

God, the Devil, and Cupid: A Tripartite Formula for a Sinful Death¹

Jaime Leños
University of Nevada (Reno)

Sexual lust indeed chiefly signifies a disorder by reason of excess regarding desires for sexual pleasures. (Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. XV, "On Sexual Lust")

Avarice as to the primary application of the name signifies the inordinate desire for money. (Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. XIII, "On Avarice")

Oýdo he a mis mayores que un exemplo de luxuria o avaricia mucho mal haze.
(*La Celestina*, Act I)

Can there be evil without good? Do people have freedom of choice, or is what they do always outside their control? Is there such a thing as sin? If so, what is it? How does it arise? These questions, based on Thomas Aquinas's *De malo* (ca. 1267), were, perhaps, on the mind of Fernando de Rojas as he composed his masterpiece, *La Celestina*. There is no doubt that the teachings of Aquinas were present in fifteenth-century Spain, and that Rojas was well-acquainted with his religious philosophy as Aquinas's teachings dominated the syllabus of the *studia humanitatis* at and around the time when Rojas was a student at the University of Salamanca.²

In this article, I will focus on Aquinas's moral theories as they can be traced in *La Celestina*. I believe that they are paramount in establishing the meaning of ambiguity (or lack thereof) in Rojas's work. While numerous studies interpret Rojas's "moral intention" as a decoy to advance his project of writing sexually-explicit material, I want to analyze exclusively (for the purposes of the present study) the possibility of taking Rojas's assertions at face value. In this regard, it is important to consider Michael Gerli's study on laughter in *La Celestina* and how it can be a meaningful act of signification, thus supporting the view that Rojas "fully understood the semiotics of laughter as they were conceived and developed by the *antiguo auctor*." Gerli explicates:

Recognizing laughter's ability to produce a sharp awareness in the difference of meaning conveyed by it and by the measured sounds of public speech, Rojas saw how laughter cuts across linguistic codes and

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous readers of *eHumanista* and especially Prof. Cortijo-Ocaña for their valuable comments on this article.

² Rodríguez Puértolas observes that "se supone que Fernando de Rojas, antes de pasar a la Universidad de Salamanca, estudió con los frailes del monasterio de Guadalupe" (237, n. 25). According to Gilman, "given that Rojas was already matriculated at Salamanca by the time he composed his masterpiece, we can assume he had already been in contact with the Thomistic philosophy" (272).

spoken language –how it casts doubt upon them– and how it may be laden with trenchant, often contradictory meaning. (25-26)

José Luis Canet also explores the ambiguous message in *La Celestina*:

Queda claro para casi todos los críticos actuales que la *Celestina* tuvo sus defensores y detractores durante el siglo XVI [...]. Así pues, no nos deben extrañar posturas completamente contradictorias, [...] el grupo de humanistas italianizantes [...] entienden la obra como un *exemplum* de moral práctica, y por lo tanto, aceptan la intencionalidad del autor [...] mientras que otros prefieren calificarla de escritura diabólica o la denostan porque su materia trata de amores, incluyendo dicho texto en un saco donde se agrupan todas las ficciones sentimentales. (49)

Having established a precedent in *La Celestina*'s contemporary readership let us begin to explore Rojas's work as a didactic piece that portrays its characters as an *exemplum* (and *speculum*) of evil personified.³ First and foremost, it seems appropriate for our purposes to define the concept of evil, which, according to Aquinas, is not anything actual, whether a substance or a property, but merely the absence of a good that ought to be present (Aquinas, Introduction 20).⁴ As such, it exists only in the sense that something "is missing." Aristotle had previously stated that badness always involves the absence of what is desirable.⁵ In *De malo*, Aquinas distinguishes between what he calls *malum poenae* and *malum culpae*. The first aspect refers to pain, sickness, injury, and the like, also known as naturally occurring evils, which are ultimately due to the sin of Adam, whose wrongdoing led to punishment that deprived him and his infralapsarian offspring of Paradise. By *malum culpae* Aquinas refers to moral evil, or evil in human action, and he is aware of the fact that there is a difference between victims of evil and people who are morally bad. According to him, however, what renders them bad is the gap between what they are and what they should be but are not. He also believes that people who act wrongly would not strike us as morally

³ For additional bibliography (and a review of several critics' positions) as well as an interpretation of death in *La Celestina*, see Sanmartín Bastida, who explores the same topic covered in this article.

⁴ For quotations on *De malo*, I will use the Oxford edition translated by Richard Regan and edited by Brian Davies.

⁵ *Rhetoric* I, 7, among other places. St. Augustine arrives at the same conclusion in *Enchiridion Fidei*, chapter II (section 11): "For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present –namely, the disease and wounds– go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance, the flesh itself being a substance, and therefore something good, of which those evils –that is privations of the good which we call health– are accidents" (Rotelle & Harbert eds.).

bad unless we recognized that, in acting as they do, they fail to do what they ought or need to do.

Aquinas also presumes that there are patterns of action to which we tend as individuals and that our tendencies can be affected or influenced by our past and by the choices we make. We do not, he holds, act in an historical vacuum. We act on the basis of a *habitus*,⁶ a past learned (and repeated) behavior. Aquinas defines sin as “nothing else than to neglect eternal things, and to seek after temporal things.” All human wickedness, he adds, “consists in making means of ends and ends of means” (*Summa Theologiae* Ia2ae, 71, 6).

In *La Celestina*, sin is the principal catalyst in the demise of five of the main characters: Pármeno, Sempronio, Calisto, Melibea, and the eponymous anti-heroine herself. Here, Rojas specifically employs the twin transgressions of sexual lust and avarice to provide a perfect moral *comedia* for sermonizing on the explicit dangers that these failings epitomize, presenting his work, like his predecessor Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, in the *Libro de buen amor*, as an *exemplum*.⁷ Because both of these sins are fully analyzed and explicated by Aquinas in his *De malo, quaestio* XV on Sexual Lust and *quaestio* XIII on Avarice,⁸ the Dominican philosopher’s careful consideration of the cause and effect of these several offenses now becomes a highly useful tool that would allow us to better understand the way in which they were both viewed and interpreted by Rojas in *La Celestina*.

The attitude toward sex by the Medieval Christian Church was always related to original sin. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria linked it directly to the discovery of sex by Adam and Eve (Richards 23-24). Later on, St. Augustine redefined original sin, identifying it specifically with sexual desire rather than simply with the sexual act (*On Marriage and Concupiscence* I, 24; quoted by Richards). Sexuality, according to Christian teaching, was given to people for the purpose of reproduction and for no other reason. According to Richards,

sex was not to be used for mere pleasure. By this definition, all sex outside marriage, both heterosexual and homosexual, was a sin and inside marriage sex was to be used only for procreation. Medieval theologians stressed that it was a mortal sin to embrace one’s wife solely for pleasure. ‘A man who is too passionately in love with his wife is an adulterer,’ said St. Jerome in the fourth century, an opinion regularly reiterated throughout the Middle Ages. It was not until the end of the sixteenth century that the

⁶ For an extended treatment of *habitus*, see *Summa theologiae* Ia2ae (49-54).

⁷ Of course, there are plenty of differences on both works, but at the beginning of both, the authors tell their readers to take their composition seriously and as a teaching tool, and not as something to take slyly because the way you interpreted the reading could mean the salvation or the downfall of your soul. For Juan Ruiz, see in particular his prose prologue (*sermo ad intra*) *Intellectum tibi dabo*. For the topic of ambiguity in Ruiz’s work, see Lawrance, Dagenais, and Malkiel, among many others.

⁸ I choose this order on the basis of importance: sexual lust being more significant than avarice for the downfall of the characters.

idea of sex purely for pleasure was advanced as a serious theoretical proposition. (23-24)⁶

Original sin (*'originale peccatum'*) in the Thomistic view is a sin of concupiscence, of ignorance, of lack of original justice, and of punishment of moral fault. Original sin is nothing other than that which extends to any human being from the sin of the first parent (*De malo*, q. IV.2). This is what Thomas Aquinas refers to as "a sin of nature" (*'peccatum naturale'*) that is applicable to all men as inheritors of Adam's nature. Again, Aquinas identified original sin as the privation of that gift of original justice which God had bestowed upon man when creating him (*Summa Ia2ae*, 82, 1). Without original justice, as Jeremy Cohen tells us, "man no longer properly orders his various drives and appetites, and he falls subject to the frailties of human existence" (501).⁹

Centuries later St. Thomas Aquinas in *De malo* declared that "every act of sexual lust is a sin either because of the disorder of the act or even because of the disorder of the desire alone, which disorder primarily and intrinsically belongs to sexual lust" (422).¹⁰

In this context, my goal is to show how Rojas, through the five characters mentioned above, attempts to give his readers a moral lesson utilizing the teachings of Aquinas. I will break this quintet into two groups: Calisto and Melibea representing sexual lust, and Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno as representatives of avarice. From the beginning, Calisto and Melibea are destined to fail due to their anti-Christian actions. The very first words out of Calisto's mouth are: "En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios"¹¹ and he proceeds to state that,

en dar poder a natura que de tan perfecta hermosura te dotasse, y hazer a mí, inmérito, tanta merced que verte alcançasse, y en tan conveniente lugar, que mi secreto dolor manifestarte pudiesse. [...] ¿Quién vido en esta vida cuerpo glorificado de ningún hombre como agora el mío? Por cierto, los gloriosos santos que se deleytan en la visión divina no gozan más que yo agora en el acatamiento tuyo. (85-86)¹²

Here, Calisto has violated the First of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:2-17; for the version of the Bible used in these pages,

⁹ For more information on Aquinas's view on Original Sin see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia2ae (81-85) and *De malo*, q. IV, "On Original Sin."

¹⁰ St. Augustine in the *City of God* says: "Sexual lust is not the sin of beautiful and pleasant bodies but of souls wickedly loving bodily pleasures to the neglect of moderation, which makes us fit for things that are spiritually more beautiful and pleasant" (XII, 8; PL 41:356).

¹¹ Deyermond, referring to this quote, mentions that there is a strong deliberate allusion to the opening words of one of the best-known Psalms: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work" (177).

¹² All references to *La Celestina* will be from Severin's edition.

see *The Holy Bible*). Melibea, in Calisto's eyes, has replaced the image of God. Next, Calisto indicates: "Téngalo por tanto, en verdad, que si Dios me diese en el cielo la silla sobre sus santos, no lo ternía por tanta felicidad" (87). Once again, we observe Calisto rejecting God for the sake of fulfilling his own sexual desires. Disobeying any of the Ten Commandments was a capital sin that could only lead the transgressor to hell. In a choleric attack, Calisto conversing with his servant Sempronio tells him: "¡Ve con el diablo!" to which Sempronio responds: "No creo, según pienso, yr conmigo el que contigo queda" (89), reiterating once again the future dishonorable death without pardon that he must suffer for his mortal sins.

The tormented lover does not stop here with his disobedience of God's First Commandment; in addition, Calisto dishonors the oath to obey the Second mandate: "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God." Madly in love with Melibea, Calisto undergoes a series of symptoms, principally an unquenchable burning of the flesh: "Por cierto si el de purgatorio es tal, más querría que mi espíritu fuesse con los de los brutos animales que por medio de aquél yr a la gloria de los santos" (92). It is this ardent passion that makes him sin and forget about his God, substituting Him for Melibea. The following dialog between Calisto and Sempronio exemplifies the deification and idolization of his carnal lover:

- Sem: Algo es lo que digo; a más ha de yr este hecho. No basta loco, sino hereje.
- Cal: ¿No te digo que hables alto quando hablares? ¿Qué dizes?
- Sem: Digo que nunca Dios quiera tal, que es especie de heregía lo que agora dixiste.
- Cal: ¿Por qué?
- Sem: Porque lo que dizes contradize la christiana religión.
- Cal: ¿Qué a mí?
- Sem: ¿Tú no eres christiano?
- Cal: ¿Yo? Melibea só, y a Melibea adoro, y en Melibea creo, y a Melibea amo.
- Sem: Mandaste al hombre por la mujer dexar el padre y la madre. Agora no sólo aquello, mas a ti y a tu ley desampan, como agora Calisto. (92-94)¹³

These last words of Calisto are the very ones that will condemn him to eternal suffering. Here, Rojas tries to give his readers a moral lesson instructing us to love God above all terrestrial things. Disobeying the first two Commandments would be more than enough to condemn Calisto to hell. Instead, Rojas (or the author of the first

¹³ Here Sempronio quotes *verbatim* from Genesis 2:24: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."

part)¹⁴ goes even further and sends an unambiguous moral lesson to his readers by having Calisto break yet another of the Ten Commandments (the Seventh): “You Shall Not Commit Adultery.” In this context, Aquinas, quoting Matthew 5:28 in *De malo*, says: “‘Anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in desire.’ And so such a person sins mortally” (426). Calisto, in search of his lost falcon, comes across Melibea in her orchard where he lustfully falls in love with her and so sins mortally.

On the other hand, Melibea, in Act I, exercises her power of articulation to ridicule and undermine Calisto’s efforts as a suitable lover:

Más desventuradas de que me acabes de oír, porque la paga será tan fiera qual meresce tu loco atrevimiento, y el intento de tus palabras Calisto ha seydo como de ingenio de tal hombre como tú aver de salir para se perder en la virtud de tal mujer como yo. ¡Vete, vete de ay, torpe! Que no puede mi paciencia tolerar que haya subido en coraçón humano conmigo el ilícito amor comunicar su deleyte. (87)

Nevertheless, in Act IV, her language begins to change and she takes pity on Calisto. The external causes for this love (witchcraft, fate, or persuasion) are not important here; what is significant now is that Melibea lets herself be ruled by sexual lust rather than by reason. Towards the end of Act IV, Celestina has successfully manipulated Melibea making her believe that sending optimistic news to Calisto is a good and Christian deed: “... de lo passado aya perdón; que en alguna manera es aliviado mi coraçón, viendo que es obra pia y santa sanar los apassionados y enfermos” (166). Right after these sympathetic words, Melibea expresses herself yet again: “En pago de tu buen sufrimiento quiero cumplir tu demanda y darte luego mi cordón” (168). Six acts later Melibea is faced with a collision of beliefs about her love for Calisto and prays to God and asks him to give her the strength to conceal the sexual lust that she feels:

¡O lastimada de mí, o mal proveída donzella! ¿Y no me fuera mejor conceder su petición y demanda ayer a Celestina quando de parte de aquel señor cuya vista me cativó me fue rogado, y contentarle a él, y sanar a mí, que no venir por fuerça a descubrir mi llaga quando no me sea agradescido, [...]. ¡O mi fiel criada Lucrecia! ¿qué dirás de mí; qué pensarás de mi seso quando me veas publicar lo que a ti jamás he querido descubrir? Cómo te spantarás del rompimiento de mi honestidad y vergüenza, que siempre como encerrada doncella acostumbré tener. [...] O soberano Dios, a ti que todos los atribulados llaman, los apassionados piden remedio, los llagados medicina, a ti que los cielos, mar y tierra, con

¹⁴ For studies on the authorship of the first act, see Snow, Martínez, Whinnom, Faulhaber, and Cortijo Ocaña, among many others.

los infernales centros obedecen, a ti el qual todas las cosas a los hombres sojuzgaste, humildemente suplico: des a mi herido coraçón sofrimiento y paciencia, con que mi terrible passi3n pueda disimular, no se desdore aquella hoja de castidad que tengo assentada sobre este amoroso desseo, publicando ser otro mi dolor que no el que me atormenta. Pero ¿c3mo lo podr3 hazer, lastimándome tan cruelmente el ponçoñoso bocado que la vista de su presencia de aquel cavallero me dio? (238)

Melibea, due to her strong sexual lust, violates the First Commandment and places her desire before anything else. As mentioned by Tozer,

instead of asking for God’s intervention to quash her inner-most desires, she asks only for God’s help to conceal the outwards signs of her passion. It would seem that from this point onwards, Melibea substitutes God with Love and unwittingly breaks the First Commandment (‘Thou shalt have no other Gods’); as a consequence, she begins to operate on a different value system, whose patron is Cupid. (291)

Melibea’s confused behavior reconfirms Thomas Aquinas’s definition in *De malo* of what sexual lust signifies:

Sexual lust indeed chiefly signifies a disorder by reason of excess regarding desires for sexual pleasures. And such disorder can belong either to internal emotions alone or also in addition to external acts that are of their very selves disordered and not only because of the disordered desires from which they spring. For it belongs to disordered desire that, because of a desire for something pleasurable, one does something intrinsically disordered. (420-21)

Melibea’s disordered reason is caused by lusting after Calisto. Her emotions are affected by lust which causes her to loose all reason:

Di, por Dios, lo que quisieres, haz lo que supieres, que no podr3 ser tu remedio tan áspero que yguale con mi pena y tormento. Agora toque en mi honrra, agora dañe mi fama, agora lastime mi cuerpo, aunque sea romper mis carnes para sacar mi dolorido coraçón, te doy mi fe ser segura, y si siento alivio, bien galardonada. (242)

Aquinas in *De malo* denounces sexual unions outside marriage and sees them as a disordered act caused by sexual lust. Since fornication exists for the gain of sexual pleasures and not for procreation, then, fornication is an excess of disordered reason:

And the end of using genital organs is to beget and educate offspring, and so every use of the aforementioned organs that is not related to begetting and properly educating offspring is as such disordered. [...] And every sexual union of a man and a woman outside the law of marriage is disproportional to the proper rearing of offspring. For the law of marriage was instituted to prohibit promiscuous copulation. (421)

Rojas's message in *La Celestina* is clear: abstain from fornication for otherwise the consequence is death. Aquinas –quoting from Augustine's *City of God* (XII, 8)– states in *De malo*:

Sexual lust is not the sin of beautiful and pleasant bodies but of souls wickedly loving bodily pleasures to the neglect of moderation, which makes us fit for things that are spiritually more beautiful and pleasant. (422)

Since sexual lust is not a sin of the flesh but, instead, of the soul, this offense can only be castigated with the death of the body and the condemnation of the soul. Therefore, Rojas decides to kill the two lovers without giving them a chance to absolve their sins so that they might reunite after Purgatory. Instead, Rojas bestows upon the sinners the maximum sentence and in this way teaches a valuable moral lesson to his contemporaries. In fact, the writings of Aquinas validate Rojas's decision to dispatch the two lovers. Quoting from Galatians 5:19-21, Aquinas declares:

'The deeds of the flesh, which include fornication, sexual impurity, shamelessness, sexual lust, are manifest [...]. Those who do such things will not possess the kingdom of God.' But only mortal sin excludes one from the kingdom of God. Therefore, every act of sexual lust is a mortal sin. (426)

Both Calisto and Melibea have committed a mortal sin for which they must die. Rojas at the end of Act XIX kills Calisto without confession highlighting his death and therefore making it even more tragic:

Cal: ¡O válame Santa María, muerto soy! ¡Confesión!¹⁵
 Tris: Llégate presto, Sosia, que el triste de nuestro amo es caído del
 escala y no habla ni se bulle.
 Sos: ¡Señor, señor, a essotra puerta! Tan muerto es como mi abuelo. ¡O
 gran desventura!

¹⁵ Emphasis mine.

- Tris: ¡O mi señor y mi bien muerto, o mi señor y nuestra honrra despeñado! O triste muerte y *sin confesión*. Coge, Sosia, esos sesos de esos cantos; júntalos con la cabeça del desdichado amo nuestro. ¡O día de aziago, o arebatado fin!
- Mel: O desconsolada de mí, [...]. Mi bien y plazer todo es ydo en humo; mi alegría es perdida; consumiósse mi gloria.
- Luc: Tristán, ¿qué dizes, mi amor? ¿Qué es esso que llores tan sin mesura?
- Tris: Lloro mi gran mal, lloro mis muchos dolores; cayó mi señor Calisto del scala y es muerto; su cabeça está en tres partes. *Sin confissión*¹⁴ pereció. (326-27)

In the passage cited above, Rojas uses a spiritual device known in the Middle Ages as *compunctio cordis*, the emotion which is the beginning of prayer. St. Augustine described the steps of meditative prayer as beginning in fear, self-created by the most hair-raising, goose-flesh-inducing recollection and imagining of one's sins or imagining one's own death (Carruthers 95-96).¹⁵ The purpose of this passage is to serve as a catalyst to indoctrinate Rojas's audiences by means of raising fear. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that "sin confesión" in this short passage is mentioned three times. As a medieval reader or listener of *La Celestina* we can only imagine the horrific effect that dying without *confesión* must have caused. Tristán, addressing Sosia, tells him in Act XIX: "Coge, Sosia, esos sesos de esos cantos; júntalos con la cabeça del desdichado amo nuestro" (327). This repulsive image that Tristán offers to the audience would have had such an impact that people would have reflected and meditated about their own sins; or for those who had not committed a lustful sin, this morbid illustration would have served as a deterrent to abstain from fornicating. This shocking image does not stop here; later, Tristán once again states: "Su cabeça está en tres partes [...]. Toma tú, Sosia, dessos pies; llevemos el cuerpo de nuestro querido amo donde no padezca su honrra detrimiento; aunque sea muerto en este lugar" (327-28).

Also, in Melibea's *ante mortem* soliloquy in Act XX, she brings out the two main points (a catastrophic death and death without *confession*):

No vido bien los passos, puso el pie en vazío y cayó, y de la triste caýda sus más escondidos sesos quedaron repartidos por las piedras y paredes. Cortaron las hadas sus hilos; cortáronle sin confesión su vida. (334)

Rojas makes sure to point out the gravity of Calisto's death so that his public clearly understands the crime and therefore its consequences. The next voice that takes the stage after Tristán's in Act XIX is that of Melibea which serves as the moral of the entire work: "¡O la más de las tristes, triste, tan poco tiempo poseydo el plazer, tan presto venido el dolor" (328). Here Rojas affirms that committing a mortal sin, such as

fornication, which both denies entrance to heaven and an eternal afterlife, is not worth the simple and fleeting pleasures of the flesh. He also does not show any pity for those who have broken the law of God and throughout Lucrecia's words he explains in Act XIX: "No te amortescas [Melibea], por Dios, ten esfuerço para sufrir la pena, pues toviste osadía para el plazer" (328). Sermonizing on his *exemplum*, Rojas seems to say that if you are going to be courageous in committing the sin, do not show weakness in accepting the punishment.

Once again, Rojas's message in *La Celestina* is clear, as stated in the Prologue: "Olvidemos los vicios que así nos prendieron; no confiemos en vana esperanza" (75). Abstain from lustful sins and let us not trust in vain hope. To reiterate this didactic idea, let us glance at the last stanza of the Prologue:

O damas, matronas, mancebos, casados,
notad bien la vida que aquéstos hizieron;
tened por espejo su fin qual huvieron,
a otro que amores dad vuestros cuydados.
Limpiad ya los ojos, los ciegos errados,
virtudes sembrando con casto bivar,
a todo correr devéys de huyr,
no os lance Cupido sus tiros dorados. (75-76)

The message and its addressees are clear. Rojas, alluding to every member of society, having in mind neither their marital status nor age, addresses them using a medieval rhetorical device known as a *speculum*. Let the bad example of others be your window to a clean and honest life. See and learn through the experiences of others; let them breathe their last breath *sin confession*, so that you, reader or listener, may enjoy the after life seated at the right hand of God the Father.

Let us now take a look at the avaricious nature of the other three key players of Rojas's equation:

Calisto ↔ Melibea
 ↓
Celestina : Sempronio : Pármeno = Condemnation

Celestina, Sempronio, and Pármeno –as opposed to Calisto and Melibea's deaths caused by lust– will encounter their own demise through their untamed greed, as Pattison comments: "Celestina dies at the hands of Pármeno and Sempronio, killed with swords as a direct result of her avaricious refusal to share the profits extracted from Calisto" (139).

Thomas Aquinas in *De malo*, quoting from Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, explains:

We should understand avarice, which is called *philarguria* in Greek, both regarding silver or coins and regarding all immoderately desired things whenever one at all wants more than is sufficient. (389)

Let us not forget that death comes to Celestina for her immoderate desire for coins and gold. Celestina's pure intentions are not for the well being of her community, but rather, for her own economic being. Calisto questions himself and asks Sempronio and Pármeno: "Hermanos míos, cient monedas di a la madre; ¿hize bien?" To which Sempronio responds: "¡Ah, si hizieste bien! [...] Sin dubda te digo que es mejor el uso de las riquezas que la possession dellas. ¡O qué glorioso es el dar! ¡O qué miserable es el recibir! Quanto es mejor el acto que la possession, tanto es más noble el dante que el recipiente" (Act II, 130). Sempronio, like Celestina, is only interested in himself, caring little for anything other than his own financial stability, an attitude whose origins are explained by Lihani: "The bond between master and servant was one based on economic necessity and on greed, rather than on fondness and altruism" (21). Both Celestina and Sempronio, then, are only concerned for their own economic needs and, as such, have become the slaves of their own immoderate materialistic desires.

Aquinas in *De malo*, making reference to avarice explains: "Some speak of avarice as the contrary of generosity, and then avarice signifies a defect regarding dispensing money and surplus goods, a defect regarding the acquisition and retention of such things due to an excessive love of money" (391). The following passage in *La Celestina* exemplifies the true avaricious nature of the wretched woman. Celestina, talking with Sempronio about her material gains in the context of her attempts to persuade Melibea, says in Act V: "De mi boca quiero que sepas lo que se ha hecho; que aunque ayas de aver alguna partezilla del provecho, quiero yo todas las gracias del trabajo." To which Sempronio responds: "¿Partezilla, Celestina? Mal me parece esso que dizes" and Celestina answers:

Calla, loquillo, que parte o partezilla, quanto tú quisieres te daré. Todo lo mío es tuyo; gozémonos y aprovechémonos, que sobre el partir nunca reñiremos. Y también sabes tú quanta más necesidad tienen los viejos que los moços, mayormente tú que vas a mesa puesta. (173)

With Celestina wanting to share only "alguna partezilla" we observe her greatest defect: she is unrepentantly covetous, what Lihani tells us is "an example of greed personified:"

The driving force in her life is money. Her various occupations are practiced for financial gain. Each object that she sells, each task that she undertakes, is carried out for the purpose of acquiring money. (22)

As an example of this greed we can look at the passage where the father of one of Celestina's born-again virgins demands that his daughter be fixed so that she can be married as a virgin. Elicia –in Act VII– reprimands her for her avaricious ways:

Cumpliendo con uno, dexas ciento descontentos. Que as seydo hoy buscada del padre de la desposada que levaste el día de pascua al racionero, que la quiere casar aquí a tres días y es menester que la remedies, pues que se lo prometiste, para que no sienta su marido la falta de la virginidad. (209)

Celestina fails to remember who this young woman is due to the fact that she received compensation for her futile services in advance. Elicia explains it with the following words: “¡Mira si tornará! Tiénete dado una manilla de oro en prendas de tu trabajo ¿y no avía de venir?” (209)

Neither Sempronio nor Celestina care about the emotional state of their victim; the profit that it may generate is their only concern. In Act III, Celestina states that “Meliba es hermosa, Calisto loco y franco; ni a él penará gastar, ni a mí andar” (143). Sempronio also places his financial needs above his master's emotional well being and declares: “Desseo provecho; querría que este negocio oviesse buen fin, no por que saliesse mi amo de pena, mas por salir yo de lazeria” (146). Both Celestina and Sempronio never cease to think about the recompense that they will receive. Both, according to Aquinas, are committing a capital sin for which they must eventually perish.

One of the most significant passages in *La Celestina* deals with the incident of the gold chain. Aquinas tells us that avarice, which constitutes an inordinate desire for riches, is a capital sin. As mentioned above, the driving force in the life of Celestina is money and it is this same force which brings about her death at the hands of Calisto's faithless servants. When she receives a valuable gold chain from Calisto as partial payment of her services, she is so overwhelmed by her new-found wealth that she cannot fathom the idea of sharing it with Pármemo and Sempronio. The same greed that controls her also motivates her two accomplices to contest her ownership of the chain (Lihani 23). Ultimately, the greed that originates from this event is the catalyst for the next three deaths. Aquinas tells us in *De malo* (q. XIII, a. 3):

We can consider avarice in excessive taking things belonging to another, and so there are acts of violence. And sometimes an avaricious person uses deceit, which if done by words will be falsehood in the ordinary

speech whereby one deceives another for gain, and which if done by words confirmed under oath will be perjury. (397)

In this instance of the gold chain, Celestina does take things belonging to another since she had previously promised to divide the bounty into three equal parts, something that she clearly fails to do. Sempronio, knowing that Celestina desires the entire gold chain for herself, explains in Act XII: “Antes que venga el día quiero yo yr a Celestina a cobrar mi parte de la cadena. Que es una puta vieja; no le quiero dar tiempo en que fabrique alguna ruyndad con que nos escluya” (268). Fearing that they will take away her gold chain, Celestina fabricates a lie in an attempt to deceive them for her own personal gain:

Di a esta loca de Elicia, como vine de tu casa, la cadenilla que traxe para que se holgasse con ella y no se puede acordar dónde la puso, que en toda esta noche ella ni yo no avemos dormido sueño de pesar, no por su valor de la cadena, que no era mucho, pero por su mal cobro della y de mi mala dicha. Entraron unos conocidos y familiares míos en aquella sazón aquí, temo no la ayan llevado, diziendo: Si te vi, burléme. (271)

To which Sempronio responds:

No es esta la primera vez que yo he dicho cuánto en los viejos reyna este vicio de cobdicia; quando pobre, franca, quando rica, avarienta. Assí que adquiriendo, crece la cobdicia, y la pobreza cobdiciando, y ninguna cosa haze pobre al avariento sino la riqueza. ¡O Dios, y cómo crece la necesidad con la abundancia! ¿Quién la oyó esta vieja decir que me llevasse yo todo el provecho, si quisiesse, deste negocio, pensando que sería poco? Agora que lo vee crecido, no quiere dar nada, por complir el refrán de los niños que dizen: De lo poco, poco, de lo mucho, nada. (272)

Sempronio, knowing that Celestina refuses to share the profits equally with them becomes infuriated and abuses her verbally and then physically: “O vieja avarienta, muerta de sed por dinero, ¿no serás contenta con la tercera parte de lo ganado? [...] Espera, doña hechizera, que yo te haré yr al infierno con cartas” (274). Yet again, Rojas reiterates Aquinas’s teachings that avarice is a mortal sin.

Aquinas in regard to avarice comments in *De malo*:

Only mortal sin excludes one from the kingdom of God. But avarice excludes one from the kingdom of God, for Eph. 5:5 says: ‘No fornicator or unclean person or avaricious person, that is, a worshiper of idols, inherits the kingdom of Christ and God’. Therefore, avarice is a mortal sin. (392)

Rojas's explicit intention in killing Celestina and her two accomplices is very clear: the three of them die because of their avaricious nature.

In addition to avarice, Celestina corrupts the concept of justice. According to Aquinas (*De malo*, q. XIII, 2), what is contrary to justice seems to be mortal sin, since justice has the nature of an obligation that falls under a precept. He infers that avarice is contrary to justice, since avarice withholds things that can bring about the benefit of one's neighbors. Therefore, avarice, being by nature contrary to justice, can be classified as a mortal sin. Celestina interferes with justice by not being loyal to her word, and therefore, not benefiting her neighbors with her new wealth. The consequences for her must inevitably be to die at the hands of those she has wronged and it is ironic that she begs for justice given the fact that she defies justice in the first place (Act XII): "¡Justicia, justicia, señores vezinos, justicia, que me matan en mi casa estos rufianes!" Her inability to ward off the inevitable imposition of justice must perforce send her to hell without confession: "¡Ay, que me ha muerto, ay, ay, confesión confesión!" (274).

We should pay close attention to the fact that Rojas decides to punish Calisto and Celestina with the maximum sentence: a death without confession. What is Rojas's motive? Why does he focus preferentially upon the death of these two characters?¹⁶ Calisto and Celestina, in fact, drive the plot forward from beginning to end. The opening words of Calisto praising the unparalleled beauty of Melibea ("En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios") are the context from within which the plot can only progress when Calisto decides to utilize the services of the *puta vieja*, a decision which inexorably leads to a tragic end. Melibea's rejection of Calisto causes him to make a contract with Celestina to aid him with his amorous endeavors. Had Calisto not fallen in love with Melibea and had he not chosen to enlist the services of Celestina, the entire plot would have dissipated into a substandard story instead of becoming a transitional masterpiece between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Likewise, the demise of both Pármeno and Sempronio is imminent and unavoidable since they cannot continue to exist in an unnatural state without their master and because the two servants are intrinsically unjust. Aquinas states that that which is contrary to justice is a mortal sin. The last words of Sempronio, "Saltemos destas ventanas; no muramos en poder de justicia," are ironic in the sense that he does not want to die at the hands of Justice even though from the very beginning he has

¹⁶ We could argue that Melibea's death is just as tragic as that of Calisto and Celestina, but for a medieval reader her death would not have been as catastrophic as those previous two given that there is no mention of her dying without confession. Committing suicide in the Middle Ages was not as broad a topic covered in the Medieval Church as it was dying without the last rites. Even though Melibea dies without confessing herself, her last words "a Él [Dios] offrezco mi alma" reflect an extremely sympathetic view of her death from the author's part, therefore diminishing the severity of her demise. For an analysis of suicide, see among others Aquinas' *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae (64, 5). With regard to Melibea's death, as well as the death of several other characters, and an analysis of the moral tenets supported (or attacked) in *La Celestina*, see Sanmartín Bastida.

avoided everything that pertains to what is just and honorable. While Rojas has the two servants dispatched in the most frightful manner, he has apparently done so without, as he had previously in the deaths of Celestina and Calisto, making any reference whatsoever to their salvation or damnation, a scene briefly narrated by Socia, Calisto's servant (in Act XIII):

¡O señor, que si los vieras, quebraras el corazón de dolor! El uno llevaba todos los sesos de la cabeça de fuera sin ningún sentido, el otro quebrados entramos braços y la cara magulada, todos llenos de sangre, que saltaron de unas ventanas muy altas por huyr del aguazil, y assí quasi muertos les cortaron las cabeças, que creo que ya no sintieron nada. (280)

However, it is soon made clear that there is a distinct difference in the way in which the two faithless servants meet their end when compared to the death without confession suffered by Celestina and Calisto. Rojas lets us know, if only indirectly, that Sempronio and Pármemo are, in fact, victims of their social environment and, indeed, of their own sinful master. As such, they will have, if not an honorable death, at least one that provides them with the opportunity to save their souls. The following description given by Socia substantiates this observation in Act XIII:

Ya sin sentido yvan, pero el uno con harta dificultad, como me sentió que con lloro le mirava, hincó los ojos en mí, alçando las manos al cielo, quasi dando gracias a Dios, y como preguntando si me sentía de su morir; y en señal de triste despedida abaxó su cabeça con lágrimas en los ojos, dando bien a entender que no me avía de ver más hasta el día del gran juyzio. (278)

Rojas has taken pity on the servants and though punishing them with death has given them both time and place to absolve their sins and, perhaps, to find salvation.

As I have established throughout this paper, sin is the principal arbiter of the demise of the five characters: Calisto and Melibea; Pármemo and Sempronio, and the eponymous anti-heroine herself. Rojas, in his master work *La Celestina*, and according to the theological teachings of Thomas Aquinas provides an imperative moral lesson for sermonizing on some explicit dangers of the society of his time: sexual lust and avarice. In his work, and if were to belief Rojas's assertions, he presents a snapshot of the ills of his society with the sole purpose of instigating his contemporaries to act differently from his five main protagonists. This lesson of abstention and avoidance of lust / avarice can be summarized in the last verses of Rojas's Prologue: "O damas, matronas, mancebos, casados, / notad bien la vida que

aquéstos hizieron; / tened por espejo su fin qual huvieron” (75). Rojas’s message is clear: utilize this work as a reflection on the said vices so that present and future generations will not go astray.

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