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Article abstract

This article investigates one of the most important and erotically explicit early modern Spanish texts: Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* (1499/1507). Highlighting the dynamics of the three sex acts depicted in the plot, it argues that intercourse can be read as a negotiation of the text's main values: (courtly) love, honour, and money. While scholars have elaborated on the metaphor of the wheel of fortune in *La Celestina*, this article suggests that the wheel was more than a trope for life's vicissitudes; it operated as a structural tool in the text, a metaphor rendered material via Ramón Llull's (ca. 1232–1315) *ars combinatoria*. Applying the Catalan philosopher's mnemonic device demonstrates how the text's values are transferred from men to women and thereby shift their semantics. While the resulting inversions must have amused contemporary audiences, they also reveal the tensions of a transforming society.

# Sex Acts in *La Celestina*: An *Ars Combinatoria* of Desire

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*This article investigates one of the most important and erotically explicit early modern Spanish texts: Fernando de Rojas's La Celestina (1499/1507). Highlighting the dynamics of the three sex acts depicted in the plot, it argues that intercourse can be read as a negotiation of the text's main values: (courtly) love, honour, and money. While scholars have elaborated on the metaphor of the wheel of fortune in La Celestina, this article suggests that the wheel was more than a trope for life's vicissitudes; it operated as a structural tool in the text, a metaphor rendered material via Ramón Llull's (ca. 1232–1315) ars combinatoria. Applying the Catalan philosopher's mnemonic device demonstrates how the text's values are transferred from men to women and thereby shift their semantics. While the resulting inversions must have amused contemporary audiences, they also reveal the tensions of a transforming society.*

*Cet article examine un texte parmi les plus importants et explicites sur le plan érotique de l'Espagne des débuts de la modernité : La Celestina (1499/1507) de Fernando de Rojas. En mettant en lumière les trois actes sexuels prenant place dans l'intrigue, on avance que ces relations peuvent être interprétées comme une négociation des valeurs présentes dans le texte, à savoir, l'amour (courtois), l'honneur et l'argent. Alors que les spécialistes se sont penchés sur la métaphore dans La Celestina de la roue de fortune, cet article propose que cette roue représente bien davantage que les vicissitudes de la vie, puisqu'elle fonctionne dans le texte comme un élément structurant qui devient concret à l'aide de l'ars combinatoria de Ramón Llull (ca. 1232–1315). L'utilisation du dispositif mnémorique du philosophe catalan démontre comment les valeurs du texte sont transférées des hommes vers les femmes, transformant ainsi leur signification. Bien que ces inversions aient dû amuser le public, elles révèlent également des tensions propres à une société qui se transforme.*

No collection on “sex acts in the early modern world” should be without an appraisal of *La Celestina*—or, to give it its full and correct title, the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (1499/1507).<sup>1</sup> This text, written by Fernando

1. Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Dorothy S. Severin (Madrid: Cátedra/Colección Letras Hispánicas, 1987); Fernando de Rojas: *La Celestina*, trans. with an afterword by Peter Bush, intro. by Juan Goytisolo (London: Penguin Classics, 2010). The first edition of *La Celestina* appeared in 1499. Only one copy survived, and it contains only sixteen acts instead of the twenty-one found in later editions. Arguably by 1502, and definitely by 1507, the other five acts and numerous interpolations were added under the new title *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.

de Rojas<sup>2</sup> on the threshold between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, describes the schemes and plots of the most impressive sex worker in Spanish literature. Indeed, the text is so deeply seated in Iberian cultural memory that in its wake *Celestina*'s name became not only a synecdoche for the work itself but also a metonym for "procuress" in Spanish.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the text's allure to readers seems to know no spatial or temporal bounds. Immediately after its first edition (1499)<sup>4</sup> it became a bestseller and was translated into nearly every European vernacular; in the past as today, the scholarly industry examining the text has been overwhelming.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite this collective scrutiny, the text remains enigmatic, eliciting readings that not only emphasize different aspects of the narrative but can also be quite contradictory. In general, there exist two analytical schools of thought: one that reads *La Celestina* as a pessimistic account of social realism by an author belonging to the marginalized stratum of the *conversos* (Jews converted to Christianity), and one that—in contrast with the previous school and including many renowned scholars—takes the text as a farce or travesty of medieval literary patterns. One scholar who spent a good portion of his career making sense of *La Celestina* even concluded: "At the end of this line of readers and hearers, we stand. This is a book that changes each time we read it, each time we discuss it with someone else."<sup>6</sup>

Here, I will provide a synthesis of these two schools of thought by highlighting the dynamics of the three sex acts depicted in the text. My analytical approach is informed by gender and postcolonial theory, which makes it possible to interpret Rojas's characters as positioned at the intersection of race,

2. I should say "at least partly written," as the paratexts indicate that the first act was written by another author. Also, the original sixteen acts comprising the text were enlarged to twenty-one (see above note), whereby the *comedia* became a *tragicomedia*. For the evolution of the text and questions of authorship see Keith Whinnom, *The Textual History and Authorship of Celestina* (London: Queen Mary University, 2007).

3. Alan Deyermond argues convincingly for the use of the vulgarized title, *Celestina*, as its audience seemingly labelled it from very early on. See his "Readers in, Readers of, *Celestina*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 78 (2001): 14.

4. See notes 1 and 2.

5. Indeed, scholarly attention to *La Celestina* even exceeds interest in Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. With this vast commentary in mind, rather than suggest specific secondary literature in addition to what is mentioned in this article, I refer the reader to the journal *Celestinesca*, which focuses exclusively on the text, its unsolved riddles, and ongoing scholarly debates.

6. Deyermond, "Readers in, Readers of, *Celestina*," 37.

class, and gender. I will show how after consummated intercourse, the three main thematic values treated in the text—(courtly) love, honour, and money—are transferred from men to women and thereby shift their semantics. The resulting inversions must have amused contemporary audiences, yet, at the same time, they laid bare the tensions of a society under transformation.<sup>7</sup> The text's exposure of the voids within established value systems and the rising urban economy of sex provides for plenty of crime, greed, and death, but also for amazing portrayals of female lust and sensual delight. I shall argue for an interpretation of these representations as philogynist counter-readings of the text in a Bakhtinian sense, realizing that I could also interpret them—and most of the scholars familiar with the social and political context of *La Celestina* would find this more convincing—as negative, deterrent examples of female comportment serving as a casuistic in the sense of a *reprobatio amoris* (rejection of love).<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates the most appealing characteristic of Rojas's early Spanish literary masterpiece: its openness. There is no authoritative path through its semantic labyrinth; whoever claims possession of a thread through the same is guaranteed to miss interesting crossroads of the text. Fleshing out the empowerment

7. The transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance was all the more radical in Spain, which became Europe's first (proto-)national state and the first to establish colonies overseas. The politics of global expansion were legitimized by a distinct Christian identity that entailed not only voluntary experiences of mobility but also the expulsion of the Jews. Furthermore, as in other European regions, a distinct urban culture arose with dramatic changes to the formerly feudal economy. For these characteristics of Spain in the early modern period see for example Francisco Comín Comín and Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, "Spain: From Composite Monarchy to Nation-State, 1492–1914: An Exceptional Case?" in *The Rise of Fiscal States: A Global History, 1500–1914*, ed. Bartolomé Yun Casalilla and Patrick K. O'Brien (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 233–67. For the context of prostitution and economy in *La Celestina* and early modern Spain in general see María Eugenia Lacarra, "La evolución de la prostitución en la Castilla del siglo XV y la mancebía de Salamanca en tiempos de Fernando de Rojas," in *Fernando de Rojas and Celestina: Approaching the Fifth Centenary*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph T. Snow (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993), 33–78; María del Carmen García Herrero, "El mundo de la prostitución en las ciudades Bajomedievales," in *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios Medievales y Renacentistas* 4 (1998): 67–100; Denis Menjot, "Prostitutas y rufianes en las ciudades castellanas a fines de la Edad Media," in *Temas medievales* 4 (1994): 189–204.

8. For the topos of love rejection, see for example Eukene Lacarra Lanz, "Enfermedad y concupiscencia: los amores de Calisto y Melibea," in *La Celestina V Centenario (1499–1999). Actas del Congreso internacional*, ed. Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez, Rafael González Cañal, and Gema Rubio (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2001), 193–215, 208, where she points out the double bind (straight versus parody) in Calisto's lovesickness.

and agency of the female characters does not contradict an analysis of the social tensions underlying the text. Indeed, combining these readings offers a more nuanced view of the complex setting.

As a result, I do not wish to stake yet another claim on how to make specific sense of *La Celestina*, but rather to emphasize that its *intentio operis* (intention of the text) is first and foremost to generate hybridity and that, as such, it invites pluralistic readings. A consideration of recurrent tropes in the text is a good place to start for grasping the structural principles generating this hybridity—most notably, all manner of threads (including yarn, chains, and string) as well as the wheel of fortune. Before elaborating on the structural device that, I propose, may organize these elements, I will provide a brief overview of this *novela dialogada* (a novel in dialogue),<sup>9</sup> a genre whose ambivalence between narrative and drama is inherently hybrid, as is the paratext *tragicomedia*.

The plot starts with the young nobleman Calisto declaring his love to Melibea, who is also a descendent of a wealthy and noble family. After Melibea's rather ambivalent rejection of his performance of courtly love, Calisto becomes desperate, whereupon his servant Sempronio advises him to avail himself of the machinations of the well-known procuress and former prostitute Celestina. Sempronio and Celestina craftily agree to squeeze as much capital out of Calisto's lovesickness as possible. However, Calisto's younger servant, Pármeno, foils their plan. He warns his master of "la puta vieja" ("the old whore"), Celestina, whom he knows quite well because his mother was her close friend and colleague. Yet, by initiating Pármeno into carnal pleasures with the help of one of her disciples (the young prostitute Areúsa), Celestina manages to convert him to her camp. This is the first sex act that I will consider. After this, Celestina obtains access to the noble household of Melibea's father, Pleberio, and to Melibea's heart. The scene in which Celestina uses all of her psychological capacity to persuade Melibea is a fascinating example of the power of rhetoric; Celestina saturates her discourse with metaphors of disease and pain, convincing Melibea that curing a suffering man is a "noble" task. As a token of her willingness to help, Melibea provides Celestina with her girdle.

9. The term was first coined in the eighteenth century by Leandro Fernández de Moratín. But there are also other terms that reflect the miscellaneous aspects of the genre such as *drama de acción* (drama of action).

After their first promising bargain, Celestina's two accomplices, Sempronio and Pármeno, organize a banquet together with their lovers, Elicia and Areúsa, as well as with their common *madre*, Celestina. During this brothel feast, the second sex act takes place—this time between Sempronio and Elicia. The scene is powerful not only because of its voyeuristic qualities; it also holds a central position in the text both literally and metaphorically. Approximately at *La Celestina*'s midpoint, the protagonists of this *subcultura de amor* (subculture of love), as Amanda Tozer labelled it, are joyfully gathered together at a beggar's banquet of life, only to experience death and destruction shortly afterwards.<sup>10</sup> The fateful events derive their initial momentum from Melibea's sexual surrender, which happens after the feast of the servants. After arranging the meeting of the noble couple, our bustling saleswoman Celestina is remunerated by Calisto with a gold chain that she is not willing to share with her partners, Sempronio and Pármeno. The two of them consequently kill her by stabbing her in the stairway of her home and later are executed by the local police after attempting to flee through the brothel's window.

This does not prevent Calisto from consummating his mad love for Melibea, as the third sex act that I will analyze shows. However, the two prostitutes Elicia and Areúsa persuade two ruffians to ambush Calisto's new servants because they hold him responsible for the death of their lovers. Hearing the noise of the fray, Calisto hurries to discover the possible danger, but falls off a ladder and dies. Melibea locks herself in the tower of her home, confesses her love for Calisto to her father, and then commits suicide by plunging down from the tower into her garden of pleasure. The text ends with Pleberio's famous lament over the vicissitudes of the fickle goddess Fortuna.

10. Amanda J. A. Tozer, "La identidad masculina en Celestina: la emasculación de Pármeno," *Celestinesca* 27 (2003): 161. I am an advocate of the highly disputed claim that Plato's *Symposium* is an intertext for this scene. For an analysis from this angle see Kevin S. Larsen, "Bed and Board: Significant Parallels between Plato's *Symposium* and Rojas' *La Celestina*," *Neohelicon: Acta Comparatins Litterarum Universarum* 21.1 (1994): 247–68; Luis Galván, "Intertexto, sentido, autoridad: 'el lobo viendo ganado' (Celestina, XIX)," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 84.6 (2007): 677–700. For a rejection of such views see Nicholas G. Round, "Celestina, Aucto I: A Platonic Echo and Its Resonances," in *Fernando de Rojas and Celestina: Approaching the Fifth Centenary*, ed. Ivy A Corfis and Joseph T. Snow (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993), 93–112.

## The wheel of fortune

Many scholars have elaborated on the significance of fortune—in this case, fortune as a metaphor for coping with the change in mentality between medieval and Renaissance Spain—in their quest for an accurate interpretation of the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.<sup>11</sup> However, I would suggest that in Rojas's *tragicomedia* the wheel of fortune is more than a well-worn image for the vicissitudes of life; indeed, it operates as a structural device of the text, a metaphor rendered material by adopting the mnemonic tools offered by Ramón Llull's *Ars brevis*.<sup>12</sup> The late medieval Catalan philosopher Llull (ca. 1232–1315) was famous for his *ars combinatoria*, a mnemonic device meant not only to organize but to *generate* reliable knowledge. In its simplest form, Llull's apparatus is comprised of triangles arranged on a rotating disk that contain movable letters (Figure 1). In contrast to Aristotle's doctrine of categories based on fixed qualities, Llull's "logic machines" focused on action.<sup>13</sup> They also offered the advantage that they could render *topoi* visible and change them flexibly according to their use in various areas such as ethics, medicine, law, and even fiction. Hence, depending on the specific disciplinary interest they were meant to satisfy, they exhibited different categories that could be combined by shifting

11. See for instance Emilio De Miguel Martínez, "Celestina en la sociedad de fines del XV: protagonista, testigo, juez, víctima," in *El Mundo social y cultural de la celestina. Actas del congreso internacional, Universidad de Navarra, junio, 2001*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús M. Usunáriz (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2003), 253–73. From my point of view, his assumptions place too much emphasis on our retrospective claim of a sudden shift in epochs. It might be preferable to revise his arguments from the perspective of the incipient nation-building program on the part of the *Reyes Católicos* and the resistance they were confronted with by local aristocrats. But the author is justified in contending that, despite Celestina's characterization with the most extreme attributes of a bawd, we cannot help but feel great sympathy for her.

12. For a good introduction to Llull's life and work see Anthony Bonner, *The Art and Logic of Ramon Llull: A User's Guide* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007). One of the first scholars to associate Llull's art with *La Celestina* seems to be José Luis Canet Vallés, "La Celestina en la 'contienda' intelectual y universitaria de principios del s. XVI," *Celestinesca* 32 (2008): 85–107, although he does this only for the first act, considering it together with other texts on logic in order to focus predominantly on the general logic of argumentation, not the *Ars's* qualities as a technical device.

13. For a further analysis of the emphasis on a perspective of acting from the Lullian framework of mnemotechnique see Alexander Fidora, "Einleitung," in *Raimundus Lullus: Ars Brevis. Lateinisch-Deutsch*, trans. and comm. Alexander Fidora (Hamburg: Meiner, 2009), xxiv–xxvii.

the elements on the disc. I suggest that we can adopt the *ars combinatoria* as kind of hermeneutical tool to locate some key values of *La Celestina*'s literary cosmos—in this case, by turning the disc of men in opposition to the disc of women, with Celestina as the point around which this rotation occurs. Of course, we have no information regarding the instruments that Fernando de Rojas may have used in the creative process of *La Celestina*. But there is some evidence that the art of memory played a part, especially if we keep in mind that, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, reading was often a collective, performative process and that, therefore, the use of mnemonic techniques to visualize recurrent subjects was crucial.<sup>14</sup>

The late medieval Lull was a zealous missionary—indeed, he developed the *ars combinatoria* as a tool for converting Jews and Muslims to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Born on the island of Mallorca, where a considerable portion of the population was non-Christian, from very early on Lull had direct and intense contact with the cultural production of the two other confessions. He was very proud of his command of Arabic and he may even have known some Hebrew. It thus comes as no surprise that he adopted some intellectual attitudes that bear similarities to figures of argumentation from Arab and/or Jewish traditions. In fact, in fifteenth-century Italy Lull's *Ars brevis* was translated into Hebrew under the patronage of the Jewish humanist Yohanan Alemanno (ca. 1435–1504). Alemanno played an important role in combining cabbalistic ideas with Neoplatonic ideas and was a close friend of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In this context, the translation of Lull's text served as a cabbalistic quest to ascend into the realm of God. As Harvey J. Hames put it, "It is the conception of the potentiality of men to ascend to and descend from the divine via nature or

14. For general information on the ancient techniques of *ars memorativa* see Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory: Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press*, trans. Jeremy Parzen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Penguin 1969).

15. For Lull's missionary activities see Anthony Bonner, ed., *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Llull Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and more specifically, William Theodore Aquila Barber, *Raymond Lull, the Illuminated Doctor: A Study in Mediaeval Missions* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1903), and Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *Raymund Lull, First Missionary to the Moslems* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1902; reprinted by Diggory Press, 2006).



creation that probably attracted Alemanno and other Jewish thinkers to Lull in general and to the *Ars brevis* in particular.”<sup>16</sup>

Stephen Gilman provides a close reading of *La Celestina* from the vantage point of Rojas’s own life.<sup>17</sup> Through Gilman’s influential studies, we know that Rojas was a *converso* and that he studied law at the University of Salamanca. We can thus assume that he was quite familiar with the Llullian *ars memorativa*, since it was taught and used widely throughout the early modern period as a means for sorting out all kinds of knowledge—especially in a discipline like law that elaborated a casuistic with a range of argumentative variables. Rafael Ramis Barceló gives an account of important disseminators of Lull’s legal writings. One of them, the Franciscan Bernard Lavinjeta (ca. 1462–1530), held a chair of law at Salamanca, which makes it very probable that Rojas met him there.<sup>18</sup> If we follow Gilman’s thesis that at that time Rojas was still sympathetic to the faith of his Jewish forebears, Rojas might even have been familiar with the adoption of Lull’s ideas in cabbalistic circles. As we shall see, however, Rojas’s *La Celestina* offers the most striking evidence for his use of a mnemotechnical apparatus because its major themes are interwoven with circulating metaphors.

### Themes and variations

The three core themes of the *tragicomedia* are love, honour, and money. Some of *La Celestina*’s motifs give the impression of circling variations on these core themes. In a text owing its dynamic to the wheel of fortune, it comes as no surprise that “falling” would be a recurrent motif: Celestina falls after being pushed and stabbed; Sempronio and Pármemo plunge out the brothel window in an attempt to flee; Calisto accidentally falls off a ladder in a most ridiculous fashion; Melibea deliberately jumps out of the tower to her death. Before the

16. Harvey J. Hames, “Jewish Magic With a Christian Text: A Hebrew Translation Of Ramon Lull’s *Ars Brevis*,” *Traditio* 54 (1999): 288–89.

17. Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Stephen Gilman, *The Art of La Celestina* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956; repr. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976).

18. We do not have the exact dates of his stay at the Castilian university, but we know that it must have been before his appointment to the Sorbonne in 1514. See Bonner, *Doctor Illuminatus*, 65. For Lavinjeta’s impact on Iberian law schools see Rafael Ramis Barceló, “La recepción de las ideas jurídicas de Ramon Lull en los siglos xv y xvi,” *Revista de Estudios Histórico-Jurídicos* 34 (2012): 431–56.

plot ends with these literal declines, the protagonists are extricated from a knot of different sub-entanglements with another recurrent motif: the thread or string. Celestina expertly restores virginites by sewing vaginas shut; she gains access to Melibea's house under the pretext of selling yarn; Melibea hands over her girdle to Celestina for her to give to Calisto; Calisto rewards Celestina with a gold chain, breaking the bond between her and her helpers, Sempronio and Pármeno.

Gilman was the first to outline the opposing categories depicted in *La Celestina*:

The cast of *La Celestina* [...] may be conveniently divided in terms of the three central dualities underlined by medieval critics of Terence: rich against poor (this includes social class, insofar as it exists, with its division of servants from masters and prostitutes from respectable ladies); old against young; and men against women.<sup>19</sup>

I will now proceed to trace the ludic clashes between some of these categories as manifested in yet another dynamic motif—and its variations—played out through a Llullian “hands-on” logic: namely, having sex.

### Rotating desires

In Christian and Jewish epistemology, knowledge and sex are closely related.<sup>20</sup> To know a person can mean both to have sex with her/him and to have acquired intellectual knowledge. The common ingredient in having sex and obtaining knowledge is desire. In *La Celestina*, desire is also the impetus for the wheel of fortune. The metaphor became literal as the text's organization transferred to a Llullian apparatus in a strictly horizontal position, instead of the usual vertical

19. Gilman, *The Art of La Celestina*, 58.

20. For a general discussion of the context of desire, knowledge, and sex see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980); Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). For the epistemological affinity of knowing and having sex, see especially Frederick Ferré, *Knowing and Value: Toward a Constructive Postmodern Epistemology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 12–13.

position, as I will show by contrasting the disc of men with the disc of women. This transfer had the effect of evening out the class and gender hierarchies.

### *Pármemo and Areúsa*

The first sex act in the *tragicomedia* can be read as a travesty of the value of honour. Our youngest “acquirer of knowledge” is Pármemo. At the beginning of *La Celestina*, he underscores his personal concept of honour by acting as an absolutely loyal servant to his master.<sup>21</sup> Although the son of a prostitute, he has not yet become acquainted with the true promises of sex. Celestina has found out about his desire for Areúsa, a young but already experienced sex worker. Jean Dangler uses the resulting sex scene between the two young people to point out the transgendered characteristics of Celestina, labelling her a “masculine seducer of women.”<sup>22</sup> And indeed, it is Celestina who seems to take the most delight in initiating this sex act:

By God and the archangel Saint Michael! You are so plump and firm! Such lovely breasts! I'd always thought you were beautiful, but I could only see what everyone else sees. I tell you there aren't three bodies in this city to rival yours. What a sweet sixteen! If only I were a man and knew you well enough to make the most of this vista!

!Bendígate Dios y el señor Sant Miguel Ángel, y qué gorda y fresca que estás; qué pechos y qué gentileza! Por hermosa te tenía hasta agora, viendo lo que todos podían ver. Pero agora te digo que no ay en la cibdad tres cuerpos tales como el tuyo en quanto yo conozco; no parece que ayas quinze anos. !O quién fuera hombre y tanta parte alcançara de ti para gozar tal vista!<sup>23</sup>

21. Tozer, 151, equates Celestina's seduction of Pármemo with emasculation, due to the attendant destruction of the homosocial bond with Pármemo's master. Although her text offers some very interesting elements, I do not quite agree with her conception of medieval manliness, which in my opinion operates predominantly along the lines of status rather than sex, therefore excluding this hypothetical homosocial bonding between master and servant, as the text makes abundantly clear.

22. Jean Dangler, “Transgendered Sex and Healing in *Celestina*,” *Celestinesca* 25.1–2 (2001): 69.

23. English translation: Rojas, *La Celestina*, trans. Bush, 85; Spanish: Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Severin, 202.

Not merely voyeuristic, Celestina's pleasure is also tactile: she massages Areúsa to alleviate her *mal de madre* (hysterical mother/uterus), the typical female ailment in cases of mounting sexual desire. As Katherine Park and others have pointed out, such a cure for the suffocation of the uterus was widely accepted in medical textbooks of the time.<sup>24</sup> Yet, on a metaphoric level, the *mal de madre* can be read as a metonymic description and parody of Celestina herself. Instead of curing Areúsa, Celestina arouses her further in order to prepare her for intercourse with Pármeno. Celestina leaves no doubt about Pármeno's predisposition for further treatment of the *mal de madre* through sexual intercourse, as his origins seem to recommend him for effecting a sustainable cure:

But as he's a crafty sod, a little rooster, a strip of a lad, I expect he'll keep his pecker up for at least three nights. He's the kind doctors where I come from said I should eat only when my teeth were in a better state.

Mas como es un putillo, gallillo, barvioniente, entiendo que en tres noches no se le demude la cresta; déstos me mandavan a mí comer en mi tiempo los médicos de mi tierra quando tenía mejores dientes.<sup>25</sup>

This is a fine example of the recurring affinity between sex and eating put forward by the text.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Celestina's powerful culinary imagery of Pármeno's potency corroborates the gender travesty pointed out by Dangler, since teeth are a well-known metaphor for the male genitals and thus for virility. But it could also be read as an allusion to Celestina's own sexual appetite connoting the *vagina dentata*, a monstrous attribute of appalling female voluptuousness.<sup>27</sup>

24. Katherine Park, "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500–1500," in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Helen King, *Midwifery, Obstetrics, and the Rise of Gynaecology: The Uses of a Sixteenth-Century Compendium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

25. Rojas, trans. Bush, 89; Rojas, ed. Severin, 208.

26. For this anti-Platonic trait, see Galván, 691.

27. I gratefully owe the reading of the tooth as *vagina dentata* to Vanessa McCarthy. For further information on this "abnormity" see Sarah Alison Miller's essay "Monstrous Sexuality: Variations on the *Vagina Dentata*," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Mittman and Dendle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 311–28.

Adopting this male attribute, Celestina confirms her active role, simultaneously deprecating Pármeno's virility. On a metaphorical level, active and passive genders here oscillate. And indeed, Pármeno's performance is questionable, as he leaves Areúsa still in a state of suffering and desiring to continue the "treatment": "Well, all that fun, and I've still got woman's sickness. I don't understand how that can be. / What did you say, my love? / I'd like to talk about my pains."<sup>28</sup>

This is a wish Pármeno cannot comply with, as it is already noon and he has to hurry to work. Moreover, *his* real pleasure is yet to come, for he enjoys narrating his adventure much more than he enjoyed the adventure itself: "God on high, who can I tell my joys to? Who can I let in on my big secret? Who will I tell of my bliss?"<sup>29</sup> Thus, relating his glory to Sempronio becomes crucial for Pármeno and so, after having consummated this craving, our honourable young servant becomes a cheat to his master Calisto.

While Pármeno's desire smoothly downshifts from seeing to telling, Areúsa, for her part, actually enjoys having sex, and acts out her strength as a self-reliant subject who manages to recode Pármeno's values of honour and loyalty. She nurtures a proletarian nobility of soul based in the social bond of solidarity:

I swear by all the pleasures in my life that it's true, women who serve noble ladies never enjoy love's thrall and sweet rewards. They can never consort with their equals or have close friends they can ask about the simple things in life. [...] The best you can hope for is to run errands, take their messages from one fine lady to another. [...] That's why, mother, I've always preferred to live in my little house, free and my own mistress, and not in their luxurious palaces, like a prisoner under their thumb.

Assí goçe de mí, que es verdad, que éstas que sirven a señoras ni gozan deleyte ni conocen los dulces premios de amor. Nunca tratan con parientas, con yguales a quien pueden hablar tú por tú [...] la mejor honrra que en sus casas tienen es andar hechas callejeras, de dueña en dueña, con sus mensajes acuestas [...] Por esto, madre, he querido más

28. Rojas, trans. Bush, 92; "A: Pues así goze de mi alma, no se me ha quitado el mal de la madre; no sé cómo pueda ser./P: ¿Pues qué quieres, mi vida? A: Que hablemos en mi mal." Rojas, ed. Severin, 211–12.

29. Rojas, trans. Bush, 92; "O alto Dios, ¿a quién contaría yo este gozo? ¿A quién descubriría tan gran secreto? ¿A quién dare parte de mi gloria?" Rojas, ed. Severin, 212.

bivir en mi pequeña casa esenta y señora que no en sus ricos palacios  
sojuzgada y cativa.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, after having sex, Areúsa reveals her knowledge that personal integrity outstrips ostensible honour and that, even though she is a prostitute, the freedom it grants is preferable to a loyalty that is nothing more than servitude. In order to understand the negotiations of the value of “honour” between class and gender here, it might be instructive to note these two characters’ further “fortunes” in all their poetic justice: Pármeno comes to a tragic end, while Areúsa survives.

### *Sempronio and Elicia*

Now let us move to a more materialistic value, money, as embodied by Sempronio, the other servant in the text. At the beginning he seems to be Pármeno’s counterpart, up for every trick. His mentality is a parody of *carpe diem* (“seize the day,” a leitmotif of the text), since he is quick to detect everyday situations in which he can exploit anyone at hand. Although it is clear from the beginning that he maintains a sexual relationship with Elicia, the young prostitute living with Celestina, their only sexual intercourse mentioned in the text happens during the banquet. Again, it is Celestina, with her voyeuristic delight, who initiates the scene:

Kiss and hug because I can only gain pleasure watching you. When you’re round the table, anything goes from the waist up. [...] May God bless you, laugh and pleasure, you cheeky devils! That’s the best way to end this squabbling. But watch you don’t knock the table over!

Besaos y abraços, que a mí no me queda otra cosa sino gozarme de vello. Mientras a la mesa estáys, de la cinta arriba todo se perdona [...]; Bendígaos Dios como lo reýs y holgáys, putillos, loquillos, traviessos! [...] mira no derribés la mesa!<sup>31</sup>

The noble Melibea’s servant, calling for Celestina to go to her desperate mistress, suddenly interrupts this surfeit of wine, food, and sex. After the banquet and

30. Rojas, trans. Bush, 107–09; Rojas, ed. Severin, 232–33.

31. Rojas, trans. Bush, 107; Rojas, ed. Severin, 232.

sex with Elicia, Sempronio quickly transforms into a ruthless killer: arguably, his former attitude of *carpe diem* becomes ever more perverted through each exposure to sex. Acting out his desires transforms his intelligent, ostensibly reasonable attitude into one of pure greed for material gain, exemplifying the axiom that “time is money” in a literal sense. Still, the gold chain he was so eager to acquire by murdering Celestina remains in the latter’s house, thereby passing into the property of her “heir” Elicia—Sempronio’s sex partner. Again, it is the woman who not only experiences pleasure, but who “seizes her day,” in this case effortlessly obtaining the gold chain while Sempronio ends up hanging from the gallows with Pármeno.

### ***Calisto and Melibea***

Love, of course, is the most ostensible value acted out in the *tragicomedia*. To flesh out its semantic scope, we have to focus on the noble couple: Calisto and Melibea experience the most extended sexual acts in the text. As Melibea confesses to her father at the end of the story, the two enjoyed each other for nearly a month. From the outset, the protagonist Calisto embodies a distorted version of the lovesick hero. As Alan Deyermond has pointed out, even Calisto’s first confession of love in act 1 sounds as if it was taken from a compilation based on the highly popular *De Amore libri tres* by Andreas Capellanus (late twelfth century).<sup>32</sup> The misogynist undertone of Calisto’s quasi-interpellation might be one reason for Melibea’s harsh rejection of him. Calisto’s subsequent performance of *amor hereos* (love melancholy) seems to ridiculously inflate the code of courtly love: “Me? No, I’m a Melibeian. I worship Melibea, I believe in Melibea and I adore Melibea.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet in the last dialogue between Melibea and Calisto, it becomes clear that he is pursuing nothing more than the satisfaction of his sexual drive:

M: Let’s play and pleasure in a thousand ways I can show you. Don’t be so violent and mistreat me as you like to do. Why do you feel the need to rip my clothes?

32. Alan D. Deyermond, “The Text-Book Mishandled: Andreas Capellanus and the Opening Scene of *La Celestina*,” *Neophilologus* 45 (1961): 218–21

33. Rojas, trans. Bush, 4. “¿Yo? Melibeo só, y a Melibea adoro, y en Melibea creo, y a Melibea amo.” Rojas, ed. Severin, 93.

C: My love, if you want to taste the bird, first you must get rid of its feathers.

M: Holguemos y burlemos de otros mil modos que yo te mostraré; no me destroces ni maltrates como sueles. ¿Qué provecho te trae dañar mis vestiduras?

C: Señora, el que quiere comer el ave, quita primero las plumas.<sup>34</sup>

This comparison between food and making love—here reassessed, as it were—seems to lay bare the physical character of Calisto’s love. His experience of sex proves any sublimation to be false; in short, he behaves like an animal. Hence, in the interactions between the two main characters the elements of an *ars combinatoria* become more evident: whereas Calisto perverts the Neoplatonic code of love by reducing it to purely physical sex, Melibea adopts an idealized vision of love by moulding her ridiculous suitor into a (proto-)romantic hero. Like the other women in the text, she seems to emphatically enjoy the sex act for its own sake, whereas Calisto is eager to show off his prowess. This becomes clear when Melibea tries to arrange some privacy by sending away her servant: “Why, my lady?” asks Calisto, “I’d like to have a witness to my moment of glory.”<sup>35</sup> And indeed, Calisto’s two guards are busier watching the erotic scenes in the garden than looking out for potential danger in the street. This constellation is later imitated in the scene where Calisto dies: the two guards cannot flee and Calisto meets his absurd death by falling down a ladder.

In Lull’s *Ars brevis*, and especially in its above-mentioned fifteenth-century Hebrew translation, the ladder as a *scala naturae* (ladder of nature) is a metaphor for the ascent towards godliness. Viewed from this perspective, it remains unclear if Calisto’s inglorious death constitutes a parody of besotted love or of the idea of transcendence as such. Yet through Melibea’s idealized stance, this specimen of *comedia* turns into tragedy as she decides to follow her lover:

His death calls out for mine, calls out to me, and wants it now, without delay. Tells me to fall like him and imitate him in everything. [...] And

34. Rojas, trans. Bush, 182–83; Rojas, ed. Severin, 323–24.

35. Rojas, trans. Bush, 151; “C: ¿Por qué, mi señora? Bien me huelgo que estén sejemantes testigos de mi gloria.” Rojas, ed. Severin, 285.



I will make him happy in death as I could not in life. My love and lord,  
Calisto, wait for me, I am coming!

Su muerte conbida a la mía. Combídame y fuerça que sea presto, sin dilación; muéstrame que ha de ser despeñada por seguille en todo [...] Y assí contentarle he en la muerte, pues no tove tiempo en la vida. Oh mi amor y señor, Calisto; espérame; ya voy;<sup>36</sup>

Although even this climax has a slightly ironic undertone, Melibea's transmutation from a spoiled girl into a self-determined devotee of love is convincing. This is confirmed by her earlier reaction to the marriage plans harboured by her parents: "My parents must be content with him if they want to be content with me. They should stop thinking of doing deals and arranging a marriage. Better a good lover than an unhappy spouse. They should let me enjoy my youth if they want to enjoy their old age."<sup>37</sup>

Admittedly, Melibea's quasi-religious attitude towards love does not correlate with any acceptable female model in early modern society. Such hubris can be sanctioned only through her tragic end. Interestingly, Melibea's last soliloquy is one of the rare occasions in the text where transcendence is featured.<sup>38</sup> We are not given a clear picture of her personal hereafter, but she seems to be convinced she will meet Calisto there.

### Primary meanings and their flip sides

So, what knowledge about love, honour, and money is acquired in the three sex acts of *La Celestina*? In sum, desire is the motor driving all of the work's protagonists, but with quite different effects on the female and the male discs. In

36. Rojas, trans. Bush, 191; Rojas, ed. Severin, 334.

37. Rojas, trans. Bush, 166; "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;" Rojas, ed. Severin, 304.

38. Consolación Baranda points to what she calls the absence of any transcendent view ("la ausencia de miras trascendentes"; see Consolación Baranda, "Cambio social en *La Celestina* y las ideas jurídico-políticas en la Universidad de Salamanca," in *El Mundo social y cultural de la celestina. Actas del congreso internacional, Universidad de Navarra, junio, 2001*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús M. Usunáriz (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2003), 12. Melibea's soliloquy is a remarkable exception.

men, desire corrupts their characteristic traits; accordingly, the text can actually be read as a *reprobatio amoris*.<sup>39</sup> In fact, one could argue that the three main thematic values—love, honour, and money—are perverted into three deadly sins: lust, pride, and avarice. If we deem the fatal ends suffered by the perpetrators of these sins to be poetic justice, the text would seem to invite a didactic reading.

As Jacqueline Ferreras writes about *La Celestina*, “The Scholastic defines the distinction between the pure and the impure and that which dirties the churchman’s hands: woman, blood, and money.”<sup>40</sup> What is true for the clergy during the reign of the *Reyes Católicos* (the Catholic kings) becomes more and more the case for lay noblemen, albeit accompanied by some semantic twists. Women were considered dangerous as a matter of course and were linked to impurity in several senses: first, their sexuality was closely linked to blood, both through menstruation and childbirth. Second—and even more significantly in the context of *La Celestina*—the blood corruption of patriarchal society was transferred through exogamous contact between/with women. And although *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) as a synonym for honour is reported to be a collective obsession in Spain only in the second half of the sixteenth century and through the seventeenth, various allusions in *La Celestina* to the predominance of *cristianos viejos* (old Christians) suggest the idea of a lineage stained by Jewish blood. It was an open secret in early modern Spain that many noble families had some Jewish ancestry—an issue elaborated in some *comedias* through peasant protagonists claiming to have more honour than aristocrats due to their pure Christian lineage.<sup>41</sup> In this context, the honour of the *cristiano viejo* is *superbia* (vain pride). Thus, Areúsa’s personal notion of honour can be read as pointing simply to the *cristiano viejo*’s flaw.

The desire for material advantage—against the background of the economic changes in an emerging urban society where the feudal bond between a

39. See note 8.

40. Jacqueline Ferreras, “*La Celestina* entre literatura cancioneril y archivos judiciales,” in *El Mundo social y cultural de la celestina. Actas del congreso internacional, Universidad de Navarra, junio, 2001*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús M. Usunáriz (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2003), 133. “La escolástica define la distinción entre lo puro y lo impuro y lo que ensucia las manos del clérigo: la mujer, la sangre y el dinero.” My translation.

41. A good case in point would be Lope de Vega’s *Peribanez*. For an analysis of “peasant plays” see Dian Fox, *Refiguring the Hero: From Peasant to Noble in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, Studies in Romance Literatures (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

noble master and his servant was no longer functioning—and the otiosity of the *cristianos viejos* constitute obstacles to a *vita activa* in its proto-bourgeois incarnation. Therefore, a lowly character such as Sempronio cannot manage to find a positive life script. According to Baranda, *La Celestina* stages only two social strata: the aristocrats and the poor.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, we can find here at least one important variant in the dialectic scheme of the “haves” and the “have-nots”: Melibeá’s father Pleberio is described as a rich nobleman, yet, as is revealed in his final lament, he earned his wealth through commerce. This not only challenges the Spanish ideal of noble idleness, but is also at odds with the Christian principle that trading is impure. An ironic indication of these conflicting traits can be seen in the name “Pleberio,” since its Latin etymology contradicts his patrician status. In my opinion, his commercial activities are evidence that he is a *converso*, as traditionally Jews had to pursue such “impure” careers. Pleberio’s somewhat isolated status within the plot supports such a reading. Apart from his business, he seems to care only for his family.

For the other men Rojas portrays in *La Celestina*, real pleasure is nothing more than exhibitionism, that is, being watched or boasting: Pármeno feels driven to describe his *gloria* to Sempronio, who, for his part, puts on a performance before the banquet crowd, while Calisto resorts to showing off in front of the servants.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, these performances do not make for very virile and strong male characters. It may therefore be completely convincing to interpret *La Celestina* as a didactic casuistic for the young male reader who seems to have been the first intended recipient for the text.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, what is intended by the careful development of Rojas’s female characters? I would suggest that these impressive female representations provide us with readings that offer significant alternatives to the didactic

42. Baranda, 16.

43. An interesting analysis of the need to be observed, from a psychoanalytical perspective, is provided by E. Michael Gerli in “El placer de la mirada: voyeurismo, fetichismo y la movilización del deseo en *Celestina*,” in *El Mundo social y cultural de la celestina. Actas del congreso internacional, Universidad de Navarra, junio, 2001*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Jesús M. Usunáriz (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2003), 191–210.

44. For the question of the intended audience see Dorothy S. Severin, “*Celestina’s* Audience, from Manuscript to Print,” in *Selected Papers from the International Congress in Commemoration of the Quincentennial Anniversary of La Celestina*, ed. Ottavio Di Camillo and John O’Neill (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 2005), 197–205; see also Canet Vallés (note 12).

reading of reprobation. For the female disc, the *ars combinatoria* instigates a process leading towards greater authenticity: all the women not only enjoy the sex act itself in an almost Lacanian *jouissance*, but also invert the drives of their sex partners towards a more authentic value. If we examine this flip side of the wheel of fortune, we may perceive these subversive values as a utopian counter-model of the society in which they are embedded: love is neither an animal drive nor a sublimated courtly affect control,<sup>45</sup> but a holistic experience of sexual delight and spiritual dedication; honour is not an attribute of blood lineage or of any other superimposed rubric, but rather a habitus of personal integrity; money is neither to be neglected nor considered an end in itself, but rather something to be obtained by “seizing the day” in the sense of being poised for the *kairós*, the opportune moment, and not in a sense of challenging fortune.

If we further apply the Llullian apparatus at the intersections of race, class, and gender, we can detect Rojas’s preference for the “inferior” side of the three dichotomies: Christian/*converso* (Jew), noble/poor, and man/woman. The Christian Calisto not only dies, but dies in a dishonourable fashion without having confessed. The only other nobleman, Pleberio, possibly a *converso*, remains alive and has the most serious monologue in the text, whereas his noble daughter, Melibea, meets a tragic end and also confesses—albeit to her father.

Nobility, as enacted by Calisto, is impoverished and extinguished—or in the case of Pleberio, who remains without an heir, sterile—while the gold chain ends up in the hands of the poor Elicia. If we read this important token metaphorically, we can argue that only poor women are united by ties of friendship. Celestina is killed, but the two other prostitutes manage to take revenge and, as I hope I have shown, all of the female characters exhibit much more enterprise and skill than men.

### Dialectic twists

Mnemonic art was widely used for all kinds of practical purposes and as a philosophical approach towards God. Thus, *La Celestina*’s literal re-semanticization of metaphors such as the wheel of fortune furthermore seems to profane the metaphysical background of the Llullian *Ars*. Thus, the valorization

45. For the importance of courtly love as an instrument of tempering the emotions of the medieval knight see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. I. *The History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

of the female can be placed in the context of contemporary philosophical inquiries, because there is another, quite specific, reason that Celestina acquires the gold chain. In Spanish, “gold chain” sounds very similar to its Latin form, *catena aurea*, and was a widely used metaphor for the structure of a divine order, especially in magic traditions:

The model for the image is a passage in the *Iliad* (Bk. 8) in which Zeus pictures himself dangling a golden chain from Olympus. In medieval and Renaissance thought, the Great Chain of Being extends from God in his heaven to the angels, then to humans, all the way down to the lower animals, plants, and inanimate matter.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the *catena aurea* shows an epistemological affinity to the *scala naturae*. Both images were familiar to Christians and Jews as representing the aspiration and desire for (divine) knowledge. Yet, in *La Celestina* the two concepts are placed in opposition to each other, as horizontal versus vertical planes. In addition to the several ladders featured in the text, Pleberio’s tower could be read as another vertical element. However, all these tropes of a doorway towards transcendence lead to decline.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, the gold chain seems to symbolize an immanent order—the social bond between the prostitutes. Yet, even their transcendent representation is present in the text when, in act 11, Calisto attends the Church of the Magdalen to pray for his fate. Ryan Dennis Giles writes that “the tragicomedy satirizes both the sins and holiness of Magdalene’s life, and in particular her power to make the transition from a fallen to a pure state of being.”<sup>48</sup> The background for this statement is the fact that Magdalene symbolized the successful conversion from sinful lust to Mary’s purity. Therefore she was important as a mystagogy, an instruction

46. David Mikics, *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), 138. One prominent scholar who elaborated on this subject was Arthur O. Lovejoy in his *Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936; reprint 2009).

47. As Hames indicates, a further elaboration of this metaphor is to be found in Pico della Mirandola’s use of Jacob’s ladder to describe the ascent of the pure soul to God (292). See also Moshe Idel, “The Ladder of Ascension—The Reverberation of a Medieval Motif in the Renaissance,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 83–94.

48. Ryan Dennis Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 70.

for new Christians. In this context the *Song of Songs* (4.12) also became an important visualization, with the Solomonic garden as a *hortus conclusus* (an enclosed garden), a Christian image of Mary's virginity. In *La Celestina*, it is the procuress's thread that restores virgin purity.<sup>49</sup>

These elements of the Magdalene cult<sup>50</sup> can be linked to the early modern advocate of a "Llullic cabbala," Yohanan Alemanno. Alemanno not only played an important role in the fifteenth-century translation of Llull's text into Hebrew but also wrote the *Heshek Shlomo* ("The Desire of Solomon"), a commentary on the *Song of Songs*. This text deals with spiritual desire and also displays vertical metaphors such as the tower, or *migdal*. As Harvey J. Hames explains, this reference to the ninth *sefirah*, along with all the other sophisticated imagery Alemanno offers, "is aimed at showing that Solomon was wise in all aspects of human knowledge and endeavour."<sup>51</sup>

Yet, Christians and Jews alike tended to feel uneasy with the *Song of Songs* since it was one of the most sensual texts of the Bible.<sup>52</sup> It depicts erotic corporal invocations, with an emphasis on vision and the motif of the garden—elements that figure prominently in *La Celestina*. A widespread messianic current in medieval Spain interpreted the *Song of Solomon* as representing humankind reaching the Garden of Eden after having overcome the Fall.<sup>53</sup>

Interpreting *La Celestina* against the backdrop of this textual material conveys a radical inversion of key concepts and sources in Christian and Jewish

49. See Giles, 68–70.

50. Interestingly, there are some scholars who obviously perceive no positive traits in the female characters. See especially Jorge Abril-Sánchez, "Una familia de meretrices: prostitutas públicas y privadas, cortesanas, ramerías y putas viejas en *La Celestina*," *Celestinesca* 27 (2003): 7–24. This author tendentiously emphasizes the fact that Calisto is attending the *iglesia de la Magdalena*, and is thus ironically depicted as a devotee of prostitutes. But Abril-Sánchez's ensuing interpretation of the various female characters constitutes a dubious example of a twenty-first century scholar adopting a misogynist attitude actually specific to late-medieval literature, with none of the ambivalence found in Rojas's text.

51. Hames, 293 sig.; Moshe Idel, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences," *Topoi* 7.3 (1988): 201–10.

52. David J. Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1992); *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Ariel and Chana Bloch (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

53. James Hamilton, "The Messianic Music of the Song of Songs," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 331–45.

theology and might well reveal Rojas's deliberate misrepresentation of the notion of transcendent knowledge, since its pursuers aspire to little besides their next carnal pleasure. In this sense, my Llullic reading levels out any claim for a hereafter. What remains of the destructive love acts in *La Celestina* is the horizontal disc of life embodied by women.

I am aware that my disagreement with interpretations claiming that *La Celestina* is nothing more than a parody is speculative, but so are those interpretations themselves; indeed, as Deyermond's comment at the beginning of this paper shows, so are most academic interpretations of *La Celestina*. To be more precise, the text is a parody only to the extent of the ludic surface of the (*tragi*)*comedia*, thereby veiling the all-comprising *desengaño* (disillusion) of the *tragic(comedia)*. The critical exposure of a more and more restricted social world hedged by an imposed Christian metaphysics can be grasped in a systematic counter-reading. I hope that my reference to the Llullic *ars combinatoria* makes it eminently clear that the purpose of Rojas's enigmatic text was precisely to instigate such ambiguous readings. As he himself wrote, "So when ten people get together to listen to this comedy being read, and all have such differing views, as is usually the case, who will deny there won't be arguments over something that can be interpreted so differently?"<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the most graspable subject in the tragicomedia is sex. I hope that my suggestions regarding the transactions of sexuality on a physical, economic, and social level will encourage other stimulating interpretations.

54. Rojas, trans. Bush, 213; "Assí que quando diez personas se juntaren a oír esta comedia [...] ¿quién negará que aya contienda en cosa que de tantas maneras se entienda?" Rojas, ed. Severin, 80–81.

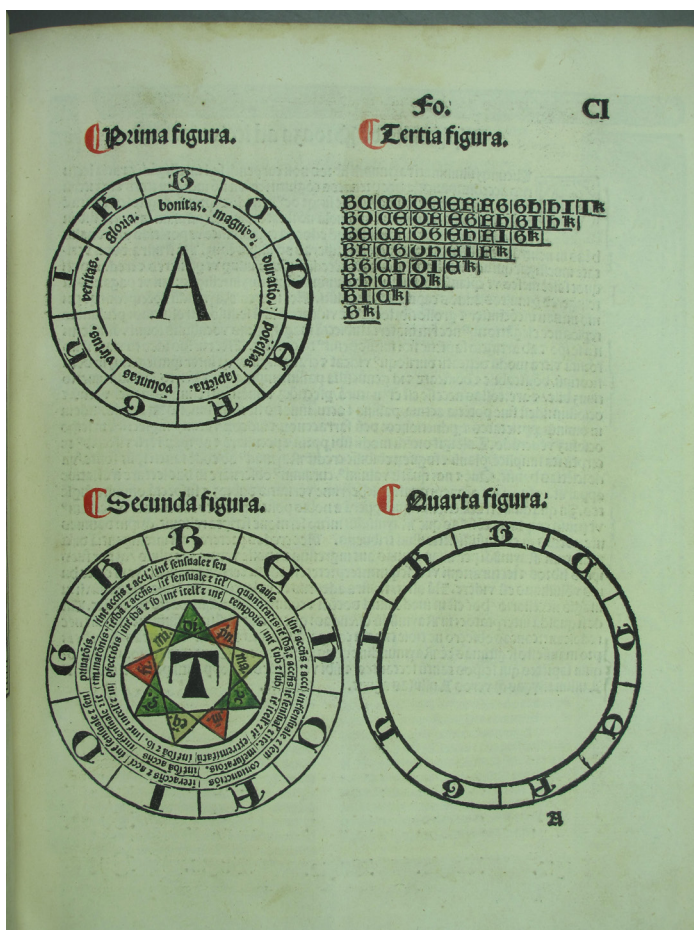


Figure 1. Raimundus Lullus, [*Ars inventiva veritatis*]; Divi Raymundi Lulli doctoris illuminatiss., *Ars inventiva veritatis*, Valentia: de Gumiel; 12. Febr. 1515; Prima impressio. Universitätsbibliothek Wien/Vienna, University Library.