She especially sees herself as aiding the many women who are burning with passion under their frigid exteriors:

La mayor gloria, que al secreto oficio de la abeja se da, a la qual los discretos deven imitar, es que todas las cosas por ella tocadas conuierte en mejor de lo que son. Desta manera me he havido con las çahareñas razones y esquivas de Melibea. Todo su rigor traygo convertido en miel, su yra en mansedumbre, su aceleramiento en sosiego. ¿Pues, a qué piensas que yva allá la vieja Celestina, a quien tú, demás de [su] merecimiento, magníficamente galardonaste, si no [a] ablandar su saña, [a] sufrir su accidente, a ser escudo de tu ausencia, a recibir en mi manto los golpes, los desvíos, los menosprecios [...], en viendo que de alguno eran amadas? Las quales, aunque están abrasadas y encendidas de vivos fuegos de amor, por su honestidad muestran un frío exterior, un sosegado vulto, un aplazible desvío, un constante ánimo y casto propósito, unas palabras agras, que la propia lengua se maravilla del gran sofrimiento suyo, que la fazen forçosamente confessar el contrario de lo que sienten. Assí que, para que tú descanses y tengas reposo, mientras te contaré por estenso el processo de mi habla e la causa que tuue para entrar, sabe que el fin de su razón e habla fue muy bueno (339-40).

Celestina is so successful in her attempts to sway women away from protecting their chastity that, she is even able to convince nuns, «las más cubiertas,» and «las más encerradas» (Rojas 242) women within society to sneak out at night and participate in clandestine encounters. Since Celestina is able to sew non-virgins like these so-called «nuns» up, nobody was ever the wiser. Illustrious men were then fooled into thinking their wives were noble virgins, afraid of breaking their maidenheads for the first time. One such man—a French ambassador—was tricked three times by the same reconstituted «virgin» (242). Although this incident no doubt represents a joke at the expense of unpopular French nationals within Spain, it also forcefully speaks to the subversive power of fake purity and false chastity. Moreover, it shows how women could intervene into institutional processes by way of domestic ventures. By sewing up maidenheads, Celestina «go[s] between sexual regulations and hierar-

chies» and in the process «tangle[s] with the very fabric of society» (Gosy 41). Her actions clearly exemplify how «stitching and weaving have long been considered subversive to Western culture» (Miller 66). Given that Celestina is capable of corrupting even the purist of Spanish women it is obvious that her power is extremely subversive. So much so that it is capable of completely destabilizing the very social structures based upon gender that the masculine medieval religious authorities had constructed and then sustained through a strict regulation of the female body.

Perhaps even more egregious than encouraging women to jettison their socially constructed frigidity, and then later re-making them into virgins so that no one would be the wiser. As a kind of madam Celestina encouraged women such as Areúsa and Elicia to enter into prostitution, thus insuring that this ignoble profession would continue to plague «decent» Spanish society just as long as there were women capable of being convinced to sell their bodies for their own monetary benefit (as well as that of their recruiters). In a society as ridden with social unrest and economic instability as was medieval Spain, convincible women such as these beckoned to be introduced to the debauched life of a prostitute.

Celestina was an excellent instructor to her followers. This served her well, if not the rest of the society in which she lived, because although Sempronio and Pármemo abruptly put an end to her professional dealings when they murdered her, Celestina's «daughters» lived on to take up where she had left off. In fact, one of her most adept pupils, Elicia, had become so adept at her unsavory profession that she felt confident enough to move into her mentor's house and take over her work almost immediately after her murder. Her words make clear her intention to take Celestina's place and in the process make sure that the work of her «madre» does not die with her: «Que allí, hermana, soy conocida, allí estoy aperrochada. Jamás perderá aquella casa el nombre de Celestina, que Dios aya. Siempre acuden allí moças conocidas y allegadas, medio parientes de la que ella crió. Allí hazen sus conciertos, de donde me seguirá algún provecho» (529). Like her partner in prostitution, Areúsa also saw Celestina's death as an opportunity rather than a deterrent wants to make a name for herself, but rather than being at all deterred by Celestina's death she still intends to work as a prostitute. This was not at all difficult, because according to her, business got even better after the death of Celestina: «Quiça por bien fue para entrambas la muerte de Celestina, que yo ya siento la mejoría más que antes. Por esto se dize que los muertos abren los ojos de los que biven, a unos con haziendas, a otros con libertad, como a ti» (544). Thus through these women, Rojas demonstrates that although you might kill one, there will always be another Celestina to take her place. Yet another reason why, despite all claims to the contrary, a women's chastity is never a sure bet. As a consequence,

one cannot always count on the true possession of pure blood or the sense of honor and self-worth that accompany it.

Areúsa and Elicia's decision to carry on in Celestina's name speaks volumes about both the corrosive influence of their mentor over themselves and women like them and the inability of the powers that be to keep it in check. What speaks even more to the power of Celestina's presence is the prestige that she enjoyed while she was still alive.

Throughout the text, Rojas makes it readily apparent that despite her outrageous behavior, Celestina is not ostracized, but allowed to attend all of «las bodas... las confradías... los mortuorios» as well as other «ayuntamientos de gentes» (240) without ever provoking any problems at all. On the contrary, as is made clear with the great deference shown to her position, those who run into her at these events call her by her honorary title *puta vieja*, and the people of the village treat Celestina and her work not only with respect but also with a certain admiration. In fact, as she puts it, when she and her mentor Claudina «yvámos por la calle, donde quiera que oviésemos sed, entrávamos en la primera taverna y luego mandava echar medio açumbre para mojar la boca» (284). It seems that no one was too lofty to share a drink with the local go-between. This explains why despite her unsavory profession Celestina is welcomed into God's house with open arms, even as she solicits prospective clients from the pews. Ironically, those charged with reining in Celestina's lewd behavior and disruptive influence, opened the church doors wide open to her and her propositioning of previously «buenos cristianos» when they ordered all prostitutes to attend church services in order to cleanse them of sin (46).

Fontes alludes to Celestina's surprisingly elevated stature when he persuasively argues in his very important article «Celestina as Antithesis of the Virgin Mary,» that not only all of the people but all the animals and inanimate things acknowledge the presence of Celestina with the same energetic greeting of admiration and reverence that they would generally reserve for the most revered Catholic figures, among them the Virgin Mary (19). He then strengthens his argument by stating that the connection between Celestina and these figures is made even more apparent when we take into account that the way that the townspeople, animals, and inanimate aspects of nature greet Celestina is similar to the way in which all the mountains, stars, animals, and humans choose to greet God in Psalm 148 of the Bible (18).

Celestina's semblance to the Virgin Mary is further highlighted by her close connection to the rosary and other important symbols of the Virgin, including the title of «Celestina madre» that she proudly carries and the bent knee reception that she invokes on the part of those in audience with her, among them Calisto who, ironically, addresses her as «reyna y señora mia» while he is discussing his planned seduction of Melibea with her. Connecting Celestina with the Virgin Mary, the most impor-

tant symbol of passivity, humility and —most importantly— feminine purity within Christian tradition emphasizes Rojas' ironic commentary about the idea of female purity. After all, Celestina was a *vieja puta* who, while she was young and with her husband, had to eat «huevos asados» (Rojas 241) in order to find sexual satisfaction, and who admits that she could never be satisfied with just one man but rather preferred to have many around her from which to choose. The comparison with the Virgin Mary implies that if not even the most sacred of virgins is pure, what does that say about the rest of women within Christian —and thus Spanish— society? More importantly, what does it say about the blood purity of the descendents of these women or even in that of Mary's own son Jesus Christ? Significantly, although this assertion is heretical in Christian terms, this depiction of Mary —although certainly exaggerated— would not have been so outlandish in the eyes of *conversos* such as Rojas. After all, Rojas «regarded the birth of Christ in strictly human terms» and thus considered Mary to be a «a married woman who had a son by someone other than her husband ... to be unfaithful and thus a prostitute of sorts,» (Lasker 153-159).

Given her notoriety, it comes as no surprise that Celestina —along with other «professional» women like her— would come under intense scrutiny, censure and ultimately stricture. So much so that by the time Celestina fatefully intervenes in the budding relationship between Calisto and Melibea, her powers have waned somewhat. Rojas indicates this change in her status when he narrates her lament against her inability to recruit as many clients and therefore make as much money as before. Yet although down, Celestina is not at all out. On the contrary, she continues to actively pursue her career of choice in the face of increasing social stigma and decreasing ability and liberty to engage in her subversive, yet still lucrative, pursuits.

Perhaps her longevity was passed down to her from her mentor, Claudina, a.k.a the mother of Pármeneo, who, like her protégé, never allowed increasingly societal pressure and government clampdowns to overly severely cramp her style, or her earnings for that matter; but rather continued to do what she pleased until the day she died:

Y más que, según todas dezían a tuerto y sin razón y con falsos testigos y rezios tormentos, la hicieron aquella vez confessar lo que era. Pero con su buen esfuerço, y como el corazón abezado a sufrir haze las cosas más leves de lo que son, todo lo tuvo en nada. Que mill vezes le oya dezir: «si me quebré el pie, fue por bien, porque soy más conocida que antes (369).

First Claudina and then Celestina's ability to persevere in this changed climate testifies not only to their strengths as resistive figures but also to

the power and permanence of women's resistance to a seemingly cross-cultural patriarchal penchant for controlling feminine sexuality and containing female bodies for purposes of maintaining the illusion of societal stability and security.

Besides *Celestina* and her *hijas*, Rojas also uses the figure of another woman, Melibea, to question female chastity. Looking at their first encounter within the text we see that Melibea's initial response to Calisto's improper approach to her in her private garden space is to ask the provocative question «¿en qué Calisto?». In making this query Melibea invites him further into her protected sphere when the appropriate thing to do would have been for her to protest his intrusion into her domain and proclaim his threat to her guarded reputation and through it the sacred «honra» of her family. Melibea then goes on to converse with him with seeming familiarity; something than a completely enclosed innocent unbeknownst to men most certainly would not have done. Thus, from the outset Melibea is not only far too readily seduced, she also exhibits precious little concern for neither the highly held values of *honestidad y virginidad* (426) nor her family's reputation and claim to *pureza de sangre*.

*Celestina* prognosticated this destructive behavior on the part of Melibea even if the sheltered young women did not. We know this because, as she makes clear in the following series of comments to Sempronio when he challenged her ability to convince Melibea to welcome Calisto to her bed, the go-between was well aware of the seething sexuality that burned beneath the seemingly demure young women's frigid exterior. And as these same passages make imminently clear, this same all-consuming desire lies within all women, waiting for a go-between like *Celestina* herself to propel it to the surface. Once unleashed, not even the unflinching light of day can stop these women from pursuing their desires:

Esto he sentido, esto he calado, esto sé dél y della, esto es lo que nos ha de aprovechar. A casa voy de Pleberio. Quédate a Diós. Que, aunque esté brava Melibea, no es ésta, si a Dios ha plazido, la primera a quien yo he hecho perder el cacarear. Coxquillocicas son todas; mas, después que una vez consienten la silla en el envés del lomo, nunca querrían folgar. Por ellas queda el campo: muertas sí; cansadas no. Si de noche caminan, nunca querrían que amaneciese: maldizen los gallos porque anuncian el día y el relox porque da tan apriessa. Requieren las Cabrillas y el Norte, haziéndose estrelleras. Ya quando veen salir el luzero del alva, quiéreseles salir el alma; su claridad les escuresce el corazón. Camino es, hijo, que nunca me harté de andar; nunca me vi cansada. Y aun,

así vieja como soy, sabe Dios mi buen deseo. ¡Quanto más éstas que hierven sin fuego! (287).

Like the women described in the above passages, Melibea lets nothing stand in the way of her sexual satisfaction. And she is not shy about admitting that rather than being bewitched into love, she wanted to be with Calisto from the moment «esse noble cavallero me habló en amor» (437). She just didn't know it until Celestina came and unleashed the «secreto amor de mi pecho» that her «querida madre encobría» and in the process «tovo manera como ganó mi querer, ordenó cómo su desseo y el mío hoviessen efeto» (587-88). As we see in Melibea's impassioned narration of her latent sexual longings, the «serpents» gnawing on her heart and on her chastity, forced virginity never really stood a chance against burgeoning female sexuality:

—¡O lastimada de mí! ¡O malproveýda donzella! ¿Y no me fuera mejor conceder su petición y demanda ayer a Celestina, quando de parte de aquel señor, cuya vista me cativó, me fue rogado, y contentarle a él y sanar a mí, que no venir por fuerça a descubrir mi llaga quando no me sea agradecido, quando ya, desconfiando de mi buena respuesta, aya puesto sus ojos en amor de otra? ¡Quánta más ventaja tovierá mi prometimiento rogado que mi ofrecimiento forçoso! ¡O mi fiel criada Lucrecia! ¿Qué dirás de mí, qué pensarás de mi seso, quando me veas publicar lo que a ti jamás he quesido descubrir? ¡Cómo te espantarás del rompimiento de mi honestidad y vergüença que siempre como encerrada donzella acostumbré tener! ¡No sé si avrás barruntado de dónde procede mi dolor. ¡O, si ya veniesses con aquella medianera de mi salud! ¡O soberano Dios! A ti, que todos los atribulados llaman, los apasionados piden remedio, los llagados medicina; a ti, que los cielos, mar y tierra con los infernales centros obedecen; a ti, el qual todas las cosas a los hombres sojuzgaste, humilmente suplico des a mi herido corazón sofrimiento y paciencia, con que mi terrible pasión pueda dissimular. No se desdore aquella hoja de castidad, que tengo assentada sobre este amoroso desseo, publicando ser otro mi dolor, que no el que me atormenta. Pero ¿cómo lo podré hazer, lastimándome tan cruelmente el ponçoñoso bocado que la vista de su presencia de aquel cavallero me dio? ¡O género femíneo, encogido y frágil! ¿Por qué no fue también a las hembras concedido poder descubrir su congoxoso y ar-

diente amor, como a los varones? ¡Que ni Calisto biviera  
 quexoso ni yo penada! [...]
   
 Madre mía, que comen este coraçón serpientes dentro  
 de mi cuerpo (426-428).

These consuming snakes of passion within Melibea's body provoke her to agree to a middle-of-the-night meeting with Calisto in her very own garden—and thus right under her father's nose. Besides lamenting briefly over «el nombre y corona de virgen por tan breve deleyte» (502) Melibea does not seem to feel much shame or remorse over what she has done. Her lack of contrition is underlined by her decision to be with Calisto in secret again and again. In fact, not only is Melibea willing to sleep with Calisto again, she, a supposedly «encerrada donzella» (426), shows herself to be in a hurry to do so as she impatiently waits for him to scale her garden wall. In fact, at one point she finds herself to be so frustrated that she makes Lucretia sing love songs to her while she impatiently waits for her lover to arrive (571).

The image of Melibea as a frustrated woman waiting for her lover to satisfy her carnal longings greatly contrasts with her parents' description of her as a young girl whose «virgin dad» simple has caused her to know precious little about «lo que no conoce ni ha entendido jamás, such as «qué cosa sean hombres» or «del ayuntamiento de marido y mujer se procreen los hijos»(539). Just in case one misses the irony, as the subsequent passages attest, Rojas stresses the ironic contrast between these two perceptions of the young noblewoman when he juxtaposes Melibea's forceful and unashamed announcement of her desire to be Calisto's secret lover rather than a noble wife with her parent's discussion of the need to properly marry her off before they die:

Si passar quisiere la mar, con él yré; si rodear el mundo, lléveme consigo; si venderme en tierra de enemigos, no rehuyré su querer. Déxenme mis padres gozar dél, si ellos quieren gozar de mí. No piensen en estas vanidades ni en estos casamientos; que más vale ser buena amiga que mala casada. Déxenme 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 ensuziar los ñudos del matrimonio, ni las maritales pisadas de ageno hombre pisar (536).

This clash in visions discussed above speaks clearly to Rojas' ability to use irony to destroy the illusions of lineal purity in even the most noble and respectable, like those of Melibea. Because instead of a demure

young woman concerned with nothing else but saving herself for marriage, as is the case with Celestina, the prostitutes, and in fact the rest of the town's women, Melibea —a «decent» and «noble» woman— in actuality proves herself to be a sexual rebel completely «at odds with the normal life destined to her by society» (Swietlicki 2). Furthermore, Melibea's illicit actions do more than just indicate that she is a mujer «en quien arde una gran pasión.» They promise to threaten and perhaps even completely destroy a society's most important and most rigid social structures. Consequently, Melibea's behavior perfectly exemplifies why Rojas chose to tell the sordid story of a noble woman who not only destroyed herself but also her family's *pureza de sangre* and the structural order that it symbolized. One only has to read her father's tragic lament over his daughter's transgressions to ascertain just how complete was the destruction that she wrought upon her family:

... porque mi Melibea mató a sí misma de su voluntad, a mis ojos, con la gran fatiga de amor que la aquexaba; el otro matáronle en muy lícita batalla. ¡O incomparable pérdida! ¡O lastimado viejo! Que quanto más busco consuelos, menos razón fallo para me consolar. Que, si el profeta y rey David al hijo, que enfermo llorava, muerto no quiso llorar, diziendo que era quasi locura llorar lo irrecuperable, quedávanle otros muchos con que soldase su llaga. Y yo no lloro, triste, a ella muerta, pero la causa desastrada de su morir. Agora perderé contigo, mi desdichada hija, los miedos y temores que cada día me espavorecían: sola tu muerte es la que a mí me haze seguro de sospecha. ¿Qué haré quando entre en tu cámara y retraymiento y la halle sola? ¿Qué haré de que no respondas si te llamo? ¿Quién me podrá cobrir la gran falta que tú me hazes? (601-602).

Lest one finish *La Celestina* thinking that Melibea and her shocking behavior are merely an aberration in an otherwise orderly society, Rojas fills the pages of his medieval masterpiece with the lurid tales of numerous other deviant and depraved women. In his discursive world all the women —despite their outer «coxquilocicas»— are seething with sexual frustration and as such, completely incapable of withstanding erotic temptations. In fact, rather than wait around for opportunity to come their way, the town's womenfolk «rompen paredes, abren ventanas, fingen enfermedades» in order to make carnal love with their male counterparts (287). They engage in their amorous adventures all night, only venturing home when dawn broke and the sun rose, casting light upon their misdeeds (287).

Within *La Celestina* as the women break down walls and tear down social fabrics and as Celestina weaves and stitches a chaotic world where something as sacred as the validity of the lines demarcating lineages and social hierarchies become an unfathomable question mark, Rojas goes a long way towards proving his case that his marginalization is an effect of a falsehood. Ironically, the closer he comes to making his case, the nearer the women he both creates and portrays in his discourse surreptitiously make their own case against their particular form of social ostracism and censure. Once created and sustained in text, Rojas' women explode the myth that social mores and physical incarceration always kept them from doing what they wanted to do, when they wanted to it—even if the «what» that they desired to do involved sex. As they do so they inform their readers that women's bodies and female minds cannot be forever kept under wraps and behind closed doors. Their ultimate message is that their sexuality is not something to be controlled by men for the purpose of social stability. It is theirs to explore as they see fit. If this provokes social instability, so be it. Rojas' message is that this instability gives him freedom: freedom to chart his own course in life, unfettered by the bounds of an unwanted and unchangeable polluted bloodstream.

Thus, Rojas' *La Celestina* serves as a testament to the notion that «the gaps and friction endemic to cognitive processing help ensure that no cultural or ideological system can seize full and permanent control of human subjects» (Richardson 552). Where there is thinking, there is resistance. Keeping this axiom in mind will help us to continue to first explore and then subsequently better understand the timeless text's subtle yet evocative delineation of the intractable resistance that the embodied human mind displays when confronted with a cultural environment that would seek to constrain it.

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RESUMEN

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Este estudio conforma una mirada crítica, tanto cognitiva como evolutiva, con el fin de mostrar cómo Rojas crea en su obra maestra una imagen de mujer descontrolada sexualmente, en protesta por la marginalización en la que vivían los conversos a finales del medioevo español. Al hacerlo, demuestra cómo los textos pueden funcionar como ventanas hacia mentalidades que han perdido desde hace tiempo su materialidad.

El artículo trata los usos que Rojas hace del arquetipo de mujer «errante» (entiéndase: sexualmente fuera de control) para hacer problemática la idea de que la sangre de la clase alta no tenía problemas de pureza. Se concluye con una demostración de cómo, al hacerlo, Rojas ofrece un foro para la presentación discursiva de la sexualidad femenina y, como resultado, facilita una poderosa forma de resistencia femenina al poder que él mismo probablemente no podría haber apreciado o comprendido. Pero que, afortunadamente, nosotros, como críticos del siglo XXI, podemos y debemos comprender y apreciar.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Celestina*, mujer 'errante', sexualidad femenina.

ABSTRACT

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This study employs both a cognitive and evolutionary critical lens to demonstrate how Rojas creates within his medieval masterwork a portrayal of women as out of control sexual beings to protest his marginalized status as a converso living in late medieval Spain. As it does so it demonstrates how texts can function as windows into material minds that have long since lost their materiality.

The article exploring the ways in which Rojas employs the archetype of the «wandering,» (read sexually out of control) woman to problematize the notion that the upper classes' blood was unproblematically pure. It then concludes with a demonstration of how in doing so, Rojas provides a discursive forum for the presentation of female sexuality and as a result enables a powerful form of female resistance to power that he himself most likely could not have fully appreciated or understood. But which, luckily, we as 21st century critics, both, can, and should, comprehend and appreciate.

KEY WORDS: *Celestina*, woman 'wandering', female sexuality.