

Apetito ‘contra natura’: Celestina and her same-sex desires

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ABSTRACT

Fernando de Rojas’ *La Celestina* drips with sexuality as represented by prostitution, double entendre, and hypersexuality but some scholars have balked at the opportunity to investigate the significance of Celestina’s same-sex desires that permeate through the pages in her interactions. This essay delves into a queer reading of Dorothy Severin’s edition of *La Celestina* using widely accepted hetero-normative scholarship but applied to the female relationships that occur within. Areúsa’s *mal de madre*, Calisto’s *dolor de muelas*, and Elicia’s mysterious *dolor* all benefit from Celestina’s cures and satisfy Celestina’s sexual appetite for same-sex desires. I also suggest that Celestina’s relationship with Claudina is more than a close sisterhood and parallels that of the reverence Calisto holds for Melibea. Finally, I contemplate Pármeno’s societal representation of repulsion toward «the Other.» I argue that Celestina’s passionate past with his mother motivates his murderous intention toward Celestina.

KEY WORDS: homoeroticism, bisexual, sexuality, same-sex desire, double-entendre

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RESUMEN

La Celestina de Fernando de Rojas es una obra cruzada por la sexualidad, la prostitución, el erotismo y la hipersexualidad. Aun cuando la crítica académica ha abordado estos ejes de análisis, no se ha hecho cargo de tratar la dinámica homoerótica que recorre la obra en torno a su personaje principal. Este ensayo justamente propone una lectura *queer* a partir de la edición que Dorothy Severin hace de *La Celestina* en 2000. En dicha edición de la obra se hace uso de perspectivas de análisis heteronormativas ampliamente aceptadas por la crítica, pero deslizando el énfasis hacia las relaciones homosociales entre mujeres. Si bien los personajes se benefician de las curas ofrecidas por Celestina, por ejemplo, el mal de madre que sufre Areúsa, el dolor de muelas de Calisto o el misterioso padecimiento de Elicia; estas dolencias también satisfacen los deseos homosexuales de Celestina. Propongo que la relación entre Celestina y Claudina va más allá de ser solo comadres, sino que más bien se trataría de una relación amorosa al estilo de la que viven paralelamente Calisto y

Melibea. Finalmente, abordo la representación social que ofrece el personaje Pármeneo y las actitudes de repugnancia hacia la otredad. Sostengo que el pasado apasionado entre Celestina y su madre, lo moviliza en su intención homicida.

PALABRAS CLAVE: homoerotismo, bisexualidad, sexualidad, deseo del mismo sexo, doble sentido



Apetito ‘contra natura:’ Celestina’s Same-Sex Desires

...Ransack the histories for clues to their past. Plunder the literatures for words they can speak. And should you encounter an ancient tribe whose customs, however dimly, cast light on their hearts, tell them that tale: and you shall name the unspeakable names of your kind, and in that naming, in each such telling, they will falter a step toward the light.

Jamie O’Neill, *At Swim, Two Boys*

Sexual desire and sexuality careen through the pages of Fernando de Rojas’s *La Celestina*, infecting each of the characters as if as contagious as the plague¹. The person at the center of the outbreak is none other than Celestina, but some scholars have balked at the opportunity to investigate her homoeroticism. Mary S. Gossy notes that «Celestina’s lesbianism has been bowdlerized by critical inattention» (1989: 41) but perhaps not intentionally. The Areúsa and Celestina scene in Act VII captures the most interest for its same-sex desire because sexuality and desire soak through those paragraphs easily and blatantly; yet there is an opportunity to extend these observations to the whole of the text, which no one has done, until now. Israel Burshatin claims this scene is one where the «butch Celestina is a surrogate penis, a momentary stand-in for Pármeneo» (1999: 445). Gregory S. Hutcheson drives to the core when he notes it is one of «implicit sexual foreplay that ends in Celestina’s masturbating her young charge» (2001: 251). And finally in Dorothy Severin’s edition of *La Celestina*, footnote 25, she notes that this «revela, quizá inadvertidamente, un interés lesbiano por parte de la vieja» (2000: 202).² I

1.– The authorship of *La Celestina* is debated and most scholars agree that Rojas wrote parts of the story, but not the entire work (see Cadenas 2018). Through this article I will use either «Rojas» or «Authors» to acknowledge this debate.

2.– I specifically use Severin’s 2000 edition. When quoting the text I use the act number followed by the page number as found in this edition.

argue this is not an inadvertent revelation of same-sex desire, but rather one episode that encourages the reader to consider additional interactions Celestina has with other female characters.

This paper takes aim at the homoerotic moments within *La Celestina* to comprehend the fullness of Celestina's sexual appetite for the same sex and how that changes the interpretation of the book and her character. In Joseph Snow's article «The Sexual Landscape of *Celestina*,» he remarks:

I will be looking at both the implicit and explicit sensuality and sexuality on display in *Celestina* in its multiple forms... The vocabulary in play derives from the terminology we associate with heteronormative behavior, and departs from it. That is, the attraction of male to female (and the reverse) as a 'normal' behavior, one leading to a conventional marriage and the formation of a family, *como Dios manda*, as one might phrase it. (2000: 151)

While Snow does then parse through such things as voyeurism, class revenge, masturbation, and orgasm as death, he only briefly touches on the Areúsa scene and even as such, avoids the multitude of opportunities to highlight same-sex desires and actions between women within the text. I appreciate that he qualifies his analysis as being determined from a heteronormative point of view, but then I too must qualify my reading as one from a queer point of view.

I venture to use anachronistic terms such as bisexual and lesbian not as an identity verified by the character, but to highlight the historicity of these practices later deemed «sexuality.» I do this with care and intention. That is, to challenge the heteronormative view, and call out heteronormative readings as anachronistic, especially when homoerotic scenes and relationships are very evident yet uninterrogated, visible but made invisible. I am inspired by Stephen D. Moore, Kent L. Brintnall, and Joseph A. Marchal's book *Sexual Disorientations* where they discuss time, affect, and the ability to reach beyond the present both into the future and the past. They state, «Queer affective historiography... might be styled a canny continuism, a continuism strategically transgressive of the alteritist protocols of traditional historiographical propriety and an exorcising of the specter of 'anachronism' in order to commune with other specters, other ghosts, future as well as past.» (2018: 20-21). A continuity does not imply linear, nor should it, yet it allows for a connection and perhaps many connections that can be drawn as tangential, perpendicular, or parallel, clustered rather than direct. They also go on to quote from Carolyn Dinshaw's 1999 book *Getting Medieval*, «'queers can make new relations, new identifications, new communities with past figures who elude resemblance to us but with whom we can be connected partially by virtue of shared marginality, queer positionality.' In particular, Dishaw called

for ‘a touch across time’ (Moore 2018: 17). While Snow, and many others, may see the heterosexual side of double entendre, word play, etc. I offer only the most basic of the queer insight into *La Celestina* as an attempt at such «a touch across time.»

Even with strong attempts at creating a focus on the same-sex desires of Celestina, Jean Dangler’s, or Gregory S. Hutcheson’s work, though exemplary, still lacks a thorough extrapolation of what Mary Gossy would call, «the untold story.» Though sex and desire soak each page of *La Celestina* calling attention to female sexuality, the untold story falls on those marginal areas that the authors allude to but gloss over, and too many scholars have simply obliged to allow to remain untold. What we can all benefit from, including future scholarship, is acknowledging the evident homoeroticism present within the book to allow for new understandings that can arise from highlighting these moments rather than viewing them as anomalous or different. If we can identify transgendered people, lesbianism, bisexuals, and gay men in the Middle Ages—and still 500 years later—then is it really *contra natura*? Or is it instead something very common, has been present, and continues to be present within nature and society. I argue that through praise, manipulation, and double entendre, as understood through previous research on sexuality in *La Celestina*, we can apply it to the same-sex scenes and understand Celestina as bisexual to better gauge societal reception of «the Other,» the bisexual, lesbian, etc. and how that influences the characters within the work.

Initially I will focus on the most homoerotic scene, Celestina’s cure for *mal de madre* for Areúsa, as a basis to develop the rest of the argument. Then, I will apply previous scholarship to Celestina’s ability to conjure Claudina as a method to tease out the parallels of the relationships between Claudina/Celestina and Calisto/Melibea. This section challenges the widely believed concept of teacher/apprentice and brings in sexual desire rather than a pure desire for knowledge. This essay contemplates the continuous use of double entendre to understand the illusions and deception the text provides, until one can understand that the same sexual symbols investigated with a compulsory heterosexual vigor can also be applied to a queer reading of the text.

In the most reported instance of Celestina’s same-sex desire, the *mal de madre* of Areúsa; flattery, voyeurism, and touch transgress heteronormative gender roles. Voyeurism is a type of sexual pleasure derived through the act of looking and watching, but Celestina takes it a little further when she touches Areúsa, «Pues dame lugar, tentaré» (VII.202). Hutcheson, Burshatin, and Gerli all agree that Celestina touches her and when Areúsa says «Más arriba la siento sobre el estómago» (VII.202) it prompts Gerli to note that she was «palpándole el vientre, y quién sabe más» (2009: 203). Hutcheson makes note of «Galen’s recommendation that midwives bring to orgasm women afflicted...» (2001: 252) which in-

dicates why he believes this scene includes Celestina «masturbating her young charge» (2001: 251). Therefore, the look and the praise eventually led to touch and together show her desire. A desire that magnetically draws Celestina's hands to Areúsa's body.

Though the story centers on Calisto's incessant need to have Melibea, his initial reaction to seeing her is noticeably shorter and gains a much different reaction than when Celestina reacts to Areúsa. For comparison, the first time Calisto sees Melibea he says, «En este veo, Melibea, la grandeza de dios» (I.85). The first time Celestina sees Areúsa naked she utters:

¡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 quince años. ¡O quién fuera hombre y tanta parte alcanara de ti para gozar tal vista! Por Dios, pecado gana en no dar parte destas gracias a todos los que bien te quieren... (VII.202).

The reactions are measurable through the number of words used. There are two thoughts here then. The most accepted thought is that she responds with praise to increase the sexual enticement for Pármemo. I find a problem with this suggestion though and argue that she is responding to her sight with fervor and seduction out of an abundant desire for that which society claims she cannot have.

When given the choice between a male or a female to express such pleasure at this sight, the author chose to put the words in the mouth of Celestina. Jean Dangler puts it best when she suggests that «Celestina performs the male role of gender when she delights in Areúsa» (2001: 70). The authors capitalize on these gender norms to invoke the irony found within Celestina's statement, «¡O quien fuera hombre y tanta parte alcanzara de ti para gozar tal vista!» (VII.202). She most certainly can enjoy her view even if she is not able to follow through on her thoughts because she does not possess the parts necessary to have penetrating sex. Only Pármemo, who has a penis, can fulfill and fully indulge in the view and the cure (read sex) that will come shortly after. Celestina, though lacking a penis or dildo, still delights in this view by spewing her glorification onto Areúsa. In her praise she reinforces a heteronormative discourse while her imagination can fulfill the lesbian experience as she actively participates in foreplay. Celestina bemoans her lack of a penis, «o quién fuera hombre,» but the spoken desire is indeed there, dildo or not. Pármemo performs the final remedy, but Celestina's carnal praise should not fall on deaf ears. The work builds on conversation as a method to

imply staging, acting, and who addresses who, but also the framework for most of the double entendre written about by others.

E. Michael Gerli impresses the importance of the event, the look, and who hears, when he claims that *La Celestina* is «una obra en que se exhibían las propiedades eróticas de la imaginación sensorial, sobre todo las del ojo, las de la mirada, y las del oído... la mirada deleitosa de lo inalcanzable, la obtención del placer —sobre todo el placer sexual— en el mismo acto de ver y mirar» (2009: 192-193). Gerli's suggestion stretches across the entirety of the work through the importance of voyeurism and listening. Hearing, or who is meant to hear, is an integral part of understanding *Celestina* as a bisexual character, let alone a central part of the book with its many asides between the characters (see Illades Aguilar 2017). Within performance and asides or soliloquy, Alan Richardson speaks to the triad which includes the speaker, addressee, and side-participant or overhearer (2002: 367) which then makes the reader an active participant in the story. The two within the dialogue acting as the speaker and addressee. The reader is the intended overhearer, or perhaps the unintended hearer of the words being expressed by the characters in *La Celestina*. There is the possibility that *Celestina* spouts these glorifications because Pármeno must hear it. On the other hand, as I will highlight shortly, he has been quite enthralled with Areúsa from the start. It is the reader who must hear.

In addition to Gerli, Sherry Velasco in her chapter «Listening to Lesbians in Early Modern Spain» makes the sound or listening her central premise for identifying and understanding these early iterations of lesbianism or bisexual individuals. Velasco argues that «we should be *listening* to the archives to discover how women expressed their erotic attraction for other women in the context of how officials and bystanders used aural strategies to identify and control these women» (2022: 585). This strategy aids in understanding those intimate moments that happen behind closed doors in confined and presumably secure places. As evidence Velasco cites multiple legal cases when it is essentially hearsay that identifies the person as acting in a manner consistent with lesbian activities, same-sex action. While the cases present what was heard it was the unintended listeners that identified the actions. It is then in the words and the sounds that present another way to make that touch across time to find historic outsiders that resonate with the LGBT community today.

Rojas himself would have been both the unintended hearer and intended overhearer in the hot topic of acknowledging female homosexuality in a court of law. The private lives of the women who stood trial was told to the courts and thus disseminated to the lawyers, judges, and eventually the law student, putting Rojas in the same situation as the reader: an active participant. The question of female homoeroticism became particularly popular in 1497—approximately two years before the suggested

original publication date of the *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* the precursor to *La Celestina* —because of new speculation on the part of Gregorio López regarding certain Christian laws for those who commit acts «against nature» (Torquemada 2014: 94). The highlight of the debates was whether women could really sin without wasting semen or without the ability to penetrate but quickly became more about the violence of the action and how «contra natura» these homoerotic situations were deemed. María Jesús Torquemada reveals this medieval judicial interest was particularly in the violence of the act, but also highlights the link between prostitution and lesbianism in the correlations between «desviaciones sexuales, brujería y alcahuetería» (2014: 89). That is to suggest that prostitution did not end at sex for pay, and that witchcraft and deviant sexualities were also prevalent within the women of this profession. Celestina is an *alcahueta* and former prostitute still very engaged in this field. Dorothy Severin (2017) makes the case in «Witchcraft in *Celestina*» that Celestina most certainly was a practicing witch, *bruja*. These *desviaciones sexuales* then only go hand in hand with what the courts were already discussing, thereby giving Rojas and the later authors plenty more to build on when it came to Celestina's *apetito* for the same sex.

Rojas' knowledge of prostitution and the assumptions that accompany the practitioners could have come from these court cases or even through the fact that such brothels were looked down upon, but not outlawed. Rojas was able to aptly portray the three types of prostitution María Eugenia Lacarra highlights as common in Medieval Spain, «[1] putas que están públicamente en la puteria, [2] las mujeres malas, pero no conocidas como putas, y [3] las mujeres forzadas a prostituirse por su relación de dependencia con los alcahuetes» (1993: 37). There is a woman character for every level of this structure with Elicia as the third type, Areúsa as the second, and Celestina as the first type plus filling the role of a bawd. Elicia's situation fits with Lacarra's definition when considering the qualifier, «por su relación de dependencia.» Elicia lives with the bawd and has a good number of clients that Celestina has procured for her, nevertheless, there is a clear reliance on Celestina for housing and lifestyle. Celestina makes it clear that Elicia has been part of the lifestyle through familial ties, «Hazíalo yo mejor quando tu abuela, que Dios haya, me mostrava este officio, que a cabo de un año sabía más que ella» (VII.210). Elicia's grandmother was another past mentor to Celestina which means Elicia has been around prostitution for generations. Areúsa is Elicia's cousin as well, so the trade has been maintained within certain family members. Later, after Celestina's death, Elicia relays just how important Celestina was to her well-being, «Celestina...que yo tenía por madre, aquella que me regalava, aquella que me encubría, aquella con quien yo me honrrava entre mis iguales, aquella por quien yo era conocida en toda la cibdad y arrabales...» (XV.296). Celestina was considered family but is also attributed

to parts of her success, being well known, and her safety, *regalada* and *encubierta*, thus relaying her dependent relationship with this *alcahueta*.

Rojas replicates these categorical inhabitations of the different types of prostitution but also includes the nuanced aspects of each which reinforces the notion that he knew much of this world and would have wanted to incorporate not just the prostitution and witchcraft but the same-sex desires as well, or as Torquemada notes, «desviaciones sexuales, brujería y alcahuetería.» The authors even included another aspect of Areúsa where, «muchas mujeres siguieron ejerciendo la prostitución... en sus propias casas...» (Lacarra 1993: 44). Therefore, to make Celestina as ugly as possible would enhance and strengthen Rojas' self-claimed desire to write a warning against love to demonstrate «all the concomitant threats to family, state, and public morals» (Lawrance 1993: 92). Rojas exceeds his intentions to demonstrate her diabolical nature and everything it represented through careful crafting of such nature as *contra natura*. This is not necessarily a secret, instead it is made implicit in her character; one who subverts norms, revirginizes experienced women, and an old bisexual —completely against nature.

Turning from a historical perspective into the authors' intentions and/or access to such formulations of the prostitute and all her flaws or sinful attributes, I look back toward the text and how Celestina's appetite for the same sex becomes more apparent. Claudina provides one of these links between both the Areúsa scene and the larger premise of Celestina as bisexual. The first time Claudina is mentioned represents the only means of manipulation Celestina has over Pármemo, or «an opportunity to convince him not to oppose her,» (Eesley 1987: 138) but is it? After her celebration, «¡Jesú, Jesú, Jesú! ¿Y tú eres Pármemo, hijo de la Claudina?» (I.120) Celestina pivots away from Claudina to continue the thread of inheritance and connection between Pármemo's father and her. As Joseph Snow mentions she is «quick-witted and alert to this new leverage she can wield, [and] acts quickly to put Pármemo off balance» (1986: 261). She immediately adopts the use of the word *hijo* (son) to cement the familial ties; «Hijo, bien sabes cómo tu madre, que Dios haya, te me dio viviendo tu padre» (I.120-1). This part emphasizes the necessity to hear a message, or on Celestina's part, to find a route for manipulation. She needs allies, and the inheritance, not Claudina, seems like the ultimate fit until she discovers yet another route to motivate Pármemo, and it is Areúsa:

PÁR: ¿De Areúsa?

CEL: De Areúsa.

PÁR: ¿De Areúsa, hija de Eliso?

CEL: De Areúsa, hija de Eliso.

PÁR: ¿Cierito?

CEL: Cierto.

PÁR: Maravillosa cosa es. (I.124)

As is made evident through this rapid exchange and repetition, what interests Pármeno most is the possibility to have Areúsa. There is no *need* to arouse Pármeno to the idea of having sex with her, he has been love struck since the start of the book. It is the reader who must hear, and it will not be the only time this is true. This then questions the suggestion that Claudina is the only means to get to Pármeno. Celestina, in this scene, has focused more on her ties with his family through money and Pármeno's father, rather than her relationship with Claudina. This then compels us to consider her reactionary verbal utterance as that of awe, lust, and a voyeuristic act of female homoeroticism that then transcends to the physical. Thus, giving us good reason to delve a little deeper into her personal relationships with other females within the work.

Celestina's relationship with Claudina deserves further speculation and I argue facilitates a clearer perspective of a sustained recurrence of her same-sex desires. They are closer than that of a teacher and student or close friends, but that of lovers. When Claudina is conjured the second time it is in response to Sempronio's prodding on how it went with her convincing Pármeno to help in their scheme, «;que passaste con mi compañero Pármeno quando sobí con Calisto por el dinero?» she opens up to reveal the history she has with Pármeno, «Acordéle quién era su madre, por que no menospreciasse mi officio; porque queriendo de mí dezir mal, tropeçasse primero en ella» (II.142). This presents a difference between what has already been discussed, where it is thought that Claudina was her persuasion over Pármeno, as the evidence is there to support that Areúsa is truly that which convinces him. Once again, then, the prospect of hearing comes back as extremely important. What follows is Celestina's complete adulation for Claudina, the side of the story the reader does not hear when she speaks with Pármeno. What is subsequently revealed is the intimate relationship his mother and her shared, that *he* would know, but *the reader* must find out.

Celestina says the two were as «uña y carne. Della aprendí todo lo mejor que sé de mi officio. Juntas comiémos, juntas durmiémos, juntas aviémos nuestros solazes, nuestros plazerés, nuestros consejos y conciertos» (II.142). The closeness and intimate sentiment of this communication puts both women at, or near, the level of sisters; but the dual meanings of the same words in other scenes compels us to include sexual interactions. There is an abundance of research that links eating as metaphor for sex in other scenes (see Snow, 2000; Gerli, 1999; Palafox, 2007; Garcí-Gómez, 1981). *Placer* has also been shown to be erotic in nature within lyrical poetry or *cancioneros* of Medieval Spain. The act of sleeping, especially together, *juntas*, is also known as metaphor for sex as

can be seen in such texts as *El baladro del sabio Merlín con sus profecías* (c. 1400-1498), or Haro Cortés (1993), and Cantizano Pérez (2010). In the book *Sex before Sexuality*, authors Kim Phillips and Barry Reay concede that «there were accompanying suspicions that [tender friendships] could include something more than friendship, hints ‘Of some dark Deeds at night’ and ‘stuff not fit to be mentioned of passions between women’» (2011: 107) where they briefly use quotes from E.S. Wahl’s *Invisible Relations*. The notes of sexual and sensational language that surround the relationship, as told by Celestina, encourages this wonderment at their closeness. Of course, women can be as close as «uña y carne» and not be sexually active or attracted to each other but such is not the case between Celestina and Claudina, and Celestina and other women who are not even as close as these two were. The double entendre of the words used in this scene, as already discussed by others in a heteronormative vein, can thus be applied to Celestina’s recollection of what the two shared. These instances together highlight the sexual relationship Celestina and Claudina had, to the point that combined with Celestina’s adulation of her, begins to expand her role to the level of lover or girlfriend.

To take this point just a little further I want to point at the third remembrance of Claudina. Here, in addition to incessant praise of her, she also uses the word «varonil.» Celestina says:

¿Y tuve yo en este mundo otra tal amiga, otra tal
compañera, tal aliviadora de mis trabajos y fatigas?
¿Quién suplía mis faltas? ¿Quién sabía mis secretos?
¿A quién descubriría mi corazón? ¿Quién era todo mi
bien y descanso, sino tu madre, más que mi hermana y
comadre? ¡O qué graciosa era, o qué desembuelta, lim-
pia, varonil!» (VII.196)

There are several aspects of this quote to parse, for instance, apart from the use of *varonil*, she also underlines what I stated just above as the two being more than sisters. There is also a note of reverence here, and even scripture-like language present. But first, the Real Academia Española dictionary defines «varonil» as «perteneciente o relativo al varón; propio del varón o que posee características atribuidas a él,» which suggests masculine aspects to the personality and actions of Claudina. In this manner, gender becomes more fluid through actions and demeanor rather than reliant solely on one’s sex. Gender is and was a social construct which left little ability to move between the two. Thinking back to Celestina taking part in the male-gendered role of enjoying the site of Areúsa, here she performs the female role of adoring the male, while simultaneously projecting Claudina as masculine.

Jean Dangler speaks to this gender performance, in her essay, «Transgendered Sex and Healing» in that «Celestina and women close to her

transgress socially-accepted gender and, possibly, sexual boundaries» (2001: 73) but I certainly argue the «possibly» in Dangler's statement can be removed. Not only can the transgendering of performance that takes place in this scene be understood, but Dangler also points to Celestina's beard as a physical transgendered appearance. Dangler equates it with an attempt by Rojas to damage the image of the woman healer and use it as a marker of the grotesque, mirroring her subverting of societal norms. Claudina set the example of how Celestina can manifest manly traits while also fulfilling the socially accepted role of an *alcahueta* (seamstress, procurer, etc.).

Scripture-like phrasing is also evident in this conjuring which encourages a closer look at the religious or saintly undertones that come with this passage. Jerry Rank investigates the use of *Dios* and Dorothy Severin examines the use of *el diablo*, but one figure missing from both articles is the higher power, Claudina. Both essays do a much deeper dive into the role of these characters; *Dios* as provided in common discourse reflective of society and their expressions at the time; and both for their ability to work behind the scenes. In Joseph Snow's, «Celestina's Claudina,» he asserts that «'Claudina' lives only, really, in the third person,» (1986: 268) which underlines what I too noticed in that instead of there being only two characters named but without actual speaking there are indeed three. The third is Claudina. While I do not agree with Severin or Snow on the purposes that Claudina is used for, there is no doubt that she is used in several ways. Rank and Severin in their respective essays investigate how both God and Satan do work within *La Celestina* essentially making them named characters without lines, but with major effect. Snow does not reach the same conclusion as I in his paper dedicated to Claudina, but I suggest that she inhabits the same realm where *Dios* and *el diablo* exist, granting her power, reverence, and praise. Out of these three, Claudina receives the most praise then Satan, while God is mostly used for persuasion or hyperbole (Rank 1980: 78).

Claudina occupying the same space as the divine makes clear why Celestina speaks about her in a different way than Calisto speaks of Melibea. The sacred hyperbole Calisto uses to glorify Melibea, «¿Mujer? ¡O grossero! ¡Dios, Dios!» (I.95) is only necessary because she is still of the flesh. She does not exist on the higher plane whether he wants her too or not. She is not a goddess. Celestina, however, can praise her Claudina as if she were a god through scripture like phrases. «¿Quién suplía mis faltas? ¿Quién sabía mis secretos? ¿A quién descubría mi corazón?» (VII.196). She asks, initiating the image of an omnipresent, omniscient being. In Christianity this would be God or Jehovah. She is of course speaking about Claudina. Considering this scripture like structure of reverence and power one can see that it illuminates an image of God in her eyes. It is not as direct as Calisto to Melibea, but the authors equate carnal love

with celestial reverence through such use as sacred hyperbole. Further, the figure of Claudina, as a goddess to Celestina, invites us to look at the similarities of heretic tone between Calisto's love for Melibea and Celestina's love for Claudina. What both Celestina and Calisto do with this level of reverence is as Sempronio says to Calisto, «contradize la cristiana religión» (I.93). Manuel De Costa Fontes' argument that Celestina is constructed «as an antithesis of the Blessed Mother» or a figure purposefully designated to contradict Christian morals and dogma.

Celestina has been called many things including the «Mistress of Desire» by Gerli (2011), «capable of corrupting the entire city with her manipulation» by Dorothy Severin (1995: 12), «antithesis of the Blessed Mother» by Costa Fontes (2004: 138), and Gregory Hutcheson notes «her skills in verbal seduction» (2001: 252). Desire, corruption, manipulation, and seduction are all themes that are derived from sin and especially, carnal sin. De Costa Fontes argues of how the church congregation would look at her «she became the main object of their devotion, displacing God in his own house. The rapture that she provoked therefore elevated her into the category of a divine, anti-Christian figure» (2004: 117). The book of Revelations in the bible speaks of the anti-christ, but there is no warning of the antithesis of the virgin Mary. *La Celestina* serves as this warning.

The narrative that surrounds Celestina and Claudina when read next to and integrated with the heteronormative or compulsory heterosexual texts revealing double entendre and other hidden meaning, thus provides a greater understanding of the romantic relationship that exists between the two. As Costa Fontes highlights in the above quote, the desire for Celestina, or at least the services and maidens she provides, draws on and elevates desire within the community. Reverence for the procuress even transgresses established religious norms in this town and reaches far beyond the confines of her brothel. This desire is however directed toward Celestina but does not necessarily reflect her own desires. I chose not to highlight the times Celestina remembers the young men she has entertained in her day, or the command she has had over the town and its lusty desires because that has already been done and is clearly revealed either plain as day or through more double entendre (See Gerli, 2011; Snow, 2000; Bidwell-Steiner, 2015; or Garci-Gómez, 1981). Celestina's true desires hide behind double meaning and excuses of old age and expressed quietly through her *oficios*. There is no lack of mention of Celestina's age and wretchedness be it from the scar on her face to her beard to the repeated lines of Pármeno, «puta vieja.» Celestina too comments on her age as method to obscure her desires in such a way that only those who are familiar with her ambiguous social references will understand her desires' call.

Celestina's desires gain depth when the ambiguities of her speech can be understood. Yet another example of such cloaked speech arrives as another example of double entendre but between Celestina and Elicia. With flimsy attention into the dynamics between these two, their relationship appears to be as master and apprentice. The closer one looks though, the more obvious it becomes that not only do the two women live together but also that Celestina has an appetite for Elicia. At the end of the 11th act Celestina arrives home late after conducting business with Pármeno and Sempronio. Elicia worries about this tardiness and scolds Celestina, to which she responds, «dexemos su yda y mi tardanza; entendamos en cenar y dormir» (XI.255). This is yet another time when the combination of eating and sleeping is used. Jean Dangler notes on an earlier instance that «Celestina's request surely implies that she and her protegee share the same bedroom and bed, as did Celestina and Claudina in the past» (2001: 78). Celestina's relationship with Claudina mirrors that between her and Elicia.

Fernando Cantalapiedra Erostarbe suggests that «la 'cámara/cama' es un espacio eufórico del amor,» (1986: 172) yet still from a heteronormative space. He claims that the use of the verbs «'acostar, dormir, reposar' connotan el descanso funcional» and cites the exact line investigated here to contribute to his analysis. Let us remember though that when Celestina establishes her intimate relationship with Claudina she catalogs eating, sleeping, relaxation, and pleasures as those things the two shared. The infinitive of the word used in that catalog is *dormir* yet surrounding this instance a plethora of sexual imagery lingers to play. I have also pointed to many sources that directly link the verb *dormir* to sexual acts. Erostarbe's claim that the verb *dormir* only refers to the physical act of sleeping in this instance is then nullified by not only the work's known sexuality but also through the specific use of metaphor. Since Elicia and her relationship is a mirror to that of hers with Claudina, the sexual undertones then also mirror the same.

This scene still contains more especially regarding the pain and the cure. Many have already shown that Celestina sees sex as a remedy for different types of pain. Calisto's feigned *dolor de muelas* is a prime example of clear symbolism of sexual desire (see West 1979). There is no actual molar pain, instead this pain serves as a euphemism for sexual desire toward someone else. The cure is sex with that person. I also understand Areusa's pain from *mal de madre* to be a calling card for desired sex, though it is not so apparent at first. As I have already shown, Celestina provides the remedy for this malady through her touching and then allowing Pármeno to take over with coitus. Areúsa brings it up again though early in Act VIII when trying to get Pármeno to stay in bed with her she says, «Pues así goze de mi alma, no se me ha quitado el mal de la madre; no sé cómo puede ser» (IIX.211). This comes around her multiple

attempts at getting her young lover to stay by her side even though it is already the middle of the day. Jean Dangler sees this as a failed remedy (2001: 72) but when positioned and understood through Areúsa's clear attempts at getting him to stay, serves as yet another way to instigate and call for the remedy. The remedy, the sex, is being called forth by Areúsa after first being prescribed by Celestina.

I make the point that Celestina views sex as remedy because when she supposes Elicia is in pain from being left alone, I claim she is suggesting the same for her. Elicia is confused by this pain that Celestina insists she has:

CEL: ...Pero no te duele a ti en ese lugar.

ELIC: «Pues, ¿qué me ha de doler?»

CEL: Que se fue la compañía; que te dexé y quedaste sola.

ELIC: Son passadas quatro horas después; ¿y avíaseme de acordar desso?

CEL: Quanto más presto te dexaron, más con razón lo sentiste. Pero dexemos su yda y mi tardança; entendamos en cenar y dormir. (XI.254)

I will borrow from George A. Shipley to describe this moment as «When desires and appetites come into collision with each other and into conflict with social conventions, ambiguity becomes armour for self-defence [sic] and a key tool for practical persuasion» (1975: 328). He goes on to describe sickness and sickness images and how they are used to manipulate characters within *La Celestina* in his article «Concerting through Conceit: Unconventional Uses of Conventional Sickness Images in 'La Celestina'.» The fuzzy definitions of *dolor* in its many forms allows this ambiguity to form meaning between the speaker, addressee, and the overhearer. Celestina gives Elicia reasons why she would be in pain, the two continue to go back and forth to which Celestina finally suggest that they «[entiendan] en cenar y dormir.» She invokes understanding of this confusion, these blurred definitions of pain, to be understood by eating and sleeping, which has been shown to function as hyperbole for sex. She is the medicine to the pain much like Calisto is Melibea's medicine (Fontes 1984: 6). Celestina, a master manipulator, pulls the thread of solitude to quickly rapture Elicia in her enduring company through sex.

This then makes Miguel Garci-Gómez's (1981) essay even more compelling as he suggests Pármeno's comment «¡O qué comedor de huevos asados era su marido!» (I.109) is implying that Celestina's sexual appetite is so grand that her partner must have needed aphrodisiacs just to keep up with her. Elicia had sex with Sempronio only four hours prior, yet Celestina still provokes desire for sex. This small point is extrapolated by Lacarra Lanz when she quotes from Avicena's *Canon de medicina* which states that «las relaciones homoeroticas femeninas se producen cuando

el hombre no puede satisfacer sexualmente a la mujer» (2009: 216) which would encourage her partner to eat as many grilled eggs as possible—if he did not want his wife to go lesbian for a night or two. This quote also speaks to how easily sexual roles or boundaries were seen as being more fluid but also as a symptom of sexual disfunction. This thinking and skewed association is of course dangerous and mislead. It does not, however, alter the fact that this evidence would support the more «hints» that were dropped by Rojas of Celestina's sexuality; ridiculous or not.

Imagery has proven to be important when considering hidden sexual connotations and still holds true even in a queer reading. In the scene between Areúsa and Celestina, Celestina uses digital masturbation to help Areúsa's *mal de madre*. Celestina rues the lack of a dildo or male member to be able to perform the male gendered role in full-on penetrative sex with Areúsa, yet the use of digits is still a form of sex. In an earlier scene, when Celestina asks Elicia why she did not help the young lady Celestina has sewn up six times prior, Elicia responds with, «Yo le tengo a este oficio odio; tú mueres tras ello» (VII.210). The act of repairing a virgin requires a needle, thread, and of course a closeness to that which is to be sewed or repaired. In this imagery Celestina has her face between the legs of another woman working with her fingers, needle and thread. Though one of her *oficios*, the imagery is similar to performing cunnilingus. George A. Shipley notes the «the potential of imagery as a bridge for communication» (1975: 329) and here Elicia reveals how much Celestina revels in deceiving unknowing deflowerers by remaking a virgin, yes, but also to have her face buried between the legs of another woman. An image, that relies on the reader to understand the closeness to other women's genitals is not solely for the purpose as described but relaying the scene as one that generates pleasure and happiness on the part of the old bawd. That and the recurrence of the need for Celestina to be between this particular young lady's legs seven times is reminiscent of Areúsa's further complaint of *mal de madre* as a ruse for wanting sex. A common understanding between two parties of a figure or figurative situation, to provoke and describe sexual desires.

As evidenced by the scenes reviewed, the propensity for Celestina to be bisexual is quite evident, yet I must wonder why or to what importance would Rojas include a bisexual woman in *La Celestina*. I think the answer in its fullest sense is still unclear because understanding Celestina's sexuality, until now, has not successfully drawn on all (or as many as I could) instances of when her homoerotic desires could be understood. There is a strong sense that the authors would have wanted to underline the diabolical nature of Celestina as was understood in Medieval Spain, especially if truly didactic in nature.

First though, I return to Claudina to replace all that I have suggested back into the text to realize the importance of the subject. In the third ap-

pearance of Claudina, Severin declares that «Celestina completes the seduction of Pármemo to her side in the Calisto affair; she takes her revenge on him by regaling him with a close description of her activities with his mother Claudina, and Claudina's punishment» (1995: 25). Finally, Pármemo agrees with her to become friends with Sempronio, the arguments, for the moment, are finished. What follows though is a continuation of praise like those that arose after Sempronio's question in the second conjuring. The point I want to clarify is that the manipulation was already finished before this effusion of memories. As I mentioned earlier, the convention that Claudina was a tool, or Celestina's only means of manipulation over Pármemo really becomes damaged here. Joseph Snow identifies this complication when he determines that «...while certainly phrased in eloquent rhetorical phrases, not overtly intended to persuade anyone of anything. But, even so, this permits her to keep Claudina very much in the forefront of her concentration, at least as far as Pármemo is concerned. [Snow] would venture to say that the person most 'taken in' by these idealized recollections of former days is Celestina herself» (1986: 272). The memories of those good times are not necessary, initially. If the text is analyzed with the concept of a necessity to persuade Pármemo—as suggested by Snow's comment—we lose the relevance of parable, or the necessity for the reader to hear. What the reader gains from hearing is the support of the amorous relationship between Celestina and Claudina.

If one accepts Celestina as bisexual, there are other realizations to be made, especially in her murder scene. Snow suggests that the conjuring of Claudina only served to awaken *something* in Pármemo, and Severin equates the memories with vengeance. I disagree with this suggestion because the invocation of Claudina is not simply to control Pármemo, and that *something* is a deep hatred of his mother's lover. Even though Claudina is a memory, her story is written by Celestina through Rojas. «Claudina's 'autor' es Celestina» (1986: 259) says Snow, «her 'Claudina' lives only, really, in the third person of Celestina's narration and, although we get quite far into her character realization, she cannot be cut free from that dependence» (1986: 268). His essay underlines Claudina as one of three invisible characters present in the story used to affect change. To say this in combination with the suggestion of Snow that Celestina is the most «taken in» it is understood that this is not just a convenient memory, but a sentimental memory of her goddess. A lover's remembrance. The one negatively affected by these stories, however, is indeed Pármemo.

Before her death, Celestina conjures Claudina for the final time, «Y tú, Pármemo, *no pienses que soy tu cativa por saber mis secretos y mi vida pasada y los casos que nos acaescieron a mí y a la desdichada de tu madre...*» (XII.273). To which Pármemo responds, «No me hinchas las narices con esas memorias si no embiarte he con nuevas a ella, donde mejor te puedas quejar» (XII.273). Pármemo threatens her life at the men-

tion of his mother in a manner that imitates her first adulation of his mother in front of him. Her words are, «No me la nombres, hijo, por Dios, que se me hinchen los ojos de agua» (VII.196) which she speaks before going into the scripture-like reverie reviewed previously. Nevertheless, the repetition begs for a reading of a revision to the story. The contrast of emotions surrounding these swellings (*hinchar*) both emanate from a deep personal space within both; reactions that surround memories of Claudina. She may cry from these stories where her eyes *swell* with water, but he is enraged by them to the point that his nose flares out of rage. Like society, he does not want to hear any more about the lesbian adventures of his mother or Celestina's «secretos y [su] vida pasada.» If she is so in love with his mother, she can reunite with her in hell, the biblically prescribed destination for people against nature. Pármeno's reaction is of anger, rage, and ire turned toward his mother's lover. This final act of killing Celestina completes the «pena de muerte» prescribed by the *Fuero Juzgo* for *alcahuetas* and sodomites, fulfilling what unfortunately has continued to be the fate of the «other,» especially of LGBT characters.

This quick interaction encourages others like Severin and Snow to read Claudina as a tool. It is in this moment that Snow opines that «Celestina's Claudina turns against her» and that it is «blindness that constitutes her fatal flaw» (1986: 270). Celestina's stubbornness and inability to stop bringing up Claudina lights the flame that is the hatred within Pármeno that finally motivates his desire to kill her. It is important to remember that when Sempronio was set on going to Celestina's place to get their treasure, Pármeno was thinking about going home to sleep or to eat. This could be a call to sexual inuendo again, but Sempronio disturbs this by saying «ve tú donde quisieres...yo yr a Celestina a cobrar mi parte de la cadena» (12.268). It is only Celestina's mention of Claudina and her secrets and past life that flip the switch in Pármeno. Incorporating the roles of subverting societal norms, homoeroticism, and lover of Claudina, I offer that if this book is read as a parable and that it is «meant to warn us against falling in love, or against courtly love, or against the perils of passion» (Lawrance 1993: 88) then the same moral extends to Celestina's story. Severin suggests the memories of Claudina were used as vengeance toward Pármeno, but with our interpretation, Celestina's death represents Pármeno's, and perhaps society's, vengeance against her. The warning served could then be interpreted as a threat of death toward anyone that lives on the margins of sexuality, or who subverts norms, someone who is the Other.

In a recent essay about the gay novel in Latin America, Daniel Balderston and José Maristany (2005) reveal that suicide and other forms of violence are often the fate of the LGBT person. This essay adds an older account to their list and draws it back to Medieval Spain whose religion and imperialism brought with it more violence to Latin America. While Hutch-

eson and Burshatin believe female homosexuality might not have been as invisible as previously decided by others, we still see what Gossy would call «the untold story» or that which is intentionally left out. Rojas and the other authors added to the story and included facets of information and facts relevant to prostitution that few would have cared to include in their work. What is left regarding Celestina's same sex desires and the love affair with Claudina, is an intentional omission, but one that need not be told because it could be understood or presumed. For this part, it is not the imagination that fills the story, but the hints and the scholarship done by others with a heteronormative scope, but finally turned and applied without fear of acknowledging that Celestina was bisexual. Pármemo's reaction fulfilled the prosecution of the «other» and adds one more story to Balderstein's investigation into historic and contemporary LGBT texts as those that terminate the Other, the LGBT character, with violence.

The question that remains then is, did Rojas understand that the laws and institutions pit against people that we could today understand as within the LGBT community, also be those that would be used against *conversos*? I cannot say, and this will depend on whether one believes him to be a converso or not, but I do find it interesting that the fate of those who fulfilled the *pena de muerte* of «the Other» met with a swift death themselves. As Sosia recounts the reason, «manda la justicia [que] mueran los violentos matadores» (XIII.280). I believe more could be said and I think it is a fabulous question that can now be thought out with the addition of this essay to the mountains of scholarship into the sexuality present in *La Celestina*. To understand Celestina as bisexual as a touch across time, and how the subject was both intertwined and untold will promote new interpretations that have been hidden because of the heteronormative course. It will not change the bad aspects Celestina represents, especially her manipulation and greed, on the contrary, it will help us understand Celestina in her environment to answer to the scarcity of research into this subject. I know much more could be said about this topic and there were many things I could not get to. For instance, I would like to know more about the role of Pármemo's father in this story especially because of what Torquemada reveals from *Liber Iudicioiorum* and *Fuero Juzgo* as suggested procedures against those charged with homosexuality and their spouses. Does Celestina's remembrance of his father and his specific wealth cause him more pain? It would also be beneficial if there was a full queer reading of Sempronio and Pármemo's conversations around Celestina because I believe it will add emphasis to the role of love between Celestina and Claudina and society's views of such love. It is my hope that this essay facilitates one more step toward acknowledging the representations of the LGBT community through history in literature. It is also my hope that with this work will form a foundation to answer some of these questions.

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