

## *Celestina's* Erasmian Turn: Feliciano de Silva's Sequel

*En 1534 Feliciano de Silva publicó Segunda Celestina, la primera y más influyente de varias continuaciones del éxito editorial de Fernando de Rojas. En esta entretenida ficción, Silva resucita a la alcahueta y reinventa su historia para rectificar las violentas y eróticas atrocidades del original con las verdades de la fe vistas a través del humanismo erasmista, el cual se descubre en los valores espirituales, éticos y sociales que traslucen el texto de Silva. Este trabajo explora las formas en que Segunda Celestina retrata de manera desenfadada y un tanto carnavalesca el progreso espiritual de una sociedad imperfecta moralmente, pero inherentemente buena. En este sentido, Segunda Celestina se puede interpretar como el intento de Silva de escribir un ameno relato para un lector popular que a la vez fuera provechoso desde un punto de vista humanista y cristiano.*

Palabras clave: *Celestina, Feliciano de Silva, Erasmo, humanismo cristiano.*

*In 1534 Feliciano de Silva published Segunda Celestina, the first and most influential of several sequels of Fernando de Rojas's editorial hit. In this entertaining and light-hearted fiction, Silva brings the old bawd back to life and reinvents the original story to rectify its erotic and violent atrocities with the moral truths of the faith as envisioned by Erasmus's Christian humanist thinking, which transpires in the spiritual, social, and ethical values comprised in the text. This essay explores the ways in which Segunda Celestina, in dialog with Erasmus's ideas, portrays, in a jovial and rather carnivalesque manner, the spiritual progress of a morally imperfect, but inherently virtuous society. In this light, Segunda Celestina can be construed as Silva's attempt to write a book of entertainment for a popular audience that would also be profitable from a humanist and Christian standpoint.*

Keywords: *Celestina, Feliciano de Silva, Erasmus, Christian humanism*

Immediately after the establishment of the printing press in the Iberian Peninsula, *Celestina* became a sensation and one of the first early modern "best-sellers." Over the course of the sixteenth century, *Celestina* and, above all, its eponymous character entered the collective and literary imaginaries, appearing frequently in moral treatises, burlesque verse, satirical works,

miscellanies of proverbs, and popular jokes.<sup>1</sup> With the publication in 1534 of his *Segunda comedia de la famosa Celestina* [hereafter *Segunda Celestina*], Feliciano de Silva, a renowned writer of chivalric sequels, would further expand this soaring tradition by continuing and recasting in a seemly manner the most popular narrative of his lifetime.<sup>2</sup> *Segunda Celestina* inaugurates a new prose genre, the so-called *celestinesca* or *género celestinesco*, a sundry collection of fictions related to *Celestina* in style and content, but whose main model is nonetheless *Segunda Celestina*.<sup>3</sup> Starting with Silva's work, *Celestina's* sequels take on its love story, its division into acts, its profusion of sayings, maxims and proverbs, and its narrative techniques, such as the exclusive use of dialogue, asides, monologue, and laughter. Nonetheless, contrary to the original's ambivalence, these follow-ups are characterized by their edifying if not overtly moralizing tenor, ostensibly intended as a corrective.

*Segunda Celestina* takes place in the same indeterminate city of Rojas's narrative in a period of time not long after the tragic demise of its main characters. The action opens with Felides, a noble young man in love with an equally patrician Polandria, complaining to his servant, Sigeril, of his love trials. In calculated maneuver, Sigeril suggests entrusting the happy conclusion of Felides's infatuation to Pandulfo, a lowly domestic servant and pimp to the prostitute Palana. The story acquires more noticeably religious connotations when, by means of a cunning alteration to *Celestina's* plot, Silva raises the old bawd from the dead by manufacturing a make-believe resurrection. As *Celestina* confides to Zenara, her friend and accessory to her ruse, she was never killed by her former confederates – Sempronio and Pármeneo – , but only severely wounded. The morning after the assault, *Celestina* had sought refuge in the residence of an old friend, an Archdeacon who owed her a favor for introducing him to his mistress, no other than Zenara. Recovered now from her wounds and calmed of her mortal fear, *Celestina* longs to return to her old house to resume her trade. To capitalize on her comeback and boost her reputation, she hatches a plan to fake her own return from the dead. In broad daylight, the old go-between thrusts herself into the bustling streets of her city, proclaiming that God had granted her a miraculous second chance to remedy her life and those of others. Well-versed in Christian rhetoric and dogma after her brush with death and a bewildering repentance, *Celestina* resumes her trade, but with one notable tweak: this time she will not traffic in unlawful sex, but only arrange marriage, a happy and proper conclusion for the great majority of couples in the story. Even if Elicia and Areúsa engage in romantic affairs with various lovers in order to make ends meet, the two prostitutes also long for love and marriage, which *Celestina* toils to facilitate. To be sure, *Celestina's* main preoccupation in Silva's sequel is honor, both hers and everyone else's. Although she reopens her shop and has an even greater thirst for wine, the

bawd significantly changes her ways and forsakes her two more distinctive talents, sexual peddling and black magic.

With the publication of this morally correct and light-hearted sequel to the late medieval smash hit, Silva offers the aging go-between and her world a chance to atone for their past wrongdoings and to amend their lives. Such a literary initiative gestures toward the social, intellectual, and religious atmosphere of Silva's time, heavily under the influence of the works and ideas of the maverick Dutch scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. In a manner not unlike Erasmus's works, Silva's *Segunda Celestina* offers a jovial portrayal of an inherently ethical, yet flawed society in need of spiritual regeneration, cyphered in the bawd's resurrection. The rebirth of *Celestina* is the springboard to critically explore notions of spirituality, virtue, and hypocrisy, to which Erasmus came back in his writings once and again as he explored civic and religious praxis. By setting straight a morally dubious narrative while introducing a subtle program of spiritual and social regeneration aligned with Christian humanism, Silva intended to create a work of entertainment unambiguously edifying.

Composed in the previous century, *Celestina* effectively disallowed the idealizing and transcendental discourses of Christianity and courtly love, whose sublimated eroticism crumbles under the weight of carnality, material desire, and subjectivity. Michael Gerli has noted *Celestina*'s radical rethinking of desire, which is portrayed for the first time in literature as an unidealized, unstoppable force that drives men and women toward their deaths in pursuit of satisfaction. In fact, despite the purported cautionary message of his story, Rojas was a pornographer of sorts, as Emily Francomano cogently articulates. Given its subject matter and popularity, it is safe to surmise that *Celestina* inflamed the desire of its readers, who vicariously participated in the joys and fantasies of its characters. All things considered, if *Celestina* offers a moral example altogether, this is a negative and equivocal one.

*Celestina*'s ambivalence did not go unnoticed by two Spanish Erasman humanists, Juan Luis Vives and Juan de Valdés, both of whom harbored contradictory feelings toward the text. On the one hand, they praised its avowed didacticism; on the other, they felt unnerved by the potential erotic pleasures and harmful lessons that the young and uneducated minds, especially of women, might draw from it. In his *Diálogo de la lengua* (ca. 1535), Valdés commends *Celestina* and its author's wit while also expressing qualms concerning its morality. When his imaginary interlocutor, Marcio, asks Valdés fictional *alter ego* his opinion of *Celestina*, Valdés applauds the character of the bawd on account of her decorum and natural, elegant language; but laments Melibea's weakness in giving herself so readily to the pleasures of carnal love (254-55). In a more conclusive manner, the stringent reformer Juan Luis Vives condemns the bawd and her eponymous work. In

his *De institutione feminae Christianae* (ca. 1523), Vives censures *Celestina* as just another mendacious and ribald tale, like those typical of the romances of chivalry, sentimental fictions, and lubricious popular songs.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, in his *De disciplinis* (ca. 1531), Vives commends its moral teachings (Gagliardi 62). Such an apparent contradiction is not altogether surprising. As Gagliardi attests to, Renaissance moralists struggled to pinpoint *Celestina's* puzzling deontology. Feliciano de Silva was no doubt one of many readers both seduced and terrified by *Celestina* and, therefore, he set off to rewrite it preserving to some extent its risqué and playful vein, while turning it into an uplifting work of literature, not unlike the chivalric fictions he penned.

Beyond the characteristic genre stunts, Silva's chivalric sequels, particularly since his *Amadís de Grecia* (1530), are characterized by an edifying Neoplatonic logic of the kind frequently found in Erasmus's writings.<sup>5</sup> Maybe moved by its Christian resonance, Silva dedicated his first chivalric romance, a sequel of *Amadís de Gaula* titled *Lisuarte de Grecia* and published in Seville in 1514, to Diego Deza, archbishop of Seville and one of the most zealous Inquisitors of Castile. It was precisely this educative tenor that refrained López Pinciano from criticizing Silva's *Amadís de Grecia* in his *Philosophia antigua poética* (1611) and, although Cervantes condemned it to the bonfire in *Don Quijote*, he also devoted some affectionate, yet mocking words to Silva, one of his knight-errant's favorites:

Es, pues, de saber que este sobredicho hidalgo, los ratos que estaba ocioso, que eran los más del año, se daba a leer libros de caballerías, con tanta afición y gusto, que olvidó casi de todo punto el ejercicio de la caza, y aun la administración de su hacienda; y llegó a tanto su curiosidad y desatino en esto, que vendió muchas hanegas de tierra de sembradura para comprar libros de caballerías en que leer, y así, llevó a su casa todos cuantos pudo haber dellos; y de todos, ningunos le parecían tan bien como los que compuso el famoso Feliciano de Silva; porque la claridad de su prosa y aquellas enricadas razones suyas le parecían de perlas, y más cuando llegaba a leer aquellos requiebros y cartas de desafíos, donde en muchas partes hallaba escrito: "La razón de la sinrazón que a mi razón se hace, de tal manera mi razón enflaquece, que con razón me quejo de la vuestra fermosura." Y también cuando leía: "... los altos cielos que de vuestra divinidad divinamente con las estrellas os fortifican, y os hacen merecedora del merecimiento que merece la vuestra grandeza." (*Don Quijote*, Part I, Chapter 1; 2002, 34)<sup>6</sup>

Admiration finds expression in parody, suggests Fernando Arrabal, who, in his impassioned defense of Silva, claims that "es el escritor más citado y sin lugar a dudas el más y mejor leído de Cervantes" (13-14).<sup>7</sup> Cervantes himself was likely a religious reformist whose ideas were in line with Erasmus's, as demonstrated by Alban Forcione and more recently by Michael Armstrong-Roche. If Cervantes laughs at Silva's verbosity in his above cited impression,

the paradox involving *razón* and *sinrazón*, often found in several of Silva's works, might also nod towards the author's folly, in the Erasmian sense of seeking and speaking the truth through apparent foolishness.

Erasmus's *Moriae encomium* [Praise of Folly] was published in 1511 to immediately become a controversial piece of didactic satire on account of its mordant lampoon and its facetious inversion of the logical order of things. As discussed by Watson, *Moriae encomium* partakes in the spirit of carnival inasmuch as it breaks with the sanctioned viewpoint and with the illusion of truth in order to open the door for the kind of renewal that would bring the soul closer to God. A similar carnivalesque frame of mind can be perceived in *Segunda Celestina* for it offers a vision of spiritual growth that reckons with human flaws in a joyful scene of communal bonding typical of carnival. *Segunda Celestina* is a comedy, its title reads. The three main axes of comedy, suggests Fraker (27-31), are its realistic portrayal of common people, its decorum, and its moral engagement, all of which are true of *Segunda Celestina*. In fact, as expressed in his *carta proemial* and as it was commonplace, Silva set off to convey a moral message under a cloak of humor. Among his literary models, Silva includes Juvenal, who in the guise of satire reprehends vice in order to lay bare the path towards virtue; Seneca, whose tragedies on the fall of princes serves as an admonition to guard oneself against the blows of Fortune; and last but not least, Plautus and Terence, the two main representatives of the Latin comedy and who also bore a powerful sway on its late medieval descendant, the so-called humanistic comedy, an indisputable antecedent of *Celestina*.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, contrary to the humanistic comedy and to Rojas's "dark comedy", as Jeremy Lawrance qualifies it, *Segunda Celestina* has a happy, if somewhat open, ending. Looking back like Erasmus in his *Moriae encomium* to classical models, Feliciano de Silva aims to correct a certain form of illicit and risky desire found in *Celestina* by means of a playful account of love entanglements at all levels of society.

*Segunda Celestina* introduces a group of ordinary fools who, in the Erasmian sense, live unburdened by negative feelings of the kind found in *Celestina*, existing instead in a carnivalesque atmosphere of joy, hope, peace, and solidarity. Fools are the luckiest of people, Erasmus points out: "First, their happiness costs least. It costs only a bit of illusions. And second, they enjoy it in the company of so many others. The possession of no good thing is welcome without a companion" (*Praise* 64). Erasmus sounds much like the old bawd in Rojas's original, however, the illusion he mentions and the spirit of comradeship will define Silva's sequel, in which characters coexist in perfect harmony despite their different social status and individual flaws. Feliciano de Silva imagines a rather idyllic life-sized community whose traits mimic but are far distant from the fully developed and complex marginal society of *Celestina*. Masters and servants forge an unprecedented

fellowship, transcending conventional hierarchies despite some servants' disreputable occupation as pimps. There is in *Segunda Celestina* an abundance of farcical scenes of master-servant rapport, facilitated by the fact that, in spite of their closeness, each societal group maintains its proper place and abides by their set responsibilities. For example, whereas Felides and Sigeril laugh at Pandulfo's bogus braggadocios, the latter constantly scorns his master's gushing rhetoric and, not mistakenly, admonishes him to quit it in favor of a more natural and sincere style. Pandulfo, as the most foolish of fools – a jester, a coward, a pimp, a gambler –, has a special dispensation to mouth the truth. In effect, Felides's affectation is the target of the ladies' ongoing derision. As it becomes progressively clear, this spirit of friendship, missing from *Celestina*, is the motor that enables personal and romantic fulfillment to be achieved in a web of mildly bawdy romantic liaisons.

*Segunda Celestina* tells the love stories of no less than eleven couples, from masters to servants, yet every affair is equally marked by propriety and respectability. Characters fall in love with their equals and steadily progress towards marriage, though some initially feign their romantic interest. Even Pandulfo gives up a life of delinquency to marry Quincia, Polandria's common servant and his counterpart, whereas Celestina asks from Felides as compensation for her services to marry Elicia. The couples of *Segunda Celestina* engage in a carefree courtship dialogue and amorous negotiation not unlike that of Pamphilus and Maria in Erasmus's colloquy entitled *Proci et puellae* [Suitors and Girls]. In it, the young male lover, Pamphilus, expresses himself as an outdated courtly lover to the derision of the girl he is courting, Maria, and whom he eventually persuades to marry him by praising the virtues of matrimony.<sup>9</sup>

Marriage, even if clandestine, as it was otherwise typical of chivalric fictions, works as a stabilizing force that offers a productive way-out from the impasse of desire characteristic of *Celestina*.<sup>10</sup> As Folly jokingly advises man in ironic and comic misogynistic tones, "he should form an alliance with woman – a stupid animal, God wot, and a giddy one, yet funny and sweet – so that in domestic familiarity her folly might leaven the lumpishness of the male temperament" (*Praise* 23). Marriage, further states Erasmus, "is an indivisible bond of life" (*Praise* 27). Although marriage requires considerable flattery, dissimulation, and even lunacy to arrange and maintain, it is the union that holds the self and society together, Erasmus reiterates once and again in his works, first and foremost in the *Encomium matrimonii* [In Praise of Marriage] and *Institutio Christianii matrimonii* [The Institution of Christian Marriage]. Erasmus condemns clandestine marriages and those without parental consent as fervently as he criticizes parents who put their interests before the happiness of their children, as well as the Church for not safeguarding, in its sanctioned practices, the

wellbeing of the bride and groom. He also charges against bawds for arranging secret marriages between inexperienced lovers, sometimes even when they are drunk, adds Erasmus, and for ensuring that intercourse follows the wedding (Erasmus et al., *Spiritualia* 241). Above all, Erasmus advocated for love marriages: “The most important part of marriage is the union of two spirits, and so those who are joined in body but disunited in spirit are living in sin rather than in wedlock,” he posited in his *Institutio Christianii matrimonii* (Erasmus et al., *Spiritualia* 219). Along the same lines, *Segunda Celestina* relates a series of love unions that allow characters to redeem themselves and to secure happiness through marriage and the honest courtship that leads to it, thus avoiding the mistakes committed by their literary forebears.

According to Iglesias (“Aspectos legales” 472), *Segunda Celestina*, like its model, inveighs against the institutionalization of marriage for sacrificing the happiness of the youth due to economic and genealogical reasons. Nonetheless, as opposed to *Celestina*, there seems to be an actual paternal impediment to the union between the two lovers. In his testament, Polandria’s father stated that she would have to marry her equal in birth and lineage, which paradoxically Felides seems to be. Rather than embarking on illicit sex, like Melibea did, Polandria decides to follow the advice of her principal female servant and confidant, Poncia, who recommends her to marry secretly in order to circumvent this predicament by not asking for her mother’s permission. Poncia herself would perform the nuptial ceremony. The honesty of marriage is a primordial concern for every woman in the narrative, especially for Poncia, the voice of reason, who warns Polandria that it is better to lose estate than honor. Following her own advice, Poncia weds her suitor, Sigeril, also in secret, but she does not consummate their union, asking him to defer sex until it becomes official. Instead, Polandria lies with to Felides much to the dismay of her maid. A lucky revelation makes the conclusion more proper. In the final act, Polandria informs Felides that they were in the err and that there is no such clause in the will. Two years after Silva’s resuscitation of *Celestina*, Gaspar Gómez published his *Tercera parte de la tragicomedia de Celestina* (1536), in which the two lovers lawfully wed with the help of the old bawd. Although *Segunda Celestina* does not end in an official wedding between the two patrician lovers, or any other couple, the text emphasizes the importance of marriage and establishes the path toward it. Perhaps a perfectly formal and official wedding would have felt anticlimactic in a sixteenth-century work of entertainment, usually reliant on some sort of love secrecy. Nonetheless, in an Erasmian fashion, *Segunda Celestina* tackles the problem of parental opposition in love unions, which it circumvents by conforming to the conventions of popular fiction and the promise of a formal ceremony. In other words, *Segunda Celestina* brings Erasmian views on marriage into a

literary context in which clandestine unions are the norm in order to offer an alternative to the tragic denouement of the original. This happy outcome is further secured by the effective lack of intercession from a go-between, at least of the sort denounced by Erasmus.

Among happy courtships and marriages, the reader also stumbles upon the blissful cohabitation between a former prostitute, Zenara, and an archdeacon. Although officially prohibited, we are reminded in Act 7 that their concubinage brings Zenara honor and motherly fulfilment, and joy to the archdeacon. In Renaissance Europe, the question of celibacy was a thorny one. Erasmus himself was widely accused of resisting ecclesiastical celibacy in his praise of the goodness and naturalness of matrimony.<sup>11</sup> The fact that he was the illegitimate son of a Catholic priest, and later in life a failed monk, probably only contributed to these accusations. In his works, Erasmus defended the superiority of virginity and the virtues of a chaste marriage, however, as a man of the world, he knew those two options were not for everyone – in fact, they were only for a few – and therefore he provided adequate paths when it came to dealing with carnality (Reese 567). In this line, Pamphilus – of *Proci et puellae* – commends marriage over celibacy, which he sees as an unnatural castration for men and women. Furthermore, in his *Enchiridion* [Handbook of the Christian Soldier], Erasmus advises the young Christian soldier to follow his natural inclination when choosing between marriage and celibacy (Erasmus et al., *Spiritualia* 68). In the Prefatory Letter to this same work, the Dutch scholar sharply attacks the laziness and moral decay of monks, who live of the community without giving anything to it in return and yet regard themselves as superior on account of their purportedly holy life. Erasmus then sets to spurn their vows, beginning with chastity: “Then as concerns the vow of chastity, I would not dare to unfold how little difference there is between celibacy of the ordinary kind and chastity in wedlock” (Erasmus et al., *Spiritualia* 22). Thinking along Erasmian lines, the well-matched and fulfilling union between a priest and his beloved seems preferable to visiting the brothel in search of companionship; however, Silva’s becoming portrayal of the couple and apparent lack of disapproval probably contributed to the work’s ban.

*Segunda Celestina* was included in Fernando de Valdés’s *Index of Prohibited Books* (1559). As Nate observes, the resurrection of the go-between was a challenge to religious orthodoxy, which reserved it for saintly and holy figures (400). The pretense of resurrection could have been interpreted as a mockery of Christian dogma or, at best, it might have cast some doubt on it. On top of that, in its trivialization of the miraculous, Silva’s text might conceal a critique of obligatory conversion, Nate adds (405). It is well-known that Silva had ties with the *converso* community both through his marriage and through friendships with contemporary writers of Jewish ancestry, such as the exiled poet Alonso Núñez de Reinoso.<sup>12</sup> Therefore,

being most likely than not a *converso* sympathizer, Silva might have felt drawn to the teachings and ideas of Erasmus, whose innovative views on spiritual renovation were as appealing to this community as they were despised by the defenders of the Catholic faith.<sup>13</sup>

In 1527 representatives from Spanish universities met in Valladolid to discuss their objections to Erasmian thought. One of the many points of contention was Erasmus's heretical disregard for the resurrection of the flesh, an accusation that sprang from several passages of his works.<sup>14</sup> One paradigmatic example can be found in the *Moriae encomium*, in which Erasmus pokes fun at the lunacy of some theological matters debated by pretentious clergymen and, in particular, their focus on the resurrection of the body (Fallica 98). Among the reprehensible delusions upon which highbrow theologians derive their contentment, Erasmus mentions their avidity for absurd and abstruse theological questions. To satisfy their hankering, he goes on to pose for them a series of ludicrous questions, including "whether after resurrection it will be forbidden to eat and drink" (Erasmus, *Praise* 79). Although Erasmus did not wholly support the resurrection of the flesh, he did avow that of the soul:

Of what sort, then is that future life with those who dwell on high, toward which pious hearts aspire with such fever? First the spirit, as conqueror and the more vital will overmaster and absorb the body, and this it will do the more easily in that now it is in its own realm, so to speak, and also because already during life, it has cleansed and lightened the body in preparation for this change. (*Praise* 123)

The path towards resurrection, asserts Erasmus, is paved during life through cleansing and spiritual becoming, just like the one that we observe in *Segunda Celestina*. Regardless of the go-between's bogus bodily resurrection, which might have concealed a tint of mockery, Silva's sequel stages the rebirth of the soul. If the feigned resurrection of the bawd was unorthodox or heretical, this breach might have carried further meaning for those whose lives did not move along the lines of dogmatism and for whom Erasmus's spirituality brought a beam of light. Silva, like Erasmus, might have not taken the reawakening of the body after death very seriously, but he uses it as a pretext to center upon a most crucial matter, to wit, the spiritual transformation of the self, even when it concerned a lustful, greedy, and deceiving bawd.

The old procuress Celestina is the axis that articulates the overall sense of spiritual transformation. Celestina, who in Rojas's original had transgressed every established social norm and boundary to smooth the path for material gratification, returns revamped into a dubious devout woman. Feliciano de Silva's go-between modifies, but does not completely abandon, Celestina's old ways. She is equally greedy and, on that account,

still aspires to profit from the currency of desire, nonetheless she carries on her business in an acceptable, sanctimonious, and low-profile manner, always with an eye to achieving marriage for her clients. On a humorous note, she comes back transformed into a downright drunk, often exalting the qualities of wine, but she never practices black magic again, which is undercut and replaced by Christian doctrine. As it happens, Erasmus did not bother to take issue with witchcraft, which is barely mentioned between the lines among the numerous superstitions described in the *Moriae encomium*. The old bawd abandons her use of necromancy to rely instead on commonsense and, most importantly, on the teachings of the faith, which she sells to her acolytes and followers as wisdom that she acquired in her travels through the infernal and heavenly regions, whose celestial expanses she claims to have wandered. Celestina refuses to disclose the nature of the divine landscape out of a newly found respect towards God, nonetheless she is quick to situate Pármeno, Sempronio, Calisto, and Melibea in Hell and to highlight that the latter finds herself in that location because she was “homicida de sí misma” (320). Suicide is specifically condemned in the Christian setting of *Segunda Celestina*, whose narrative is determined to avoid such an outcome. Fools do not commit suicide because they are the happiest of people, Lady Folly asserts (*Praise* 41).

Whereas Rojas’s Celestina, a master of persuasion and a contrived practitioner of *philocaptio*, love spells, sidestepped the social and sacred pillars of patriarchy as a means to provide an outlet for humankind’s forbidden pleasures and desires, her resurrected self is but a semblance of the former one. Silva’s Celestina first refuses to help Felides attain his beloved, advising him to do penance instead of falling into levity as his predecessor had done:

Mi amor, no curo yo tales enfermedades, pues sabes un proverbio que dize, que quien de locura enfermó, que tarde o nunca sanó; y el consejo que para esso yo puedo dar es apartar tales vanidades. Ya passó, hijo, esse tiempo de liviandades, y antes es de hazer penitencia de lo passado que de perseverar en lo presente y por venir, pues sabes que de los hombres es el pecar, mas diabólico el perseverar (243).

Not long after, the go-between agrees to meet with Felides again, this time in a monastery, “por más honestidad” (243). In that holy setting, Celestina urges Felides once again to live a life free from vanity and to focus on pleasing God, who will judge his actions in the afterlife. Although she still acts as an intermediary for the sake of profit, Celestina expresses herself more like a self-righteous prioress than as a panderer. But her brand new Christian faith does not end at words. She only agrees to arrange an encounter between the two patrician lovers when a life of chastity and

celibacy seems ruled out and only does it with the purpose of discussing marriage.

In her preaching on chastity and matrimony, Celestina is restyled into an unseemly spokesperson for Erasmian teachings. However, in spite of her spiritual metamorphosis, Silva's bawd has to suffer the disparagement of her society, who cannot wholly believe her transformation. Straddling seriousness and joviality, Celestina frequently complains about the hypocrisy of those around her, who, blind to their own sins, are fast to pillory her. For example, in the ensuing paradigmatic example, Celestina reproaches Poncia:

Poco has leído donde yo, nunca juzgues la toca por la lista; ¿no sabes tú, mi amor, cuán reprehendida es la hipocresía entre los justos, y que la palabra divina manda que nos untemos y lavemos las cabeças quando ayunáremos, por no parescer a los hipócritas tristes, que hazen uno y muestran otro, quiere dezir? Y así, mi amor, con ruin saya trayo buen manto, y no todo bueno, porque los extremos siempre son viciosos, y por esso yo, hija, me pongo en el medio, y aun porque dize el sabio que en el medio consiste la virtud. (321-22)

Celestina, who repeatedly reminds her fellow citizens about the Christian injunction not to judge if you don't want to be judged, embodies middle virtue, in this case between Christian teachings and an interest in financial gain. The possibility of virtue and redemption clashes with the bawd's temperament and need, hampering the accomplishment of her reformation though not entirely precluding it. After all, to err is to live like a human, reminds us Erasmus (*Praise* 43).

In his writings, Erasmus wrestles with a widespread lack of inner devotion that seemed to have given way to an affected and self-serving display of virtue in both religious and secular contexts. Erasmus was concerned that virtue would remain merely performative, causing people to become hypocrites. Even so, he also believed that, in most cases, the pursuit of virtue begins as a performance, in particular, as a performative imitation of Christ, and that, through the habituation that comes with acting, men and women could accomplish true and honest goodness. "The way we habitually act toward our neighbour reveals our hearts, suggests Erasmus, even if our other actions may not" (Herdt 108).<sup>15</sup> While undeniably she acts out a part in her interactions with other characters, resorting to flattery and role-play for personal profit, Celestina's actions more and more reveal her spiritual evolution.

In Act 38, in which the book's Erasmian threads arguably come together allowing Silva's views to take shape, Celestina receives a visit from an estranged "cousin," either a former client, a pimp, or a ruffian called Barbanteso. Barbanteso, whose name is a derivative of *barba* and implies tested wisdom, prowess, and rectitude, is a staunch proselyte who comes to

offer some unsolicited advice. His name also harks back to the old fool of the *Moriae encomium*, Brabanter. Nonetheless, in contrast to him, Barbanteso is closer to the maladjusted theologian that Erasmus severely criticizes. This mysterious old friend stops by to reprimand Celestina for continuing with her reprehensible business even after her resurrection and, particularly, for her dealings with clerics and noblemen, whose honor she ruins. In a contrived and underhanded manner typical of her, Celestina replies to Barbanteso's rebuke by underscoring the disenfranchisement and necessity of the poor, along with the probity of her trade: "Señor Barbanteso, aquí limpiamente bivimos y de honestidades nos preciamos, con pobreza nos contentamos, más queremos el poco interés de nuestros husos y ruecas con honra, que la abundancia de la riqueza con lo contrario" (548). Shocked by Celestina's counterarguments and unable to provoke in her the desired feeling of shame, the old and dour man reminds her of the legal risks of her trade and the danger of ending *trasquilada* by the Council of Justice. Notwithstanding Barbanteso's words, Celestina does not give in and blames the prostitutes' misfortunes on the thoughtlessness and violent ways of men, who take advantage of the neediness of downtrodden women to mistreat and oppress them.

The verbal exchange between Celestina and Barbanteso negotiates views on prostitution, both acknowledging the need of poor women for a source of income and condemning it as a risk to the morals of men, not least, holy men. Prostitution was becoming less and less tolerated in sixteenth-century Spain, which moved away from the Augustinian permissive attitude that regarded it as a necessary turpitude.<sup>16</sup> In his *Colloquy*, "The Young Man and the Harlot" (ca. 1523), Erasmus also calls into question the arguments in defense of prostitution as a lesser evil based on the reason that fornication brings eternal damnation to the soul and induces saintly men into mortal sin.<sup>17</sup> This is perhaps another reason why the archdeacon settles in a blissful concubinage with Zenara. Nonetheless, Erasmus departs from traditional misogynistic thought, never equating women with seduction or evildoing, and traces a path of redemptive spirituality for prostitutes. In another colloquy titled *Adolescentis et scorti* [The Young Man and the Harlot], Sofronio manages to persuade the prostitute Lucrecia, who stands for the Egyptian courtesan Tais, to abandon her ways.<sup>18</sup> In this line, the Spanish exile and Erasmian acolyte, Juan Luis Vives considered women to be morally and physically defective, not inherently, but due to the conditions of life, of which they were victims. As he intimates in *De subventione pauperum* [On the Relief of the Poor]:

una vez cerrada la generosidad de muchos, al no tener de que alimentarse... las mujeres que tienen buena edad, dejada la vergüenza, no pueden mantener la honestidad, vendiéndola en todas partes por muy poco y no pudiéndose librar de esa

pésima costumbre, las viejas inmediatamente se agarran a la alcahuetería y a los hechizos, unidos estrechamente a ella. (*De subventione* 133)

Contrary to their celebration of power and independence in Rojas's original, Silva's prostitutes frequently complain about the penury endured by destitute women, who, deprived of a livelihood, are forced into prostitution. As Celestina explains to Grajales, Elicia's lover, she would prefer her protégé to remain without a male friend and to make a living solely from sewing and spinning, but their needs force her to engage in sexual relations with men: "yo más quisiera que mi sobrina, aunque, mal pecado, sufriría harta lazeria y necesidad, que por su castidad se estuviera sola con su rueca y su huso" (Silva 416). In a gesture akin to the ideas of Christian humanism, *Segunda Celestina* accepts the possibility of at least some degree of spiritual growth when it comes to prostitutes, at the same time that it reckons with the impossibility of complete inner growth due to the scourge of poverty.

The censure of Celestina's ways is equally strong to the condemnation of Barbanteso's hypocritical reproof. In a further attack on hypocrisy evocative of the Christian dictum that urges us to first remove the beam in our eye than the speck in our brother's, Celestina encourages Barbanteso several times to redirect his critique against himself: "sp" (549). Leprosy, a widely contagious illness, was in the medieval and early modern period one of the markers of marginality, heresy, and collective guilt, symbolically implicated in religious and sociopolitical debates around the place of paupers in the body politic.<sup>19</sup> In the sixteenth century, the poor were identified with lepers and subjected to the same hostilities. In effect, Lazarus, the patron saint of lepers, would very soon become inextricably tied to poverty in the *pícaro* Lázaro de Tormes, who tries to better himself in life or, in other words, to grant himself a rebirth not unlike Celestina's, only to find more corruption among the supposedly "good ones." Celestina, who stands for the poor and who like Lazarus has been granted a second chance, relies on the wisdom of Holy Scripture to admonish Barbanteso, an unhesitating moralist, against judging her, for he might find leprosy in his own chest, were the soul symbolically resides together with the heart. Furthermore, as the conversation moves forward, Celestina casts doubt on the chastity of Barbanteso's daughters, whose sexual licentiousness brought corruption into his household. Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone, she propounds in a rather brash and ungraceful manner.

Having reached an impasse, Celestina gives Barbanteso one last and contentious piece of advice, that is, to refrain from giving guidance and to flatter instead, a suggestion abhorrent to Barbanteso. Flattery, observes Barbanteso, is not for friends; friends must be honest with one another. Nonetheless, the *Moriae encomium* presents flattery or *kolakia* as the sister of Lady Philautia, a sweet, yet deceiving, form of self-love from which

personal delight issues to the detriment as much as to the wellbeing of the subject. Connected to self-love, flattery, observes Erasmus, is not always bad. "To be sure, there is a baneful kind of flattery by which certain traitors and mockers drive their wretched victims to destruction, but this of mine proceeds from a certain kindness and candor of mind, and is much nearer to virtue than is what stands opposite to it," remarks Lady Folly (*Praise* 62). Lady Folly's flattery

raises the dejected spirit, it soothes those who are grieving, freshens the faint, quicken the dull, eases the suffering, mollifies the fierce, joins loves together and keeps them so joined. In brief, it acts to make every man more pleasing and more dear to himself; this is indeed the main point of happiness. (*Praise* 62)

Although Celestina's statement can be easily interpreted in a negative way, if read in an Erasmian light, Silva might have taken yet another step toward vindicating individual happiness and confraternity.

As he cannot persuade Celestina to change her ways, Barbanteso eventually gives up and leaves, but not before asking Celestina, as one last kindness between friends, not to slander his granddaughter. In the end, they promise not to defame each other's families ever again and to let them be judged by their actions for, in time, truth will reveal itself. Once Barbanteso is gone, in her last speech, Celestina decries the audacity of his counsel. As the old bawd sits at the table to share dinner with Elicia, she articulates a *carpe diem* that invites all to drink and to eat the spoils from rich pantries to put their plight out of their minds. "And so farewell...Applaud...live...drink... O most distinguished initiates of Folly!," concludes the *Moriae encomium* (125). But Celestina also utters a final piece of wisdom for Elicia that, according to the bawd, is worth more than Barbanteso's rebuke. If Elicia wishes to keep her lover, Barrada, by her side, Celestina recommends her to be pleasant and smooth at times and, at other times, rough and unruly. This is to never allow him to feel a comfortable hope to possess her so that he would continue to provide as to manifest his love. A sound and giddy piece of popular advice that Elicia welcomes and promises to observe despite her dislike of Barrada.

Celestina's dialogue with Barbanteso is key to understanding the social, spiritual, and intellectual background of *Segunda Celestina*. In a society in which everyone needs to play a role in order to survive and thrive, one should not judge the actions of others, but to seek their own inner and spiritual growth. The old bawd holds special symbolic value as a spiritual convert. Celestina is transformed by Silva into a God-fearing woman, whose faith, although at times unreliable and erratic, prevents her from wreaking further destruction. Through Celestina's recently developed concern for modesty and reputation, Silva suggests that spiritual regeneration is indeed

within grasp. Although her resurrection is a ploy, she is ultimately transformed by it. Nonetheless, Celestina's conversion is never fully accomplished given that her good intentions and Christian rhetoric are continually challenged by her precarious position in the world. For example, it is clear in her last speech that she looks forward to fleeing Elicia's suitor. Above all, she no longer trades sex and death, but mediates matrimony, and so she seeks to marry Elicia to someone suitable with the help of Felides. On the other hand, she is still a drunk and a miser who in the final pages refuses to lend money to Pandulfo to pay off his gambling debts, just like she refused to share her spoils with Pármeno and Sempronio in the original. However, unlike them, Pandulfo never engages in business with Celestina, whose tricks he often disparages and with whom he competes to secure his master's success and the rewards that would accompany it. Neither is Celestina interested in a partnership with Pandulfo, as she has learned the lesson that is best to work on her own. Celestina attains a certain degree of virtue; however, absolute virtue appears incompatible with female insolvency, which forces her to resort to flattery, thus appearing hypocritical in the eyes of the neophyte Barbanteso. And yet, the kind of flattery that Celestina promises might bring the happiness predicated by Lady Folly.

Feliciano de Silva's *Segunda Celestina* offers a vision of a healthy Christian commonwealth moved by humanist ideals aligned to those of Erasmus. As he lightens the tone and places the emphasis on confraternity, honesty, and happiness, Silva counterbalances the lack of moral principles and social riot of *Celestina* offering and edifying yet still problematic piece of entertainment fiction, judging by its inclusion in the index. *Segunda Celestina* attests to the possibility of spiritual redemption in search of a better self, but it does so through the farcical and carnivalesque resurrection of the old drunken bawd who returns transformed into an apparent prioress. Although the go-between resumes drinking and sex trafficking, her words and actions reveal a makeover since she now preaches the Christian faith and arranges only marriage. It is not even Celestina who performs the wedding of Felides and Polandria, but Poncia, the latter's maid and confidante. In this manner, the bawd is redeemed and placed in the path towards personal betterment despite her appalling life conditions. As Celestina loses her edge, the danger she posed to her society is also neutralized. With Celestina out of the picture, masters and servants also transform themselves through love and marriage, and enable order, kindness, and propriety to prevail. Much in line with the time of its composition and with Erasmus's views, *Segunda Celestina* portrays a society that, although in error, is capable of gradual progress. In the joyous and serio-comic narrative of *Segunda Celestina*, characters reveal themselves as ordinary fools in search of happiness, which they find in behaving well.

Christian thought, at least of the non-orthodox and humanist kind, and literary entertainment seemingly come together in *Segunda Celestina*, in which faith, virtue, and ethics conquer the characteristic pessimism, obscenity, and violence of Rojas's *Celestina*. In other words, Silva brought Erasmus's Christian thought into the sixteenth-century most popular story of wanton desire and raw eroticism to shed light on the path towards personal and social progress while providing his contemporaries with a suitable, but still fanciful, reading.

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#### NOTES

- 1 An index containing mentions to *Celestina*, together with its continuations and adaptations, can be found in Snow ("Hacia una historia de la recepción" and "El mundo Celestinesco"). For a detailed, yet circumstantial, account of *Celestina*'s ownership, reading testimonies, responses and commemorations, Chevalier (*Lectura y lectores*), 138-66.
- 2 The first edition of *Segunda Celestina* (Medina del Campo, 1534) was reissued at least four times before 1559, when it was included in the Index, being printed in Venice (1536), Salamanca (1536) and Antwerp (ca. 1540-1550). All quotations from *Segunda Celestina* come from Baranda's edition.
- 3 For an overview of the *género celestinesco*, see Baranda, "*Celestina's* Continuations", and Whinnom.
- 4 See *The Education of a Christian Woman*, 74-76.
- 5 See Crowley and Setkowicz for the philosophical and religious background of Silva's chivalric sequels.
- 6 This debt has also been underscored by Márquez Villanueva (56-57).
- 7 Márquez Villanueva, and several other critics before him, have noted that these words were probably inspired by Felides' first monologue in *Segunda Celestina*: 'Oh amor, que no hay razón en que tu sinrazón no tenga mayor razón en sus contrarios! Y pues to me niegas con tus sinrazones lo que en razón de tus leyes prometes, con la razón que yo tengo para amar a mi señora Polandria, [etc.]' (114).
- 8 On the development of humanistic comedy and its ties with *Celestina*, see Canet Vallés, one of the most recent scholars to investigate the subject.
- 9 An English version of *Proci et puellae* can be found in Rummel (39-51).
- 10 See Iglesias for an overview of marriage in *Celestina* and its sequels.
- 11 For these controversies around celibacy, see Erasmus, Desiderius, and John W. O'Malley, *Spiritualia* (xxxiv).

- 12 For a recent biographical note on Silva, see Cáseda Teresa. This article also establishes some ties between Silva's life and the composition of *Segunda Celestina*.
- 13 For converso theology and Erasmism, Asensio and Gilman.
- 14 See Homza for the Valladolid conference and Fallica for Erasmus on resurrection.
- 15 For Erasmus's theory of spiritual conversion as habituation, see Herdt.
- 16 See Kuffner and Zafra for an overview of prostitution in life and literature in early modern Spain. For prostitution in the context of *Celestina*, Lacarra and Iglesias ("La prostitución").
- 17 In Rummel, 51- 57.
- 18 A repentant Tais incinerated her possessions and walled herself in a monastery for three years, in which she subsisted on bread and wine only.
- 19 See Moore and Martz.

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