Celestina as a Precursor to the Picaresque

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Introduction

Picaresque literature, one of Spain's greatest contributions to world literature, begins with the novel, *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* (The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of his Fortunes and Adversities), published anonymously in 1554. Picaresque stands out from all preceding genres in its focus on the lower strata of society—with considerable emphasis on that strata's criminal or quasi-criminal population. The settings and character types that become commonplace in the picaresque are also substantially represented in *Celestina*. Their presence has led many critics to see Rojas's work as a sort of generic precursor, or at least a starting point in the development of the genre. Not surprisingly, Howard Mancing calls *Celestina* the beginning of "that great arc that [forms] the first significant manifestation of the modern novel."¹ Similarly, Dorothy Severin writes: "After *Celestina*, the writing of sentimental romances will eventually be abandoned, although they will continue to be read. *Celestina* opens the way for the picaresque genre." She adds that the newness of the work can even sweep away the prevalence of formerly dominant prose forms: "Celestina deals a blow to the world of aphorism and wisdom literature, and even Pleberio gives his own gloss on the lament. We also have

¹ Howard Mancing, "Guzmán de Alfarache and after: The Spanish Picaresque Novel in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*, ed. J. A. Garrido Ardila (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 40-59, p. 56.

a fatal clash of two literary worlds, that of the self-styled courtly lover (the fool) and the prototype picaresque world of the Spanish Bawd and her minions (the rogues)."²

Charles F. Fraker explains how the invention of indecorous characters links *Celestina* to the later picaresque tradition, specifically pointing to examples from the lower strata, and "certain moments in their careers" that form a continuity in novelty when, "between the time of the publication of *Celestina* and the date of the composition of *Lazarillo*, the great *umwelt*, the order of accepted values, the shape of humanism and literary culture, had not greatly changed."³ As each critic chooses to emphasize different stylistic and moralistic links between *Celestina* and the picaresque, any difference of opinion or focus is often mitigated by a general acknowledgment of a shared real foundation underlying both literary worlds. The historian, José Antonio Maravall, details this foundation in his own capsule narration of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Spain's internal migration from countryside to the city:

Upon approaching this urban belt of misery and inhabiting alongside each other in these zones, in the most subhuman manner, insalubrious and in repugnant promiscuity, it was possible to pass from one irregular state to another. And in this mixed environment, defined by negative characteristics that contaminate one group by a another, live habitually the families of *pícaros* (including those

² Dorothy S. Severin, *Tragicomedy and Novelistic Discourse in Celestina* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP UK: 1989), pp. 48 and 2.

³ Charles F. Fraker, *Celestina: Genre and Rhetoric* (London: Tamesis, 1990), p. 65.

of the hostile servants in *La Celestina*, to *Lazarillo*, to *Buscón*, etc.), when these are not those recently arrived from the rural areas.⁴

Because another chapter in this book will look specifically at prostitution, and also because prostitution is not featured heavily in the seminal *Lazarillo* and its most direct descendants, this chapter will mainly examine the male criminal and quasi-criminal characters. We take this approach while recognizing that men thrive in the same environment as women, the one described by Maravall as "subhuman," "insalubrious," and of "repugnant promiscuity," and that the non-prostitute's lives and activities in *Celestina* are often inseparable from those of Celestina and her female followers.

Pármeno

Few picaresque novels are without a protagonist who begins young and through a series of adventures, steeped in the dealings of the lower classes, acquires a deep cynicism and world-weariness as he passes into adulthood. In various ways, Pármeno meets several of the important *pícaro* criteria.⁵ He is young, serves multiple masters (Calisto, Sempronio, and indirectly Celestina), and begins as a relatively innocent idealist who turns to a (admittedly very short) life of crime, revealing how his principles have been displaced by a destructive anti-social cynicism. All this said, the prototypical *Lazarillo* and his indebtedness to Pármeno are not without

⁴ José Antonio Maravall, *La literatura picaresca desde la historia social (siglos XVI Y XVII)* (Madrid: Taurus, 1986), pp. 63-64. Translation is mine.

⁵ Dorothy S. Severin, "Pármeno, *Lazarillo* y las novelas ejemplares," *Ínsula* 633 (1999): 26. p. 26.

controversy among Hispanists, as Jacques Joset points out.⁶ But, as already mentioned, the differences of opinion here revolve around moral questions and worldview, not the environment or social constituents of the characters themselves. From Pármeno's conversation with Celestina, we learn that his parents left him in her care, much as Lazarillo's mother left him in the care of the blind man whose skills as a healer and dabbler in magic make him somewhat similar to Celestina in vocation, forgetting her role as bawd.

Both Pármeno and the prototypical *pícaro* are dependent on their lower-class master while they express ironic admiration that betrays a deep suspicion of their masters. For Lazarillo, the blind man "had endless ways of getting money out of people," including "prayers for lots of different things," and would "tell pregnant women if they were going to have a boy or a girl." Also, "In medical matters [the blind man] said that Galen didn't know half as much as he did about toothache, fainting fits and morning sickness," proffering medical advice, such as, "Do this, do that, boil this herb, get that root. As a result everybody followed him around, especially women who believed everything he told them" (8, 15-16).⁷ Pármeno says of Celestina, "she professed herself a kind of physician, and feigned that she had good skill in curing little children; she would go and fetch flax from one house, and put it forth to spinning to another, that she might thereby have pretense for the freer access

⁶ Jacques Joset, "De Pármeno a Lazarillo," *Celestinesca* 8.2 (1984): 17-24, pp. 17-18.

⁷ The quotes of *Lazarillo* are by page number from Michael Alpert's translation of Francisco de Quevedo, *Lazarillo de Tormes and the Swindler (el Buscón)* (London: Penguin, 2003).

unto all" (Hacíase física de niños; tomaba estambre de unas casas y dábalo a hilar en otras, por achaque de entrar en todas) (55; 55-56).⁸

Compared to each other, both the *proto-pícaro* and the canonical *pícaro* gain their world-weariness at an early age by watching their masters engage in less-than-honorable pursuits, some in search of money, others to satisfy their lust. As witnesses, the youths' mounting cynicism leads them to amoral or immoral behavior. At the end of his life's narration, Lazarillo manages to avoid the trap of greed, but is still on shaky moral ground because he is content to live cuckolded by his wife and his master the archpriest, all in order to retain his modest job. Pármene's ultimate descent into criminality more closely foreshadows the lives of Lazarillo's literary descendants, specifically Mateo Alemán's titular character from *Guzmán de Alfarache*, and the protagonist Pablos in Quevedo's *El Buscón*. Thus, Guzmán famously writes his story from the galleys where he is imprisoned after being convicted of embezzling his mistress's household. Quevedo's Pablos sinks deeper into the underworld and ends his narration (for which he promises a second part) with a planned escape to the Indies, similar to what Guzmán would have done, were he not caught beforehand. Pablo's final transgressions, getting drunk with his gang and stabbing catchpoles (corchetes) to death for entertainment, matches Pármene and Sempronio's murder of Celestina in terms of criminal violence, although the underlying motive is different. Critics debate whether a *pícaro* can be homicidal and remain a true *pícaro*, but there

⁸ The English quotes of *Celestina* are by page number from James Mabbe's translation of Fernando de Rojas, *Celestina*, ed. Dorothy S. Severin (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1987). The Spanish quotes of *Celestina* are by page number from *Celestina*, Francisco J. Lobera *et al.*, Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000).

is little disagreement that the environments featured in the four works cited above breed the general character-type of a young, cynical trickster with multiple masters likely to run afoul of the law.

Sempronio

Because of his relative seniority, independence, and lack of character development in comparison to Pármeno, Sempronio not only does not neatly anticipate the *pícaro* mold established by *Lazarillo de Tormes*. When Roland Greene writes, "Sempronio is a *pícaro*, adept in double talk, and already a steady client of Celestina's brothel when the drama opens," I believe he is seizing upon the only two elements that strongly link Rojas's character to the future genre.⁹ Sempronio is not the only one in *Celestina* to employ "double talk," but his adeptness exemplifies what Michael Gerli calls

the continuous fluctuation between direct speech and asides, a perpetual shifting between what is said openly and thought privately, between direct looks and oblique glances that permit us to perceive the presence of dangerous thoughts that cannot be expressed in the ordinary flow of social interaction or conversation.¹⁰

⁹ Roland Greene, *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2013), p. 74.

¹⁰ E. Michael Gerli, *Celestina and the Ends of Desire* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2011), p. 100.

This technique of asides in *Celestina* merits the attention of an entire article, while in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, asides and muttering under one's breath provide enough material to write an entire MA thesis.¹¹ Patricia Finch explains:

Having chosen a genre which excludes narrative commentary, Rojas makes expert use of the aside to reveal to the reader important contrasts between what the characters say and what they think. Thus the device is made to serve here as it would later in the picaresque novel, to reveal hypocrisy and deviousness.¹²

Among her many examples, Finch cites how, "after Calisto ends his Petrarchan description of Melibea in Act I, proclaiming 'no ha más menester para convertir los hombres en piedras, ['without any other help, she has the power to transform men into stones'] Sempronio answers under his breath, '¡Mas en asnos!' [Into asses, rather!]." ¹³ In *Lazarillo*, the hypocritical esquire devours the food that his servant has gathered, insisting, "God, it tastes so good that I feel I haven't eaten anything else today," causing the protagonist to mutter to himself, "I hope I drop dead right here if you have" (37).

In both Sempronio and Lazarillo's asides, we find a mixture of censure, pity, and resentment, but it is this last element that grows strongest in Sempronio, while subsiding in the fully-formed *pícaro* of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. As with Pármeno, Sempronio's cynicism and world-weariness lead him to violent criminality, while the cumulative lessons of Lazarillo's adventures lead him into a safer and more

¹¹ Jean R. Miller, "Self-Creation and Self-Destruction: The Asides in the *Lazarillo de Tormes*," MA Thesis, University of Texas, Austin: 1990.

¹² Patricia Finch, "The Uses of the Aside in *Celestina*," *Celestinesca* 6.2 (1982): 19-24, p. 22.

¹³ Finch, "The Uses," p. 21.

survivable state of amoral resignation. As with Pármeno, Sempronio is similar to the protagonists of *Guzmán de Alfarache* and *El Buscón*, but he still remains distinct in the unfolding of the narration because he is more entrenched in the underworld from the outset. More than a "steady client of Celestina's brothel," and submerged in the world of prostitution, Sempronio implies that he has participated in his share of street fights, complaining to Celestina that he cannot fully offer protection during Calisto's nocturnal tryst with Melibea:

I have brought hither my arms all broken and battered in pieces, my buckler without its ring of iron, the plates being cut asunder, my sword like a saw, all to behacked and hewed, my casque strangely bruised, beaten as flat as a cake and dented in with the blows that came hammering on my head (Traigo, señora todas las armas despedazadas: el broquel sin aro, la espada como sierra, el caxquete abollado en la capilla). (295; 295)

This admission does not in itself prove him a criminal, but in the picaresque novels that followed after *Lazarillo*, the lines between destitute servant, mischief-maker, rogue, and killer were often blurred. In *Guzmán de Alfarache*, the protagonist describes the life of a student in Alcalá, who must pawn his possessions. "So one thing after another, all goes away; not sparing so much as the jacket of mail, that lies between our mattresses; the sword, that is under our bed."¹⁴ Out of Guzmán's many moralizing examples, one involving the deceptive appearance of religiosity, makes rather explicit reference to trickery, thieving, and self-protection:

To say, when I see a religious person enter at midnight through a window, into a suspected place, with his sword in his hand, and his buckler at his girdle, that he

¹⁴ Mateo Alemán, *The Rogue or the Life of Guzman de Alfarache* (London: Constable, 1924), vol. 4, p. 210.

is going to minister the Sacrament, were a mere madness: for neither God will have it so, nor does his Church permit, that I should be such an errant Ass, as to think that to be good, which is evidently evil.¹⁵

From the very beginning of *El Buscón*, the rogue, Pablos, carries a sword, and his use of the weapon reveals a spectrum of characterization from pacifist to outright murderer. Also informative is the use of the word, "pícaro," mentioned in the context of this example. At the earliest point in Quevedo's novel, while still a child, Pablos rides a horse as a sort of Carnival King. That his mount munches on some greengrocer's wares causes her, the fellow vendors, and a group of *pícaros* [the modern translation calls them "lowlifes"] to assault poor Pablos with thrown vegetables. He is knocked off his horse and falls into a pile of excrement, after which, "The police came, arrested the women and the boys, searched everybody for arms, and took them away because they had drawn fancy-dress daggers they were wearing as well as short swords" (71).

Early on, Pablos sees himself as separate from the *pícaros*, though for most of the novel he is among them, and finally becomes one of them. Later, and more than once, sword play is associated more with trickery or the threat of danger—not its actual manifestation. On one occasion, Pablos uses his wits instead of strength to literally disarm the entire night's watch. In another chapter, sword fighting is brought to a level of abstract absurdity as Pablos mistakes someone studying the diagrams of *Libro de las grandeza de la espada* [A Book on the Greatness of the Sword] for a sorcerer. By the end of *El Buscón*, Pablos, like Sempronio, uses the sword for its intended purpose, while explicitly distancing himself from *pícaros*, not in a return to the innocence of his youth, but in the capacity of a *bravo* or killer. In the final scene

¹⁵ Mateo Alemán, *The Rogue*, vol. 2, p. 46.

of the novel, as a night of eating, drinking, and subsequent catchpole-killing begins, Pablos mentions a detail that gets lost in translation. In English, the detail is: "Supper time came and we were waited on by four great toughs of the type that are called strong-arm men" (195). The word for "toughs" in the original is "pícaros." Additionally, the translation completely ignores that the cited "strong-arm men" are called so by "bravos," who themselves are toughs, if not killers.

That toughs or killers call others "toughs" is strange, and it only makes sense if we look at the original Spanish word from which "strong-arm men" was translated, namely "cañón." According to early-modern dictionary definitions, the criminal slang word "cañón" means either a snitch or, in Galicia, a lost *pícaro* who has no job and no home. The translator's confusion could be attributed to the variability of a *pícaro*'s violent nature, and does raise the question of whether a *pícaro* or rogue can retain this status after stabbing somebody to death.

If we return to *Celestina* and look at Sempronio, he seems more disposed towards this violent behavior than Pármemo. At first glance, this comparison makes the younger inexperienced character look like a good fit as a *pícaro* precursor, based on his similarity to the relatively pacifistic Lazarillo, whose only violent act was to convince his first master to jump headlong into a post. But this comparison is weakened if we recall what happens during Celestina's murder. On this fateful occasion, Pármemo is more like Mateo Alemán's Guzmán, and even more so Quevedo's Pablos; his life among criminal types has eventually made him one of them. When Sempronio thrusts his sword repeatedly into Celestina, Pármemo cheers him on, and may even join in, as suggested by the fact that both men escape the scene of the crime together and appear equally guilty. Their status as fugitive murderers may complicate the application of the label *pícaro* or non-lethal rogue to either of

them, while Celestina's final words leave little room for ambiguity about the status that she wishes to pin upon them. "Justice, justice! [which can also be translated as "Police, police!"] help, neighbors, for here be ruffians, that will murder me in my house. Murder, murder, murder!" (¡Justicia, justicia, señores vecinos! ¡Justicia, que me matan en mi casa estos rufianes! (295; 260). For the Mabbe's 1631 translation, "ruffian" would have meant the same as today, namely, a "A brutal or lawless villain; a violent criminal, a thug," using the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition. In Rojas's Spain, the word might have also implied a violent criminal, but primarily "ruffian" would have meant pimp. Antonio de Nebrija's 1495 *Vocabulario español-latino* states that *rufián* is synonymous with *alcahuete* and *leno*, from the Spanish and Latin, respectively, meaning pimp, panderer, procurer.

To the non-Hispanist, trying to measure the degree to which Sempronio is a true *pícaro* may seem like an arcane exercise, but I believe that describing this measuring process is important if we are to speak of connections to a genre that is so heavily defined by a single character type. Greene's assertion, that "Sempronio is a *pícaro*," is perfectly acceptable under some definitions of the genre, especially when the definition of the character-type is generalized to equal most any denizen making a living in any combination of the environments found within *Lazarillo*, *Guzmán de Alfarache*, or *El Buscón*. Also, Alexander Nava reminds us that the term "picaresque" carries its meanings and associations into the modern world:

The picaresque (e.g., *Lazarillo de Tormes* or *Guzmán de Alfarache*) would give its readers a glimpse into a deviant underworld of prisoners and prostitutes, thugs and pimps, galley slaves and fugitives, the way the culture of hip-hop

would for late twentieth-century North America. The picaresque and the novel became the voices of the other.¹⁶

Sempronio is a pimp, thug, fugitive, and eventually prisoner; and while perhaps not a character who meets the strictest definition of "pícaro," he is still an important member of a rogue's gallery, without which the preceding genre would not exist. In sum, as Ernest Mérimée wrote,

The *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea* is a picaresque novel in some of its features. Pármeno, Sempronio, Sosia, Centurio, Lucrecia, Elicia and Areúsa, not to speak of Mother Celestina herself, are the direct ancestors of Lazarillo, Guzmán and Pablo.¹⁷

Centurio

Mérimée's statement above grants us license to study two minor male characters whose presence contribute to *Celestina* as a precursor to the picaresque. Centurio is both pimp and ruffian (in the modern sense), while nobody would claim that he is a *pícaro*. Most critics primarily characterize Centurio as a *miles gloriosus* in the classical mold. They qualify this assertion by adding that the type has been re-shaped by Rojas's immediate social milieu and preexisting contemporary theatrical stock figures that are more fifteenth-century Spanish than Roman.¹⁸ Severin calls

¹⁶ Alexander Nava, *Wonder and Exile in the New World* (University Park: Penn State UP, p. 86.

¹⁷ Ernest Mérimée, *A History of Spanish Literature*, trans. Sylvanus G. Morley (New York: Holt, 1961), p. 204.

¹⁸ "Celestina and Centurio are, of course, products of Fernando de Rojas's own artistic originality, but it is obvious that artistic originality cannot operate in a

Centurio "largely a stereotype, unlike the rest of the characters. He therefore fails to fit into the pattern of novelistic discourse in the work."¹⁹ But being a stereotype does not completely separate Centurio from the world of the picaresque. According to George Mariscal, in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, "traditional materials [along with "stories, jokes and anecdotes"] serve to give consistency or continuity to a whole section of the book," and "these are principally the stereotypical characters, beginning with Lazarillo himself."²⁰

In the case of Centurio, one can safely say that his hilarity and criminality, however stereotypical, are quite at home in the picaresque genre, forgetting the debate about whether or not they properly fit into a more abstract category of novelistic discourse. Some have argued that in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the protagonist ends up as a pimp, and others, like Anthony Close, have drawn direct parallels with *Celestina* through Lazarillo's "motifs of the *Celestina* tradition," in which "the barren house of Lazarillo's third master, the squire, symbol of his moral hollowness, is modeled on that of Rojas's braggart ruffian Centurio."²¹ But to find a good match for the

vacuum" wrote Juan B. Avalué-Arce, *Dintorno de una época dorada* (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1978), p. 39, the translation is mine. "And when the *miles gloriosus* showed up in the additional acts in the uncharacteristic guise of a pimp, the hilarity must have been considerable," according to Severin, *Tragicomedy and Novelistic*, p. 76.

¹⁹ Severin, *Tragicomedy and Novelistic*, p. 76.

²⁰ George Mariscal, *Contradictory Subjects: Quevedo, Cervantes, and Seventeenth-Century Spanish Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), p. 33.

²¹ Anthony J. Close, *Cervantes and the Comic Mind of His Age* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 284.

blustering and violent Centurio, we must look beyond *Lazarillo* and also *Guzmán de Alfarache* towards *El Buscón* and later iterations of the picaresque genre.²² Even when himself a pimp, Mateo Alemán's Guzmán is non-violent in his duties for his master the French ambassador, and at other moments in his life he finds himself in the company of "stout rogues" and "ruffianly fellows" who are more thieves than anything else.²³

Pablos from Quevedo's *El Buscón* is a closer match to Centurio, but it takes some time in the novel for this match to be made. Pablos meets some cheery and swindling pimps in his first forays into the underworld, and by the end of the novel, he is in much rougher company as we have explained above. When James Iffland writes of Quevedo and the grotesque, he states,

By far the most important aspect of this final episode for the purposes of this study is the special attraction Pablos feels for this latter role as "tough guy" and pimp. [...] Thus it would seem that "water has reached its own level," Pablos having finally reached the level of his origins by becoming the "Rabí de los rufianes."²⁴

²² Howard A. Mancing, "The Deceptiveness of *Lazarillo de Tormes*." *PMLA* 90.3 (1975), pp. 426–432, writes that *Lazarillo* is "more than a consenting cuckold" when he allows his wife to continue her sexual relations with his master the arch priest. "To exploit another person sexually for the sake of material affluence is the definition of a pimp. This, rather than a potentially comic deceived husband, is what Lázaro has become."

²³ Mateo Alemán, *The Rogue*, p. 161.

²⁴ James Iffland, *Quevedo and the Grotesque* (London: Tamesis, 1978), vol. 1, p. 138.

"Rabí de los rufianes" literally means "rabbi of ruffians" or "rabbi of pimps," but this expression is left as "their gang leader" in the translation that we are using here, betraying a lost connection between Centurio and Pablos.

Perhaps the links between *Celestina* and *El Buscón* are not strong enough in themselves, and we have to rely on Quevedo's picaresque poetry, especially the character Escarramán, who condensed "in a grotesque archetype the personality of so many pimps that had appeared before in Spanish literature, at least since the *Tragicomedy of Calisto and Melibea*, with the figure of the pimp Centurio [...]."²⁵ Escarramán was made most famous by his appearance in ballads full of criminal jargon known as *jácaras*. The pieces starring this *rufián* specifically tell tales of his hardships experienced as a pimp and how he seeks a shoulder to cry on from his girlfriend and prostitute, La Méndez. Today Escarramán is perhaps better known among most Hispanists for his appearance in Cervantes' comic interlude, *El rufián viudo llamado Trampagos* [The Widowed Pimp called Trampagos]. In the setting of the sketch, he is not only a great criminal raconteur, but also a legendary dancer, and "he is received by all as the personification of the picaresque spirit of the underworld."²⁶ *Celestina* makes no mention of Centurio's dancing ability, and he is not much of an entertainer to those who surround him in his immediate setting. But he is still similar to Escarramán because Centurio's characterization, however one-dimensional it may be, is enough to sustain the fictional environment that surrounds him. With good reason, the five new acts added to the original 1499 *Comedia de*

²⁵ Josep María Sala-Valldaura, *Risas y sonrisas en el teatro de los siglos XVIII y XIX* (Lleida: Universitat de Lleida, 1999), p. 53. Translation mine.

²⁶ Cory A. Reed, *The Novelist as Playwright: Cervantes and the Entremés nuevo* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), p. 98.

Calisto y Melibea were called the "Treatise of Centurio" in some of the earliest editions, and Criado de Val has declared that this addition of the "Treatise of Centurio" is "the birth of the picaresque."²⁷

Conclusion

When examining Francisco Delicado's 1528 novel, *La Lozana andaluza* (The Lusty Andalusian Woman), another precursor to the picaresque genre, the critic Bruno M. Damiani explains,

From the point of view of novelistic art and ideological intention, the picaresque novel represents a reaction against courtly literature, principally the chivalric romances and the pastoral and sentimental writings in which idealistic, magic, and supernatural elements abound. Contrary to the idealized nature and elegant models for love in courtly literature, the picaresque novel depicts a wicked and hostile world and the struggle of an individual to survive in it.²⁸

In Spanish literature, *Celestina* marks a watershed in its strikingly modern and detailed treatment of the criminal classes, and it is perhaps the first work of fiction to successfully bring the criminal underworld to the written page, as much for

²⁷ In Spanish, "el nacimiento de la picaresca." Manuel Criado de Val, *Don Quijote y Cervantes, de ayer a hoy* (Guadalajara: AACHE Ediciones, 2005), p. 182. The authorship of the "Treatise of Centurio" remains in dispute, but its appearance so soon after the very first version, and its inclusion thereafter, make it an integral part of what we read as *Celestina* today. See Severin, *Tragicomedy and Novelistic*, p. 6.

²⁸ Bruno M. Damiani, "La Lozana andaluza as Precursor to the Spanish Picaresque," in *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue's Tale*, ed. Benito-Vessels, Carmen, and Michael O. Zappala (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 57-68, p. 62.

entertainment as for moralization. Fernando de Rojas discovered a method of blending rhetorical techniques, both lawyerly and literary, and of applying them in the depiction of characters and actions drawn from his own street knowledge. As a law student, Rojas was also aided in his innovation by his awareness of criminal justice proceedings and general knowledge—shared by anyone living in an urban setting—of criminals for whom violence was both a tool of the trade and a lurking mortal danger. In his discourse on discord from the work's prologue, Rojas cites from Petrarch in a way that foreshadows the pessimistic tone that makes *Tragicomedia* a far more appropriate designation than merely *Comedia*. The prologue contains the phrase "perpetual enmity" that forms a pair with the expression "world replenished with evil," uttered by Pleberio in his final speech, amidst his anguished laments about his daughter Melibea's suicide. Taken together, these expressions emphasize that conflict and strife are endemic in *Celestina* and the world it represents.²⁹

One explanation for this pessimism, among many others proposed, relates to an inescapable and threatening criminal element.³⁰ The prologue's discourse of predation and fighting does have a broad metaphorical meaning, but it can also directly refer to armed servants, street fighting, ruffian subculture, and the generalized danger found outside the well-to-do's walls. These phrases, "perpetual enmity" and "world replenished with evil," also match Damiani's above mentioned characterization of the picaresque genre as one that "depicts a wicked

²⁹ Severin, *Tragicomedy and*, pp. 15; 399.

³⁰ The conclusion of this chapter is based on, and mostly contains exact wording from, the introductory pages of Ted L. L. Bergman, "La *Celestina* and the Popularization of Graphic Criminal Violence," *Celestinesca* 36 (2012): 47-70.

and hostile world and the struggle of an individual to survive in it." The literary exploitation of criminal violence for both pleasure and instruction undoubtedly serves a moralistic purpose, but it also reflects Rojas's own social and intellectual environments. As a student, he was likely to be both personally and professionally familiar with brothels, inns, taverns, and the city's plazas. According to historian Ricardo Córdoba de la Llave, places like these were truly a refuge for the dregs of society and "inside these locales, there abounded fights and revenge attacks, and the most attended and traveled places were the areas of greatest conflict."³¹ As Francisco Márquez Villanueva points out, Salamanca students in Rojas's time made constant contact with prostitutes, and with them came "a variety of criminals and parasites."³²

If Rojas's studies included civil law, he would have spent six years in Salamanca training to meet society's demand for good justice officials of all stripes, whether they end up in "courts and tribunals, law offices, councils, courtrooms, districts, assemblies, [or among] aldermen."³³ He would have been

³¹ Ricardo Córdoba de la Llave, "Violencia cotidiana en Castilla a fines de la Edad Media," *Conflictos sociales, políticos e intelectuales en la España de los siglos XIV y XV : XIV Semana de Estudios Medievales, Nájera, del 4 al 8 de agosto de 2003* (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2004), 394-444, pp. 398-99. Translation mine.

³² Francisco Márquez Villanueva, *Orígenes y sociología del tema celestinesco*. (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1993), p.126.

³³ Mariano Peset and María Paz Alonso Romero, "La facultad de leyes," in *Historia de la Universidad de Salamanca*, Vol. 3, *Saberes y confluencias*, ed. Luis

especially suited to catalog and analyze the words and deeds of underworld types who would later populate and constitute the environment of picaresque novels that followed *Celestina*. Márquez Villanueva believes that, in creating Celestina, Rojas was the first to make the *alcahueta* a universal figure, capable of surviving by herself. I believe that Rojas has applied the same universalizing treatment to gangsters such as Centurio, Sempronio, and Sempronio's protégé, Pármene. Fernando de Rojas's could not have foreseen that his original creation would lead to an equally groundbreaking text a half-century later, the first picaresque novel, but he was undoubtedly aware that his written portrayal of "a wicked and hostile world and the struggle of an individual to survive in it," leavened with humor to make it a *tragicomedia*, was something quite new. Luckily for us readers, many things that made *Celestina* new also made it influential, and we can count among its many influences the invention of characters, settings, and situations that are inextricably linked to *Lazarillo de Tormes* and its descendants