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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Joaquin Nin-Culmell's *La Celestina*: Opera, Identity, and Subversion

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Eric Robert Johns

June 2016

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Leonora Saavedra, Chairperson

Dr. Walter Aaron Clark

Dr. Benjamin Liu

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The Thesis of Eric Robert Johns is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Joaquin Nin-Culmell's *La Celestina*: Opera, Identity and Subversion

by

Eric Robert Johns

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Music  
University of California, Riverside, June 2016  
Dr. Leonora Saavedra, Chairperson

Joaquín Nin-Culmell's opera *La Celestina* (1956-1991) was to be his magnum opus, the work that would bring him out of the shadows of his father, the composer Joaquín Nin, and his sister, the diarist Anaïs Nin. This would require a work that would express his identity as himself, as opposed to in relation to his family. In *Joaquin Nin-Culmell's La Celestina: Opera, Identity and Subversion*, I explore the history of the opera, as well as the work as an expression of both Spanish national identity and Nin-Culmell's open-secret homosexuality.

Despite his German birth, and both U.S.-American and Cuban citizenships, Joaquín Nin-Culmell (1908-2004) is often considered a Spaniard. The negotiation of this multi-national identity was further complicated by the construction of a particular Spanish national identity by the Franco regime (1939-1975). By choosing to adapt the medieval work *La Celestina* into an opera, Nin-Culmell embraced his Spanish identity

while simultaneously rejecting the Francoist construction of a moral, unified, and Catholic Spain. The adaptation of this subversive, heretical, nihilistic, yet quintessential work of the Spanish canon questions both the state-proposed concept of Spain, as well as Nin-Culmell's personal identity. As a devout Catholic, Nin-Culmell carefully removed much of the heretical content, seemingly playing into the post-Civil War Spanish construction of nationhood; however, I posit that the continued inclusion of the original's narrative, which may reflect a *converso* or crypto-Jewish perspective, reveals the inner workings of an equally subversive political work. Indeed, the seamless adaptation and inclusion of *villancicos* and Spanish folk songs into his opera emphasizes a *regionalismo* that counters the hegemonic Francoist narrative of a unified Spain. Though the work was never performed during the Franco regime, nor during Nin-Culmell's lifetime, it exemplifies Nin-Culmell's construction of Spanish identity, embracing a pluralistic Spain of multivalent national identities.

The subversive commentaries that permeate Rojas's *La Celestina* also function as a reflection of Nin-Culmell's open-secret homosexuality. After having already completed the opera twice before, Nin-Culmell began composition a third time in 1989, after the death of his life partner, Theodore Reid. Here the subversion of the work both highlights and obscures Nin-Culmell's experiences as a homosexual in the United States through the use of metaphor and allegory. By understanding aspects of Nin-Culmell's personal life, we are able to view the opera through a hermeneutic lens exposing and transforming covert messages.

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## i. Introduction

It is seemingly impossible to overestimate the importance of *La Celestina* in the Spanish-speaking world. The medieval work has inspired paintings and poetry, as well as having been adopted into plays, films, and, in the subject at hand, opera. It has also been the subject of significant scholarly writing, with a continuously updated bibliography maintained by the website Parnaseo, containing 1,203 entries.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, an academic journal dedicated to the study of the story, *Celestinesca*, is approaching its fortieth year of publication. For Joaquín Nin-Culmell, his multifaceted interest in the story began when he first read it at the age of fifteen.<sup>2</sup> It had already proved to be an attractive subject for an opera, drawing the interest of Richard Strauss<sup>3</sup>, Giuseppe Verdi, and Felipe Pedrell.<sup>45</sup> On its operatic interest, librettist Stefan Zweig wrote to Richard Strauss on March 14, 1935:

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<sup>1</sup> "Bibliografía celestinesca," *Parnaseo*, accessed May 21, 2016, <http://parnaseo.uv.es/RefBase/>.

<sup>2</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin, Studying with De Falla, Composing in the Spanish Tradition," interview conducted by Caroline Crawford, 2002, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2006, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph T. Snow and Arno Gimber, "Richard Strauss, Stefan Zweig, Joseph Gregor and the Story of the *Celestina* Opera that Almost was, with a Bibliographic Appendix of *Celestina* Operas in the Twentieth Century," *Celestinesca* 31 (2007): 133-164.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Aaron Clark, "Pedrell, Felipe," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press), accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21186>).

<sup>5</sup> While neither Strauss nor Verdi completed an operatic setting of *La Celestina*, Pedrell's *Celestina* was completed in 1902 but not performed until 1921.

I am studying an old Spanish tragicomedy, *Celestina*, which for years I have been considering for adaptation and which probably could provide the basic idea for an opera. It is the oldest drama of Spanish literature, older than the works by Calderón and Lope and remarkable because it moves on two levels: two lovers, noble, romantic, in the lyrical tradition, patterned after Romeo and Juliet<sup>6</sup> and the lower elements, crude, vulgar; in between, as mediator, *the unique figure of Celestina*, a full-blooded matchmaker with an outstanding command of words, *a female Falstaff*, juicy, elementary. What is noble, lyrical, tender in the upper level shown is also with the servants, scoundrels, and scamps, as in a distorting mirror—to show love in its noble and crude forms, romanticism and crass realism mixed as in everyday life.<sup>7</sup>

It is within this binary of upper and lower levels that we find Nin-Culmell's *Celestina* (1956-1991).<sup>8</sup> The opera embraces the subversive and nihilistic elements of the original story, and allows for two levels of interpretation: one on the surface, purely literally, and the other requiring a deeper inquiry.

By examining Nin-Culmell's life, I will establish the complexities in the construction of his personal identity, and how the composition of *La Celestina* played a role in the expression of that construction. While Nin-Culmell spoke extensively on many topics, he rarely spoke on the subjects that I explore here. Further, Nin-Culmell disliked this very kind of investigation. After briefly discussing his incorporation of a *villancico* into the opera (which I explore in Chapter IV), Nin-Culmell explained that “this is the first time I've spoken about it and I'm not too sure I want it to get out because

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<sup>6</sup> Despite *La Celestina* predating *Romeo and Juliet* by a hundred years.

<sup>7</sup> Snow and Gimber, “The Celestina Opera that Almost was,” 136-137.

<sup>8</sup> Nin-Culmell gave several different dates for the beginning of, and completion of composition. 1956 is simply the earliest date given for the beginning of composition, and 1991 the latest date given for completion.

knowing the way people analyze things....”<sup>9</sup> This, of course, does not mean that there is nothing more to the work than what is presented on the surface, it only means that Nin-Culmell disliked any investigations into such meaning. By understanding his biography, we are able to better see how the contradictions of his cosmopolitanism informed the expression of his Spanish identity, and how contradictions between his devout Catholicism informed how he expressed, or did not express, his homosexuality. As a part of this biographical sketch of Nin-Culmell, I will also give as detailed of an account as possible of the compositional process of the opera, its journey to performance, and ultimately the reception of those performances. I argue that the negotiation of both Nin-Culmell’s national identity and sexuality inform, whether intentionally or not, his opera *La Celestina*, and that by opening up the opera through these new hermeneutic windows we are able to understand and appreciate the work on a deeper level.

## ii. **Biography of Nin-Culmell**

Joaquín Nin-Culmell’s life seems to have been destined for footnotes. He has been someone who has seemingly been within arms reach of fame, yet such fame has always eluded him. In writing about his genealogy Nin-Culmell humbly tacks himself on at the end, speaking of his family as made up of “muchos militares, algunos abogados, un ilustre pintor, un distinguido arquitecto, un escritor y finalmente un músico” (many

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<sup>9</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, “Interview with Merry Dennehy,” includes biographical information, 1997, Box 23 Folder 20, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

military personnel, some lawyers, a famous painter, a distinguished architect, a writer, and finally a musician).<sup>10</sup> Even in his own family's histories, Nin-Culmell relegates himself to a footnote in a greater familial history.

Both of Nin-Culmell's parents were born in colonial Cuba, and thus held both Spanish and Cuban citizenship. His mother, Rosa Culmell, was born to a French woman named Anaïs Vaurigaud, who went to Havana by way of New Orleans,<sup>11</sup> where the Vaurigaud family's circle of friends included the New Orleans-born composer and pianist, Louis Moreau Gottschalk.<sup>1213</sup> After emigrating to Cuba, Anaïs Vaurigaud met and married a Danish importer, who later became an honorary representative of Denmark once Cuba had gained independence from Spain.

Nin-Culmell's father, Joaquín Nin y Castellanos (known professionally as Joaquín Nin) was born in Havana to a Cuban mother, Angela Castellanos, and a Catalanian father, Joaquín Nin y Tudó. A year after Nin's birth in 1879, the family sailed for

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<sup>10</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Eramos cuatro," Prologue to 'Eramos cuatro,' Undated, Box 27 Folder 4, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>11</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Notes on Vaurigaud and Bourdin, 1941, Undated, Box 7 Folder 18, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>12</sup> Irving Lowens and S. Frederick Starr, "Gottschalk, Louis Moreau," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11530>.

<sup>13</sup> Joaquín, Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

Barcelona. There Nin y Tudó befriended the ship's chaplain, Jacinto Verdauger, who had recently finished his poem *Atlántida*, later to be set to music by Manuel de Falla.<sup>14</sup>

In Barcelona, Joaquín Nin studied harmony with Felipe Pedrell and piano with Carlos Vidiella.<sup>15</sup> Nin y Tudó proved to be a strict father, beating his son if he did not practice the piano.<sup>16</sup> There Nin began his performance and teaching career, only to be forced to relocate to Havana by his father as punishment for the seduction of one of his students. In Havana for the second time, Nin met Rosa Culmell in a music store. The attraction to "the handsome young man in the shabby little trousers"<sup>17</sup> was immediate for Rosa. Rosa's father was not pleased with the match, perhaps seeing through Nin's plan to use the Culmell family wealth for his own gain.<sup>18</sup> The elder Culmell eventually accepted and supported the marriage. His wedding present to the couple was passage to Paris, and enough money for a grand piano and to survive on until the family established itself.

They sailed for France in May of 1902. Once in Paris the couple was quickly accepted into the same social circles as pianist composers Moritz Moszkowski, Isaac Albéniz, and the chemist Louis Pasteur. Nin's studies and, later, his teaching from 1905

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<sup>14</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Anaïs, My Sister" in *Anaïs Nin: Literary Perspectives*, ed. Suzanne Nalbantian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Ficher, Martha Furman Schleifer, and John M. Furman, eds., *Latin American Classical Composers: A Biographical Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 393.

<sup>16</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 2.

<sup>17</sup> Deidre Bair, *Anaïs Nin: A Biography*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 10-11.

to 1908, at the Schola Cantorum,<sup>19</sup> further cemented him in the Parisian musical circle, entertaining Enrique Granados, Joaquín Turina and Manuel de Falla. It was at their house in Neuilly, a suburb west of Paris, that the famed diarist, Anaïs Nin, would be born on February 21, 1903. Joaquín and Rosa's marriage had been difficult from the start, and the birth of Anaïs was seen as unwelcome by Joaquín, who began insisting that Rosa stop performing publically, exacerbating tensions between the couple.<sup>20</sup>

With Joaquín's career taking off, the family returned to Havana in hopes of a triumphant reception; however, neither his reputation nor his income had improved. While there, a second child was born, Thorvald Nin y Culmell, before the family returned to France. Joaquín concertized in both Europe and Cuba, likely taking many lovers along the way and making sexual advances towards Rosa's sister Juana, who toured with Joaquín to watch over the family's finances. In 1907, Rosa, Joaquín and the violinist Juan Manén gave several successful concerts in Havana, during which time Rosa discovered she was pregnant with a third child. On the recommendation of Felipe Pedrell, the family moved to Berlin in hopes of improving Joaquín's income and reputation, and to allow him to pursue his interest in musicology.<sup>21</sup> On September 5, 1908, the family's third child, Joaquín María Nin y Culmell, was born.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Vincent D'Indy, *La Schola cantorum; son histoire depuis sa foundation jusqu'en 1925*. (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1927), 201.

<sup>20</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 12-13.

<sup>21</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 9.

<sup>22</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 14-15.

Nin was largely absent for the first few months of the newborn's life, leaving Rosa to raise the three children on her own, without knowledge of the local language or means of earning her own income. Almost immediately after the young Joaquín's birth, the family moved to Cuba, where Nin had been offered to start a national conservatory.<sup>23</sup> When the family arrived with forty-five trunks, three grand pianos, and the entire family, there was no conservatory to be found. According to an interview given by Nin-Culmell in 2002, the Cuban president who had offered to start a national conservatory had passed away, and the new president was unaware of any plans to do so.<sup>24</sup>

In 1909, Joaquín sent for the family from Brussels, where he had gained employment as a *professeur adjoint* at the New University. It was during this time that, Anaïs Nin later claimed, Joaquín began to beat the children,<sup>25</sup> a claim Nin-Culmell would vehemently deny as a fabrication, discovered through Anaïs's interest in psychoanalysis.<sup>26</sup> In 1913, the family left Brussels for the French coastal city of Arcachon, where Nin befriended the Rodríguez family, a wealthy Cuban family, which

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<sup>23</sup> Jorge de Persia, "Un Català Afrancesta...," in *Els Nin, l'arrel de l'art: centenari Joaquim Nin-Culmell*, ed. Mònica Pagès (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura i mitjans de Comunicació, 2008), 70.

<sup>24</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 1.

<sup>25</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two 1920-1923* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1982), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 9.

became his patron. The family's daughter Maruca began to study piano with Nin and soon an affair had begun, which upon learning of, Sr. Rodríguez confronted Nin.<sup>27</sup>

Nin told Rosa that he was going to Paris to rehearse for a concert. A month later, Rosa received a letter from Joaquín informing her, and the family, that he was never coming back and that everything of value in their home had been sold. There was no mention of divorce,<sup>28</sup> and Rosa never saw her husband again.<sup>29</sup> Though he refused to financially support the family, he encouraged them to move in with his parents in Barcelona, which they soon did. As tensions between Rosa and Joaquín's parents rose over how to raise the children, Rosa moved the family out into their own apartment, a rarity at this time and place. During this time, Rosa taught voice lessons at the Academia Granados<sup>30</sup> and performed regularly with Enrique Granados, but this, of course, was not enough to support three children.<sup>31</sup>

Before Nin had abandoned the family, he did not permit or facilitate Nin-Culmell's musical education in anyway.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it was during this time in Barcelona that Nin-Culmell had his first musical instruction. His first lessons were with Conchita Badía, who taught the young boy both piano and solfeggio. The ill-behaved child's lessons left something to be desired on the student's part as "he cheerfully ignored Badía's

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<sup>27</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 23-24.

<sup>29</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 13.

<sup>30</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 3.

<sup>31</sup> Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

<sup>32</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 9.

instruction and created his own music.”<sup>33</sup> The young pianist would use this creativity to improvise accompaniments to imaginative stories Anaïs would tell.<sup>34</sup>

By Spring 1914, Rosa was still struggling to support the family, and this time followed her sister’s advice accepting money to move to New York. There the family moved in with Rosa’s sister, Edemina, who was married to an American naval officer and whose child would grow up to become the musicologist Gilbert Chase.<sup>35</sup> Initially, she tried supporting the family in the same ways she had tried in Spain, by performing and teaching voice, but the realities of the music profession once again proved to be too difficult. World War I provided an economic opportunity for Rosa, who began exporting clothing to Cuba. This would be the family’s main source of income until the sugar collapse and economic crisis in Cuba began in 1920.<sup>36</sup> Anaïs paints a picture of the young Joaquín during this time in one of her earliest diary entries, writing:

He is 6 years old, he has long light-brown hair, a little round nose, a little mouth, pretty white teeth. He is terribly intelligent, he has a stormy disposition but isn’t mean; when he hurts us or when I cry, he hugs me and asks to be forgiven. I always forgive him, he is so nice. He is a little anemic like me, but he is very strong. I forgot to say that he is destructive and you will see that he never has a toy in one piece.<sup>37</sup>

Rosa actively encouraged Nin-Culmell’s musical studies, promising to take him to Paris if he decided to pursue music. In 1916 he began lessons with Emelia Quintero, an

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<sup>33</sup> Bair, *Anaïs Nin*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, “Preface” in *Linotte: The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1914-1920* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1978), vii.

<sup>35</sup> Nin-Culmell, “Growing Up with Anaïs Nin,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

<sup>37</sup> Nin, *Linotte*, 29.

accompanist of Pablo de Sarasate, who taught Nin-Culmell sonatinas by Beethoven and Mozart, encouraging the young pianist to compose as well.<sup>38</sup> In 1916, he met the illustrious Spanish composer, and family friend, Enrique Granados, who had come to New York to see the Metropolitan Opera premiere of *Goyescas*. Granados would be killed on his return voyage to Spain, as the ship that carried him across the English Channel was torpedoed by a German U-Boat.<sup>39</sup>

By Summer 1920, the family had moved out to Richmond Hill, where Nin-Culmell took piano lessons with a neighbor who eventually claimed, “I don’t know if I have anything to teach this boy.”<sup>40</sup> The following year he began lessons with the family friend Willy Shaeffer.<sup>41</sup> He also accompanied his mother in the performance of operas, such as *Madame Butterfly*, in their home for special occasions.<sup>42</sup> While he did practice and perform, the young Joaquín preferred to improvise and write his own music rather than learn the compositions of others. His sister Anaïs notes an already brewing sense of confusion surrounding his national identity writing in July 1921: “Thorvald and Joaquin are American in every sense of the word, especially Thorvald. Joaquin will always be ready to understand and assimilate that *other life* because the blood of Europe is in his veins.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nin-Culmell, “Growing Up with Anaïs Nin,” 22.

<sup>39</sup> Persia, “Un Català Afrancesta,” 72.

<sup>40</sup> Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two*, 121.

<sup>42</sup> Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two*, 489.

<sup>43</sup> Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two*, 242-43.

In 1924, Anaïs' husband, Hugh Parker Guiler,<sup>44</sup> was sent to Paris by the National City Bank.<sup>45</sup> The family decided to go along, allowing Nin-Culmell to begin a more serious study of music. On this decision to move back to Paris, Anaïs writes:

To leave New York for Paris seems, to a romantic, a prospect everyone would envy. But we spent days adding and subtracting figures, regardless of sentiment, probing opportunities... After painful deliberation—for sensibly and practically speaking, the advantages were on this side—we realized that theorizing was futile since we had to go anyway, for Mother and Joaquín must go.<sup>46</sup>

Rosa soon sold the family's Richmond Hill home in order to fund the move and support the family<sup>47</sup> destroying family documents, letters, and photographs along the way.<sup>48</sup> The family set sail for Paris on December 17, 1924.

Nin-Culmell's admission into the Schola Cantorum was partially based on his father's time teaching there, and he was able to help pay for the tuition by working as a translator for the school.<sup>49</sup> At the Schola Cantorum, it was determined that Nin-Culmell's musical education was not well developed enough and he was placed into class with boys much younger than his 16 years of age.<sup>50</sup> At the Schola Cantorum, Nin-Culmell was a pupil of Paul Braid, with whom he studied all forty-eight *Preludes and*

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<sup>44</sup> Also known as Ian Hugo, and normally referred to as Hugo Guiler by Nin-Culmell

<sup>45</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 18.

<sup>46</sup> Anaïs Nin, *Journal of a Wife: The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin* (London: Quartet Books, 1983), 54-55.

<sup>47</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 16.

<sup>48</sup> Nin, *Journal of a Wife*, 56-57.

<sup>49</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 16.

<sup>50</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 23.

*Fugues* by Bach, as well as the sonatas of Mozart and Beethoven. In 1930, Nin-Culmell received a *diplôme surperieur de piano* from the Schola Cantorum and began his performance career in Madrid the following year.<sup>51</sup> In addition to his studies with Paul Braud, Nin-Culmell also went to Alfred Cortot at his *École Normale* to improve his technique,<sup>52</sup> as well as studying piano privately with Ricardo Viñes, and harmony, counterpoint, and fugue with the brothers Jean and Noel Gallon.<sup>53</sup>

Much like many of the Spanish composers of the time, Nin-Culmell's compositional output was strongly indebted to the works of Manuel de Falla. Because of this, Nin-Culmell's mother offered to introduce the two the next time Falla was in Paris, mentioning that he used to visit the family when they lived in Neuilly.

In 1930, Falla had a conducting engagement in Salle Pleyel where Rosa introduced the two. Falla was shocked that his friend Joaquin Nin also had a musical son and invited Nin-Culmell to study with him in Granada that summer.<sup>54</sup>

In his studies with Falla, Nin-Culmell was discouraged from pursuing the dual career of a pianist-composer, advice he found questionable. Advice Nin-Culmell more seriously took was the avoidance of folk melodies in his compositions. As his father was known for using folklore in his music, it was easy for him to avoid doing so as a way of

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<sup>51</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 25.

<sup>52</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 31; Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

<sup>53</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Biographies, Undated, Box 7 Folder 4, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>54</sup> Persia, "Un Català Afrancesta," 75.

distinguishing himself from his father. With each visit to Granada, he brought Falla a new composition. On his first visit in 1930, he brought his *Three Impressions* (1929), dedicated to Falla, and inspired by a painting by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya. Falla found the work interesting, but encouraged the composition of larger works. These pieces of juvenilia were embraced by Ricardo Viñes, who performed them on a tour of Latin America.

In hopes of the continued support of Viñes, and in following Falla's advice in writing longer works, Nin-Culmell composed the *Sonata Breve* (1932) in a neo-Scarlattian style and dedicated it to Viñes. When he brought this piano sonata to Granada in 1932, Falla was displeased by the inclusion of a fugue composed on the second theme of the opening movement. According to Nin-Culmell, "that was considered a no-no by the impressionists Ravel, Debussy, and even Falla. But the curious thing was it was due to Falla's influence that I tried to face the large musical form. To face did not mean making a success of it, but it just meant to try it."<sup>55</sup> Viñes also disapproved of the sonata's fugue and refused to play the *Sonata Breve*, leaving the work to be premiered in Paris by the composer.<sup>56</sup>

According to Nin-Culmell, Falla was concerned with teaching him how to compose his own music, not to follow in the footsteps of Falla or any other composers,

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<sup>55</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 38.

<sup>56</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Paragraph on *Sonata Breve*, Undated, Box 5 Folder 10, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

and to establish his own identity as a composer. When asked about Falla's musical influence on his compositional style, Nin-Culmell spoke of Falla's large-form works e.g., *El amor brujo*, *El sombrero de tres picos*, *La vida breve*, and the Harpsichord Concerto as his greatest influences. On their influence Nin-Culmell said, "I'm not going to write something like this, but I'm going to see to it that I can make it as good as it is."<sup>57</sup> Believing he needed more regular study, Falla wrote a letter to Paul Dukas, recommending that Nin-Culmell study with him at the Paris Conservatory. Nin-Culmell's studies with Dukas began in 1932, and during those studies he returned one last time to Granada, in 1934. On this final trip he brought his *Quinteto para piano y cuarteto de cuerda* (1934-1936) and his *Dos poemas de Jorge Manrique* (1934-1936).<sup>58</sup>

In this last summer studying with Falla, Nin-Culmell was invited to the home of the poet and dramatist Federico García Lorca. In writing about his visit to Lorca's home, Nin-Culmell described Lorca at the piano improvising songs for his guests:

Me quedé atónito y al mismo tiempo un algo desconectado [sic] con las armónias [sic] inesperadas y no siempre catalogadas, la gracias del cantar y lp [sic] renovadas de algunos de los textos porque [sic] Federico no citaba canciones populares, las re-inventaba y las re-inventaba continuamente.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 43.

<sup>58</sup> Andrés Ruiz Tarazona, Program notes, "Joaquín Nin-Culmell" (Madrid: Orquesta y Coro de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2009): 6.

<sup>59</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Nin-Culmell's account of meeting Federico García Lorca. undated. Box 27 Folder 5. Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

I was blown away, and at the same time bewildered by the unexpected harmonies that weren't always the ones found in treatises, with the graceful singing and renovation of the texts because Federico was not quoting popular songs, he was reinventing them and reinventing them continuously.

Lorca would be a major influence throughout Nin-Culmell's life, influencing the early composition of his opera, as well as the composition of incidental music for Lorca's drama *Yerma* (1956)<sup>60</sup> and the setting of several of Lorca's works in the *Canciones de la Barraca* (1997).

Nin-Culmell and his mother were in Mallorca when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, leading to the two quickly fleeing for Paris.<sup>61</sup> Soon, Nin-Culmell began giving concerts of Spanish music, performing works composed over five centuries. These concerts began with older works and concluded with newer compositions of Nin-Culmell's young contemporaries. The first half included the music of Antonio de Cabezón, Luis de Milán, Juan Cabanilles, Antonio Soler, and Albéniz, while the second half featured Rodolfo Halffter, Joaquín Rodrigo, Manuel de Falla, and Nin-Culmell's own compositions.<sup>62</sup> While he received positive reviews, Nin-Culmell still had difficulty gaining many engagements. However, one positive review of a concert given at the

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<sup>60</sup> Juan J. Palop, "'Yerma' llevada a la opera por el compositor Norteamericano Nin-Culmell," *La Estafeta Literaria* 66 (October 20, 1956), 7.

<sup>61</sup> Persia, "Un Català Afrancesta," 78.

<sup>62</sup> "Five Centuries of Spanish Music," Program, Programs for concerts of Spanish music given by Nin-Culmell, 1938-1973, undated. Box 33 Folder 4, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

Town Hall in New York City would change Nin-Culmell's professional prospects. In the *New York Times*, Olin Downes wrote:

Mr. Nin-Culmell's own sonata may betray something of Ravel and of the modern polytonalists, but its freshly written, has a middle movement of striking line and mood, and ends in a brilliantly fugual style. It is the voice of a young man using confidently and naturally the idioms of his generations. These idioms may change. Mr. Nin-Culmell's music may well change. But it is music and it constitutes one more of the tokens of a young musician of a refreshing sincerity, seriousness and talent.<sup>63</sup>

Downes praised the very things in the *Sonata Breve* that Falla and Viñes critiqued. This review would catch the eye of the dean of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, where Nin-Culmell would be awarded a professorship in 1940.

During his years at Williams College, Nin-Culmell saw the premieres of his *Dos poemas de Jorge Manrique* for voice and string quartet; the *Tres homenajes* (1941) for piano, which honors Maurice Ravel, Rodolfo Halffter, and Federico Mompou; *Seis variaciones sobre un tema de Luis Milán* (1945); the *Dos danzas cubanas de Ignacio Cervantes* (1947), and *Tres poemas de Gil Vicente* (1950).<sup>64</sup> Among the more performed works of this time period is his Piano Concerto, begun in 1943 and finished in 1946, the same year that Falla died.<sup>65</sup> After a performance of his piano concerto under Erich Kleiber and the Philadelphia Orchestra, Nin-Culmell began to study conducting with

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<sup>63</sup> Olin Downes, "Spanish Pianist Heard In Recital," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1938.

<sup>64</sup> Taranonza, *Joaquín Nin-Culmell*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Persia, "Un Català Afrancesta," 78.

Kleiber and lead his own orchestra in Williamstown, the Berkshire Orchestra.<sup>66</sup> In 1946, the piano concerto was presented in Havana with Nin-Culmell as the soloist and with Kleiber again as conductor, and another performance of the same work in Williamstown, under the baton of Erich Leinsdorf.<sup>67</sup>

In 1947, Nin-Culmell was asked to teach summer session at the University of California at Berkeley, which he did for the next three years.<sup>68</sup> One week before classes began at Williams in 1949, he received a letter asking him to join the faculty at Berkeley. Nin-Culmell rejected the initial offer, but would accept it the following year. Thus, in the summer of 1950 he moved to Berkeley and began teaching that fall. His primary courses were composition, fugue, harmony, and orchestration, as well as some history courses.<sup>69</sup> In 1951, the then chair of the department, Albert Elkus, stepped down, and with the consent of composer Roger Sessions and musicologist Manfred Bukofzer, Nin-Culmell was nominated as his replacement. Both Sessions and Bukofzer had wanted Nin-Culmell to go along with their individual desires in his new position. Instead, Nin-Culmell trod his own path, which immediately made him unpopular. On Nin-Culmell's time as a department chair Sessions said:

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<sup>66</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 60.

<sup>67</sup> Nin-Culmell, Biographies, Undated.

<sup>68</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence from George Brady regarding a lecture given to the Society of California Pioneers, Includes lecture typescript, 1966, Box 10 Folder 42, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>69</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 56.

[Nin-Culmell] really wrecked the department the minute he became chairman. As a visiting professor he seemed very nice and able to get along with everybody, but then the minute he became chairman, he took over. He was a rather weak man, and he leaned on people and then would throw them over rapidly. It became impossible. The department was in a way disintegrating. The department had always been very harmonious until Albert Elkus retired in 1950 [sic], but then it exploded.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike at Williams College, Nin-Culmell did not find the years he spent teaching at Berkeley to be happy ones.<sup>71</sup>

While in California, Nin-Culmell continued his conducting career, leading the University of California Symphony Orchestra from 1950 to 1956. He also maintained a active career as a guest conductor during this era, conducting the Miami Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Aspen Festival Symphony, the Municipal Orchestra of Barcelona, and the Radio Symphonique of Paris.<sup>72</sup>

The passing of his mother, Rosa Culmell, in 1954, marks a shift in his compositional style, ignoring Falla's advice and beginning to embrace folklore. Nin-Culmell would from this point on compose what he called "original" compositions, and "non-original" compositions, meaning those based on folklore.<sup>73</sup> Nin-Culmell approached Spanish folk music as a source of inspiration, writing of folk collections as "beautifully colored butterflies . . . carefully pinned down for future reference . . . the whoe [sic] collection being interesting but lifeless . . . the pinned-down butterflies must

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<sup>70</sup> Andrea Olmstead, *Conversations with Roger Sessions* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 169-70.

<sup>71</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 54.

<sup>72</sup> Nin-Culmell, Biographies. Undated.

<sup>73</sup> Nin-Culmell, Biographies. Undated.

be brought back to life, . . . as a drop of rain can reflect the entire sky, a folk tune can be an entire world.”<sup>74</sup>

Compositions from this time period include what are perhaps Nin-Culmell’s most performed works,<sup>75</sup> the *Tonadas* (1956-1961), settings of folk melodies from throughout Spain. The history of the *Tonadas* goes back to a project begun in 1938 in conjunction with Adolfo Salazar, when they were both employed at the Middlebury Language School. Salazar, who was recently exiled from Spain and teaching a course on Spanish folklore, asked Nin-Culmell to make arrangements of the pieces he was lecturing on. While his arrangements were perhaps made too slowly for Salazar’s taste, the project was rekindled with the forty-eight *Tonadas* in the 1950s.<sup>76</sup>

These forty-eight brief pieces, published over 4 volumes, are the most popular of Nin-Culmell’s piano works<sup>77</sup> and employ folk melodies from throughout Spain, including the Basque Country, Old Castile, the Balearic Islands, León, Asturias, Valencia, Galicia, and New Castile.<sup>78</sup> While some of these melodies are treated in simple harmonizations, others are abstracted. Nin-Culmell writes of his *Tonadas*:

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Arelene B. Woehl, “Nin-Culmell: España Me Persigue,” *Clavier* 26 (1987): 22.

<sup>75</sup> Adam Kent, “The Use of Catalan Folk Materials in the Works of Federico Mompou and Joaquín Nin-Culmell” (DMA Dissertation, The Julliard School, 1999), 165.

<sup>76</sup> Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

<sup>77</sup> Wohel, “Nin-Culmell: España Me Persigue,” 22.

<sup>78</sup> Taranonza, *Joaquín Nin-Culmell*, 14.

The musical elements began having a life of their own . . . in some cases, even the original folk melody would be blurred by other considerations. . . . Tunes might be quoted literally but they might also be distorted, varied, distilled in all possible ways, changing the tempo and rhythm, mode, or melodic outline.<sup>79</sup>

This newfound embrace of regionalism would be carried on into his other works as well.

Partially in response to the passing of his mother, and his engagement with Spanish folklore, Nin-Culmell took his first and only sabbatical to Barcelona in 1956. His intention was to write an opera based on *Bodas de Sangre*, a dramatic work by Federico García Lorca,<sup>80</sup> a subject I will take up again in the following chapters. This sabbatical would not see Nin-Culmell's return to Berkeley until 1959 and almost led to his abandoning his position there to take a position as a conductor in Bilbao. The extraordinary length of this sabbatical was, as Nin-Culmell believed, the result of the intradepartmental drama back at Berkeley. Each time that Nin-Culmell would write to David Dodge Boyden, the chair of the music department at the time, he would respond positively, perhaps with the hopes that Nin-Culmell would not return.<sup>81</sup> Nin-Culmell's friends encouraged him to stay, and he was even offered a position conducting the

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<sup>79</sup> Woehl, "Nin-Culmell: España Me Persique," 21.

<sup>80</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence to Lincoln Constance regarding applying for a sabbatical, 1961, Box 28 Folder 30, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>81</sup> Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 77.

Barcelona Symphony, but upon learning of the salary Nin-Culmell, decided to return to California.<sup>82</sup>

The projects that Nin-Culmell undertook during his sabbatical all centered around Spanish subjects. One, the *Tres piezas antiguas españolas* (1959-1961), is a neo-classical orchestration of works by Antonio de Cabezón, Joan Baptista Cabanilles, and Mateo Pérez de Albéniz. Further compositions include a ballet titled *El burlador de Sevilla* (1957-1965), a play by Tirso de Molina based on the legendary story of Don Juan. His works on Spanish subjects would continue for the rest of his life.

While many of the compositions of this era embrace Nin-Culmell's Spanish identity and what it means to be Spanish living in the United States during the Franco dictatorship, the *Dedication Mass* (1965) embraces another major component of Nin-Culmell's identity, that of his devout Catholic faith. As a youth, he was not particularly religious; Olivier Messiaen's father, for instance, disapproved of the two boys' budding friendship because Nin-Culmell was not Catholic enough.<sup>83</sup> After meeting and reading the works of the French philosopher Jacques Maritain,<sup>84</sup> Nin-Culmell had a change of heart and quickly became a devout follower of the Dominican Order. His *Dedication*

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<sup>82</sup> Arcadi Espada, "Joaquín Nin: Secretos de Familia," *El País*, Interview about Joaquín Nin, 1987, Box 34 Folder 28, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>83</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 30.

<sup>84</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 94.

*Mass* for mixed chorus and organ was written for the opening of the St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco and is a reflection of his religious beliefs.

After his retirement in 1974, Nin-Culmell divided his time between California and Spain, focusing the majority of his compositional work on his opera, to be discussed in the following sections. He also composed a number of other large-scale works, including: the ballet *Le Rêve de Cyrano* (1978); *Et lux perpetua luceat eis* (1981); a setting of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary for organ and chant, the *Sinfonía de los misterios* (1993-1994); and a final setting of works by Lorca, the *Canciones de la Barraca* (1997). In 1989, he lost his life partner Theodore Reid. On January 14, 2004, at the age of 95, Nin-Culmell passed away.

### iii. A History of Nin-Culmell's *La Celestina*

"I spent the first third of my life as my father's son and the second third as my sister's brother; I'd like to spend the last third as myself!"<sup>85</sup> In many ways, the project that occupied the last third of Nin-Culmell's life is an expression of this desire to spend his life as himself, and not as a brother and a son. Taking on the task of writing and producing an opera in the twentieth century is rife with challenges, but challenges that Nin-Culmell was determined to meet. Nin-Culmell's initial reading of *La Celestina* at the age of fifteen stuck with him throughout his life. In his search for an appropriate subject for a Spanish opera, Nin-Culmell ultimately decided that this classic of the Spanish literary canon was a perfect fit, writing, "Creo en *La Celestina*, creo en mi versión y creo

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<sup>85</sup> Kent, "The Use of Catalan Folk Materials," 160.

en la ópera española"<sup>86</sup> (I believe in *La Celestina*, I believe in my version, and I believe in the Spanish opera). In this section, I will explore the history of the composition, production, reception, and the challenges Nin-Culmell faced along the way. Due to a lack of public discussion of the opera, there are many gaps in this history, but by drawing on correspondence with friends and professional associates, I will attempt to reconstruct an accurate narrative of the work's composition.

*Celestina* was initially published in 1499, consisting only of the first sixteen chapters of what is considered *La Celestina* today. Its second edition, published the following year, continued and expanded the original story. Its authorship is only identified through an acrostic and accepted to be Fernando de Rojas. Rojas tells us in a letter he wrote "to a friend" that he came across the first chapter, which was written anonymously, fell in love, and decided it needed to be continued. His version carried the title *The Tragicomedy of Calisto and Melibea*, but is colloquially known as *La Celestina*, after the matchmaker who takes on the task of making Melibea fall in love with Calisto.

The original work itself is the subject of much debate. Is it a novel? A work of drama? Who is/are the proper authors of the first chapter? Of the work as a whole? Fernando de Rojas? Alonso de Cardona? Juan del Encina? Alonso de Proaza? The question of authorship leads to further questions. The generally accepted author,

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<sup>86</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence with Pablo Meléndez-Haddad and Farid Fasla Fernández of Opera Actual, Includes article on *La Celestina*, 2000, Box 25 Folder 62, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

Fernando de Rojas, came from a *converso* family, meaning they had converted from their Jewish faith to Christianity in order to escape persecution. The work was written during the Inquisition, a time when it was politically dangerous to be of Jewish descent in Spain. In 1488, Fernando de Rojas's father was one of many *conversos* burned at the stake for his crypto-Judaism, meaning that he had not truly accepted Christianity as his faith. What hermeneutic windows does this knowledge open up for the reader? It is perfectly reasonable to read *La Celestina* and appreciate it on its most basic level, but there perhaps exists a deeper meaning to the Latin maxims, references to Petrarch, and quotes from Greek mythology that invite a more subversive reading of the work.

*Celestina's* lengthy twenty-one acts make adaptation into a dramatic and musical work problematic. When Nin-Culmell set out to write the libretto, he was forced to greatly reduce the work, shrinking it to a mere three acts. The opera draws from only eight of the original twenty-one acts: Acts I, II, III, IV, VII, IX, XII and XIX. Further, these acts are reordered, placing moments of Act II in the middle of Act I, Act VII preceding Act III, and Act IX sandwiched within Act XII, which itself is split into two different scenes. A graphical representation of this reordering and inclusions may be seen in Figure 1.

The opera begins with a brief prologue, where Calisto, a young nobleman, chances upon Melibea, a young noblewoman, with whom Calisto becomes infatuated. In the opening of Act One, Calisto calls for his servant, Sempronio, lamenting over his unrequited love. Calisto demands that Sempronio sing a song, to which the latter sings *Mira Nero de Tarpeya*, a *romance* that describes Nero watching the burning of Rome, a

tragic scene that Calisto compares to his longing desire for Melibea. In response to his master's suffering, Sempronio tells Calisto of a woman he believes can help him win the love of Melibea, a woman named Celestina. Sempronio arranges for Calisto to meet Celestina, and they devise a plan. Unbeknownst to Calisto, Celestina and Sempronio have struck a deal in order to turn a profit from her matchmaking. And in an attempt to silence Calisto's other servant, Pármeno, Celestina promises him Areusa, a whore whom Pármeno is attracted to. After setting Pármeno up with Areusa in her bedroom, Celestina performs a ritual, begging Pluto to make Melibea fall in love with Calisto.

In Act Two, Celestina visits Melibea, who already knew of Celestina's negative reputation and is hesitant to speak to her. Eventually, through a series of compliments, Celestina wins Melibea's trust, and convinces her to meet with Calisto that night. When Calisto arrives at Melibea's door, he declares himself her servant. Melibea, hesitant upon hearing such forward advances, eventually grants him permission to return the following night. Elsewhere, in Celestina's house, Calisto's servants, Sempronio and Pármeno, are celebrating with Celestina, Areusa, and Elicia. In their drunken state, Sempronio and Pármeno try to convince Celestina to share the money that Calisto gave her. A fight ensues, and the two servants kill Celestina.

Act One

Act One: Scene One		
Act I – Calisto calls for Sempronio and laments over the pain of his unrequited love. Sempronio sings Mira Nero de Tarpeya and Calisto compares the song to his love. Calisto declares that he is a Melibeian and begins to describe Melibea. Sempronio tells Calisto of Celestina, who he says can help. (87-104)	Act II - Parmeno warns Calisto of Celestina. (134-135)	Act I – Parmeno continues to warn Calisto. (108-109) Sempronio returns with Celestina and Calisto praises her. (116) Celestina insists that money would be better than words. (117) Celestina wins Parmeno into the con by promising him Areusa. (124) Calisto returns with payment and the servants respond greedily. Celestina and Parmeno leave. Celestina convinces Parmeno that her plan goes well and again promises him Areusa. (128)
Act One: Scene Two		
Act VII – Celestina arrives at Areusa’s house who is about to go to sleep. Celestina helps her undress and get ready for bed while trying to convince her to be Parmeno’s lover. Celestina lets Parmeno in. (201-202)	Act III – Celestina calls to Pluto to make Melibea fall in love with Calisto. She threatens the god if he does not help her in this mission. (147)	

Act Two

Act Two: Scene One		
Act IV – Melibea asks who Lucrecia is talking to through the wall, who she reveals to be Celestina, to Melibea’s chagrin. (151-152) Melibea allows Celestina enter the garden who then compliments Melibea. (158) Melibea asks what Celestina wants and Celestina tells her of Calisto. (161-162) Melibea protests but Celestina insists. Melibea comes around and asks to see Calisto again. Celestina arranges a meeting that night.	Juan del Encina - Triste España sin ventura!	
Act Two: Scene Two		
Act XII – Calisto arrives at Melibea’s door and declares that he is her servant. Melibea is hesitant but she is eventually convinced and asks him to return the next night. (259-261)		
Act Two: Scene Three		
Act IX – Celestina arranges for Elicia and Areusa to satisfy Parmeno and Sempronio. They drink and sing. Celestina asks about Calisto and his servants tell her that he is in love with Melibea. (223-229)	Act XII - The servants try to convince Celestina to split the money Calisto gave her but she refuses. (269) They argue and a fight breaks out leading to the servants killing Celestina. (273)	

Act Three

Act Three				
Act XIX – Melibea waits for Calisto in her garden singing to the stars. (321)	La Pastoreta	Act XIX - Calisto arrives and they promise their eternal love to one another. They then hear Socios fighting with someone so Calisto goes to help. While climbing the wall Calisto falls to his death. (324)	Juan del Encina – A tal pérdida tan triste	Act XIX – Melibea mourns her loss, climbs the wall, and then falls to her death. (328)

Figure 1<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Act and scene numbers that are spelled out reference Nin-Culmell’s opera, while roman numerals reference Rojas’ story with numbers contained in parenthesis referencing Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Dorothy S. Severin (Madrid: Catedra Letras Hispánicas, 2002).

Act Three opens with Melibea awaiting her lover in her garden, singing an aria which Calisto overhears as he gets closer. The two lovers promise their eternal love to one another, when suddenly they hear a skirmish on the other side of the wall. Calisto climbs the stairs to find out what is happening, but when he reaches the top he falls to his death. Melibea, distraught over the loss of her lover, slowly climbs the stairs, drops a rose, and the sudden close of curtain ends the opera. Nin-Culmell's intention is to have an ending open to interpretation. "¿Se ha muerto? ¿Está desmayada? Lo que quiera ver el público. Pero yo no la quiero matar"<sup>88</sup> (Is she dead? Did she faint? It's whatever the public wants to see. But I do not want to kill her).

In 1955, Nin-Culmell wrote to Lincoln Constance, the Dean of the College of Letters and Sciences department at the University of California, Berkeley, to apply for a sabbatical the following academic year in Paris. The purpose of this sabbatical was to finish a number of incomplete compositions and for the "preparation of the musical material for an opera based on Federico García Lorca's drama *Bodas de Sangre*."<sup>89</sup> While this project was ultimately scrapped "due to difficulties in obtaining the written consent"<sup>90</sup> of Lorca's family, it may be that the project simply turned into *La Celestina*. While the earliest manuscripts and the dates given in promotional materials give 1965

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<sup>88</sup> Jose Guerrero Martin, "El Liceu podría estrenar la ópera de Joaquim Nin-Culmell, 'La Celestina,'" *La Vanguardia*, June 7, 1987.

<sup>89</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence to Lincoln Constance.

<sup>90</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence to Edward Strong, 1963, Box 28 Folder 26, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

as the start of composition, a 2002 interview reveals that composition, or at least the conceptualization of the opera, began in Barcelona in 1956.<sup>91</sup>

During these sabbatical years Nin-Culmell studied Felipe Pedrell's *La Celestina*, which had been composed in 1902 but not premiered until 1922,<sup>92</sup> coincidentally with Nin-Culmell's first music teacher, Conchita Badía, as Melibea.<sup>93</sup> Much like Pedrell's opera, Nin-Culmell's is, for the most part, faithful to the original's plot and includes older, traditional Spanish compositions. For Pedrell these included works found in *romanceros*, *cancioneros*, and a song which he had heard performed in the street.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Nin-Culmell includes works found in Pedrell's edition of the *Cancionero musical popular español*, Francisco Alió's *Cansons populars catalanas, ab un prólech de Feliph Pedrell*, as well as popular Andalusian and Catalan songs. Though Nin-Culmell studied Pedrell's opera, he admitted that he "thought it was a pretty awful work."<sup>95</sup>

Initially, Nin-Culmell had planned to stay in a hotel during his sabbatical in Barcelona. He was quickly invited to stay with the family of Ramón Rosés de Milans, friends of his parents, where he stayed for the three years of his sabbatical. He primarily composed in the mornings, then joined the Rosés family for dinner. The arias came first,

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<sup>91</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 75.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Snow, "La Celestina of Felipe Pedrell," *Celestinesca* 3, no. 1 (Mayo 1979): 19.

<sup>93</sup> Miguel Huertas. "La Celestina de Nin-Culmell: un un estreno largamente deseado." *La Celestina: Tragicomedia musical en tres actos*, program notes, (Madrid: Teatro de la Zarzuela, 2008), 7.

<sup>94</sup> Snow, "La Celestina of Felipe Pedrell," 22.

<sup>95</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 75.

with *Celestina*'s "Triste Plutón" being the first to be completed with the Spanish mezzo-soprano Teresa Berganza in mind.<sup>96</sup> Once his sabbatical had finally come to a close in 1959, Nin-Culmell would regularly return to Barcelona and continue the opera's composition. The unpleasantness of the situation at UC Berkeley was no longer an issue for Nin-Culmell, as he could now focus his energies on his magnum opus, *La Celestina*.<sup>97</sup>

One of the better-documented periods of composition was the summer of 1969, which is described in letters Nin-Culmell regularly wrote to Theodore Reid. Nin-Culmell initially arrived in Paris in June and tried to convince his publisher, Max Eschig, to publish his opera. Eschig was in a difficult financial position, making him unable to publish the still-incomplete work.<sup>98</sup> Once in Barcelona, Nin-Culmell picked up where he had left off last, having already composed parts of both Act I and Act II.<sup>99</sup> Among the difficulties in composition that presented themselves was the insertion of Pármeno and Calisto's conversation from Act II of the *Rojas* into a scene from Act I. The overlapping of characters engaged in different scenes led to a moment of writers block.<sup>100</sup> Finally, a few days later, a breakthrough:

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<sup>96</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence to Antonio, 1991, Box 38 Folder 56, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>97</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, "Growing Up with Anaïs Nin," 76.

<sup>98</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, June 18, 1969, Correspondence with Ted Reid, 1969, Box 8 Folder 15, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>99</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, June 22, 1969.

<sup>100</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 2, 1969.

Yesterday, after several days of stewing at the piano and pondering at my table, I finally was able to join the departure of Sempronio (gone to look for the Celestina) and the arrival of Pármeno, the “honest” servant who tries in his own bumbling way to warn Calisto of what will happen... The warning is almost finished. I have yet to link it with his description of the Celestina and her arrival. For the first time in two weeks I feel something else besides discouragement. Quite a change!<sup>101</sup>

Composition continued in spurts of creativity, with Nin-Culmell spending much of July on a duet between Pármeno and Celestina, and a planned quartet to end the first scene of Act I.<sup>102</sup> By mid-July, Nin-Culmell had scrapped the idea of the quartet,<sup>103</sup> citing that Celestina’s text is too long and Calisto’s too short.<sup>104</sup> By July 17, 1969, Nin-Culmell had completed the first scene of the opera<sup>105</sup> and continued working on the second scene until his departure in August, thus ending the correspondence to Theodore Reid documenting the composition.

Even before the initial completion of the opera plans were being made with Juan A. Pamas, an impresario with the Gran Teatro del Liceu, for a Barcelona premiere of the work.<sup>106</sup> On August 23, 1976, Nin-Culmell delivered the first copy of the score to the

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<sup>101</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 5, 1969.

<sup>102</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 9, 1969.

<sup>103</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 15, 1969.

<sup>104</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 13, 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 17, 1969.

<sup>106</sup> Juan Pamas to Nin-Culmell, Correspondence with Juan Pamas, 1974-1977, Box 14 Folder 12, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

Liceu with plans for a premiere during the 1977-78 season.<sup>107</sup> If for some reason this should fail, a fall-back plan for an un-staged premiere with the Orchestra of Barcelona had been offered.<sup>108</sup> There was also movement for a U.S. premiere at this time. The Spanish lyric soprano Lucrezia Bori offered to sell a \$50,000 brooch to pay for a production, in exchange for the work being dedicated to her. Further arrangements for Nin-Culmell to meet with the Houston Opera<sup>109</sup> and the New York City Opera were made for the following year.<sup>110</sup>

The Liceu's one-hundred-year-old system of operation by shareholders had begun to crumble by the 1970s.<sup>111</sup> At the end of the decade, management would undergo a re-organization, meaning that a premiere of *La Celestina* would have to wait for at least two years. In lieu of waiting for this restructuring, Nin-Culmell opted for his back-up plan. A concert version of the opera given by the Orchestra of Barcelona under the baton of Antoni Ros Marbá was scheduled for the 1978-1979 season.<sup>112</sup> The scheduled performance in Barcelona suddenly came under threat of cancelation when

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<sup>107</sup> Nin-Culmell to Mary Richmond, August 1976, Correspondence with Mary Richmond, 1946-1989, undated, Box 8 Folder 23, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>108</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, March 15, 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, August, 4 1977.

<sup>110</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, December 3, 1977.

<sup>111</sup> "History," Gran Teatre del Liceu, accessed May 22, 2016, <http://www.liceubarcelona.cat/en/el-liceu/the-institution/history.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, December 3, 1977.

Ros Marbá was appointed the conductor of the National Orchestra in Madrid.<sup>113</sup> It was eventually rescheduled for that orchestra in May of 1979,<sup>114</sup> though that never came to pass. In 1980, the possibility of a staged premiere at the Liceu disappeared with the death of the impresario Juan Parnias,<sup>115</sup> who was backing the project. Throughout this time period Nin-Culmell continued to revise his “completed” opera, finishing what he called his “the third version” in December of 1977.

As word of the opera spread, further international interest arose. Jesús López Cobos, the newly appointed director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, expressed an interest in the work in 1979, with hopes of a 1983 performance.<sup>116</sup> In part due to this interest from the Berlin, there was also a renewed interest from the Houston Opera,<sup>117</sup> which had rejected the opera earlier in 1977.<sup>118</sup> This renewed interest was short-lived, as David Gockey, the General Director of the Houston Opera, turned down the opera again, claiming that “upon consultations with leaders of the Mexican-American community we were advised that the piece would be of minimal interest to Hispanics in our region.”<sup>119</sup> This rejection prompted an angry response from Dorothy E. F. Caram, an active

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<sup>113</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, January 16, 1978.

<sup>114</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, June 6, 1978.

<sup>115</sup> “Falleció Juan Antonio Parnias, empresario del Liceo,” *El País*, May 10, 1980.

<sup>116</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, September 2, 1979.

<sup>117</sup> David Gockey to Nin-Culmell, February 25, 1980, Correspondence with The Santa Fe Opera, 1972, Box 14 Folder 13, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>118</sup> David Gockey to Nin-Culmell, March 15, 1977.

<sup>119</sup> David Gockey to Nin-Culmell, June 16, 1980.

promoter of Spanish-language arts in the Houston area, who asked, “Who are these leaders who have spoken for the more than 500,000 Hispanics (not only Mexican Americans) who live in the greater Houston Metropolitan Area?”<sup>120</sup> She encouraged the Houston Grand Opera to reconsider its previous decision but they did not.

During the 1980s, Nin-Culmell became “tired” of the constant revisions and attempts to stage the work. He described the opera as a daughter that a father wanted to marry off, but with no luck.<sup>121</sup> In addition to the frustration surrounding the premiere of the opera, another opera based on *Celestina*, composed by the Austrian musicologist and composer Karl Heinz Füssl, was premiered in 1986.<sup>122</sup> In general, Nin-Culmell considered 1985 to be the year he completed composition of the opera; however, another period of revision began in 1989, and a number of manuscripts date up until 1991. Nin-Culmell claimed to have burned the earlier versions of the opera, stating, “I don’t want some smart-ass to come along in the future and say which version he prefers; this is the one I know is right.”<sup>123</sup> The number of manuscripts in the Joaquín Nin-

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<sup>120</sup> Dorothy E. F. Caram to David Gockey, July 1, 1980, Correspondence with The Santa Fe Opera, 1972, Box 14 Folder 13, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>121</sup> Julio Bravo, “Nin-Culmell, de aquí y de allá.”

<sup>122</sup> Reviews and articles on *La Celestina*, 1992-2000, undated. Box 34 Folder 18, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>123</sup> Janos Gereben, “Oakland Composer’s New Fame at 89, In S.F. and Spain,” *The Post*, August 20, 1997.

Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers, held at the University of California, Riverside, calls this claim into question.

With the publication of the score in 1991, the 1990s saw interest for premieres at Indiana University,<sup>124</sup> in Bogotá,<sup>125</sup> and in Los Angeles.<sup>126</sup> With the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original *Celestina* quickly approaching, plans had been made to include a premiere of the opera as a part of the festivities in Barcelona. Due to budgetary concerns, those plans were eventually scrapped. Nin-Culmell was in Barcelona with his cousin Lluís Nin de Juste when he learned of this most recent cancellation. The two went for a coffee and discussed the future of the project. It was proposed that the two gather all of the people who had supported the project over the past fifteen years and create an organization dedicated to the premiere of the opera. The group met once a week in Sarrià, Barcelona, where the opera was primarily composed, and took the name Amics

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<sup>124</sup> Carmen Helena Téllez, Box 38, Folder 36 Correspondence from Carmen-Helena Téllez, 1996, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>125</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence with Francisco Curt Lange, 1964-1978, undated, Box 8 Folder 19, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>126</sup> Ana Maria Gutnisky de Sercovich, Correspondence with Ana Maria Gutnisky de Sercovich, 1992, Box 38, Folder 65, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

de Joaquim Nin-Culmell.<sup>127</sup> They gathered letters of support from Victoria de los Ángeles, Alfredo Kraus, Xavier Montsalvatge, Antoni Ros Marbá, Alicia de Larrocha, Jordi Bonet, Joan Gomis, Antonio Blancas, María Luisa Cantos, Josep María Ainaud de Lasarte, Carme Agustí Badia, Elsa Barraine, Lluís Bonet, and Madeleine Mihaud, among others.<sup>128</sup> The letters of support were sent to Dr. Albin Hassenroth, the artistic director of the Liceu, who after a meeting of the Cercle del Liceu, said to Nin-Culmell: “Mestre, avui en dia hi ha moltes òperes que són més música que teatre, d’altres que passa tot el contrari, la seva *Celestina*, respectat amic, és música i teatre a parts iguals.”<sup>129</sup> (Master, today there are many operas that are more music than theater, others the opposite. *La Celestina*, my respected friend, is equal parts music and theater.) The Cercle del Liceu decided the opera would be premiered in three years. On January 31, 1994, the Liceu burned down,<sup>130</sup> once again delaying the premiere of *La Celestina*. The future of the *Celestina* at the Liceu would come to a complete end with Albin Hassenroth, who had been integral in scheduling the premiere, accepting a position at the Frankfurt Opera.<sup>131</sup>

In 1997, Michael Tilson Thomas, conductor and music director for the San Francisco Symphony, approached Nin-Culmell about premiering one of his works at the

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<sup>127</sup> Lluís Juste de Nin, “Carta de Barcelona,” in *Els Nin, l’arrel de l’art: centenari Joaquim Nin-Culmell*, ed. Mònica Pagès (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura i mitjans de Comunicació, 2008), 11.

<sup>128</sup> Correspondence with Amics de Joaquim Nin-Culmell, 1992, Box 8 Folder 20, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>129</sup> Juste de Nin, “Carta de Barcelona,” 13.

<sup>130</sup> “History,” Gran Teatre del Liceu.

<sup>131</sup> Juste de Nin, “Carta de Barcelona,” 13.

season's opening gala. Nin-Culmell already had a long history with the symphony, having had works performed under the baton of Pierre Monteux, Enrique Jordà, and Josef Krips. While flattered, Nin-Culmell felt that he had nothing for the Symphony to perform until Tilson Thomas proposed the symphony present something from his opera.<sup>132</sup> The resulting three-minute fanfare combined various themes and motives from the opera, and it was performed on September 4, 1997.<sup>133</sup>

In 2000, in conjunction with the Minister of Culture, the Alterna Opera company proposed a premiere at the Teatro Albéniz in Madrid during the Autumn Festival, under the direction of Alexis Soriano.<sup>134</sup> Soon, the plans changed to hold the premiere at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid the following year.<sup>135</sup> The premiere would continue to be delayed, and despite numerous hopeful possibilities, Nin-Culmell was never able to see or hear his opera performed. Thanks to the efforts of the Amics de Joaquim Nin, the opera was finally given a posthumous performance in centennial celebration of Nin-

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<sup>132</sup> Georgia Rowe, "Season opens with 'brash' world premiere," Reviews and articles on the "Fanfare from La Celestina," Box 34 Folder 7, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>133</sup> Programs for the performance of the Fanfare on Themes from La Celestina, 1997, Box 2 Folder 27, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>134</sup> Susana Frouchtmann to Nin-Culmell, Correspondence with Susana Frouchtmann Corachan and Farid Fasla Fernandez, 1998-2000, Box 26 Folder 7, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>135</sup> Gema Veiga, "La música debe emocionar antes que sorprender," *Diario 16*, January 18, 2001.

Culmell's life, under the direction of Ignacio García and Miguel Ortega at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in 2008.

Musically, the opera is primarily tonal. However, in scenes where Celestina is on stage, Nin-Culmell employs moments of atonality and bitonality. A number of traditional operatic elements are used, including choruses and a motive that represents love. Finally, there are musical quotations from popular sources, a *polo* and "El Vito," and from the classical tradition, two works by Juan del Encina to be discussed in more depth in the following section.

The premiere of the work received some media attention anticipating the performance, with previews running in the Madrid newspapers *La Razón*,<sup>136</sup> *ABC*,<sup>137</sup> and *20 minutos*.<sup>138</sup> Each preview highlighted the opera's tumultuous history. After its premiere, one reviewer noted the lack of press and enthusiasm surrounding it, writing, "En otro tiempo, quizá en otro lugar, el estreno de «La Celestina» habría sido un acontecimiento comentado y difundido hasta la saciedad."<sup>139</sup> (In another time, perhaps in another place, the premiere of *La Celestina* would have been an event widely commented on ad nauseam.) Still the reviewers praised the work's ability to embrace a time when the the opera would have garnered greater attention. The opera painted an "retrato oprimido de una España que fue y que reposa aletargada en el fondo de unas

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<sup>136</sup> M. Ayanz, "'La Celestina': la ópera maldita," *La Razón*, September 19, 2008.

<sup>137</sup> Irene G. Varamadrid, "La Celestina por fin canta," *ABC*, September 19, 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Rubén Ruiz, "Calisto muere de amor cantando," *20 Minutos*, September 19, 2008.

<sup>139</sup> Alberto González Lapuente, "Triste amado," *ABC*, September 21, 2008.

conciencias capaces de olvidar, recreándose en la satisfacción de lo circunstancial y lo inmediato”<sup>140</sup> (an oppressed portrait of a dormant Spain resting on the bottom of a forgotten consciousness, reveling in the satisfaction of the circumstantial and immediate). Another reviewer praised the “natura” vocal melodies, and Nin-Culmell’s daring choice to compose a tonal and almost romantic work in his era.<sup>141</sup>

The thirty-five years that passed between the initial composition of “Dulces Arboles” in 1956 and the final revisions made in 1991; show the difficulties composers face when composing large-scale works. The efforts to stage *La Celestina* beginning in the mid-1970s are exemplary of the financial and bureaucratic problems that face opera composers in the twentieth century. But it was not just the standard problems that faced *La Celestina*, as both the death of Juan Pàmias and the burning of the Liceu meant that Nin-Culmell had to overcome extraordinary obstacles in order to premiere his opera. Thanks to the organizational efforts of the Amics de Joaquim Nin-Culmell, *La Celestina* was finally able to be premiered to a welcoming audience. Unfortunately, Nin-Culmell’s death four years earlier meant that he never truly knew the product of his great effort.

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<sup>140</sup> Lapuente, “Triste amado.”

<sup>141</sup> Gonzalo Alonso, “‘La Celestina’, un estreno necesario,” *La Razón*, September 21, 2008.

#### iv. *Celestina* and Spanish Identity

“España me persigue” (Spain haunts me) – Nin-Culmell

Questions of Nin-Culmell’s national identity are complex. In an article in *Clavier* magazine, Arlene Woehl introduces Nin-Culmell as “an American composer whose piano works vibrantly and eloquently portray the various regions of Spain.”<sup>142</sup> Anaïs also wrote about her brother as being “American in every sense of the word.”<sup>143</sup> Indeed, he lived the majority of his life in the U.S. and held U.S. citizenship; however, he considered himself not only Spanish but also Catalan.<sup>144</sup> Nin-Culmell recognized the irony of his self-professed Catalan identity, as he had spent many more years living in Paris, yet never considered himself French.<sup>145</sup> Speaking of this identity, Nin-Culmell said: “[Y]o, francés, ¡ni hablar! Estadounidense, todavía menos. Cubano... solo el pasaporte. ¡Una locura!” (Me, French? No way! U.S. American? Even less. Cuban... only in passport. Crazy!)<sup>146</sup> Early in his career he was often written about as being a Spanish pianist or composer, and sometimes, as in the case of Gilbert Chase, as a “Spanish” – in quotation marks – composer.<sup>147</sup> The Nin family’s Catalan heritage went back five generations,<sup>148</sup> and it is

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<sup>142</sup> Woehl, “España Me Persigue,” 20.

<sup>143</sup> Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: Volume Two*, 242-43.

<sup>144</sup> Juan Luis Tapia, “Joaquín Nin-Culmell: Compositor,” *Ideal*, April 16, 1993.

<sup>145</sup> Arcadi Espada, “Joaquín Nin: Secretos de Familia,” 34.

<sup>146</sup> Justo Romero, “Joaquín Nin-Culmell: Memoria Viva,” *Scherzo* 130 (December 1998): 135.

<sup>147</sup> Chase, Gilbert, *The Music of Spain*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 322-23.

through this, more so than the accidental land of his birth, that he finds the roots of his national identity.

Part of the heritage that Nin-Culmell inherited as a Spanish composer was the construction of a Spanish identity through music. It was seen as a necessity to prove that Spanish music was equal to that of France, Italy, and Germany. While Spain has had a long history of musical theater with the *zarzuela*, a lyric-drama that alternates spoken dialog with musical numbers, it had yet to produce an operatic work it could call its own. Many of the most performed operas in history take place in Spain and construct an exoticized image of Spain from an outsider's perspective. Despite Spain's regular appearance as a locale in opera, no opera by a Spanish composer has become a regular part of the operatic repertoire.<sup>149</sup> The composers of the generation before Nin-Culmell tried to establish a Spanish operatic tradition and to construct the idea of Spanish-ness from their own perspective. Of that generation's nationalist operas, only Enrique Granados' *Goyescas* and Manuel de Falla's *La vida breve* have continued to be performed with any regularity.<sup>150</sup> Many of these compositions embraced particular regions of Spain, primarily the "exotic" Andalusia in southern Spain, also portrayed by

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<sup>148</sup> Mònica Pagès I Santacana, "Joaquim Nin-Culmell: Roda el món i torna al born" in *Els Nin, l'arrel de l'art: centenari Joaquim Nin-Culmell*, ed. Mònica Pagès (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura i mitjans de Comunicació, 2008), 17.

<sup>149</sup> "Statistics 2014/14," Operabase, accessed March 26, 2016, <http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&splash=t>.

<sup>150</sup> Walter Aaron Clark, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 275.

foreign composers, but also the “universal” Castile, idealized as “the cradle of ‘pure’ national identity.”<sup>151</sup> It is following in this tradition that we find Joaquín Nin-Culmell’s *La Celestina*: an opera in search of a Spanish identity, composed at a time when that very identity was being manipulated into the Francoist imagination of a universal, Catholic, and eternal Spain.

Unpacking Nin-Culmell’s political beliefs is a difficult task. He rarely spoke on the subject of politics publicly, nor did he often write about his positions in letters or in other personal documents. Further, understanding an individual’s political position is never black and white, rarely working out in the way one expects. The most overt political action that Nin-Culmell participated in was his involvement with the U.S. Democratic presidential campaign of Adlai Stevenson in 1952. A major reason for his support of Stevenson was the candidate’s support for academic freedom,<sup>152</sup> an important issue on the Berkeley campus at the time, where they had recently begun requiring faculty to take loyalty oaths.<sup>153</sup> This sort of policy, and the general political climate of the McCarthyera, may have led Nin-Culmell to be careful about what he said in public. He was, after all, a newly naturalized citizen, having gained that status in 1951.

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<sup>151</sup> Carol Hess, *Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898-1936* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 120.

<sup>152</sup> Andrea Olmstead, *Roger Sessions: A Biography* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 287.

<sup>153</sup> “Resolution Adopted by the Regents of the University of California, April 21, 1950,” The Loyalty Oath Controversy University of California 1949-1951, accessed May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016, [http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives\\_exhibits/loyaltyoath/regent\\_resolution.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives_exhibits/loyaltyoath/regent_resolution.html).

His feelings on the situation in Spain were similarly murky. While he favored democracy over dictatorship, he expressed some empathy towards Franco. Writing in a letter from 1969, Nin-Culmell stated that “[Franco] has served his purpose.”<sup>154</sup> Once democracy had returned to Spain in 1976, he ultimately gave the dictator credit for establishing free elections.<sup>155</sup> This expression of empathy towards Franco may seem contradictory to my reading of *Celestina* as in opposition to the Francoist imagination. I posit that Nin-Culmell could see value in Franco’s dictatorship, while simultaneously opposing the Francoist construction of a unified and eternal Spain. Nin-Culmell’s devout Catholicism may have also contributed to this empathy. As the historian Robert Paxton has observed, “Franco’s Spain. . . [was] always more Catholic than fascist, [and] built its authority upon traditional pillars such as the Church, big landowners, and the army, essentially charging them instead of the state or the ever-weaker Falange with social control.”<sup>156</sup> In summary, I believe that Nin-Culmell found value in the Catholic aspects of Franco’s dictatorship and that he believed that the dictatorship helped establish a democratic Spain. I also believe that Nin-Culmell was against Franco’s methodology. More importantly, I believe Nin-Culmell was against Franco’s imagined construction of a unified and eternal Spain, which he expressed through the composition of *La Celestina*.

When Nin-Culmell arrived in Barcelona during his 1956 sabbatical, he had initially set out to compose an opera based on Federico García Lorca’s drama *Bodas de Sangre*, a

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<sup>154</sup> Nin-Culmell to Reid, July 17, 1969.

<sup>155</sup> Nin-Culmell to Richmond, June 20, 1977.

<sup>156</sup> Robert Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2004), 217.

subject that would have been viewed as subversive. During the first year of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936, Lorca was executed by a “Black Squad” organized by Ramón Ruiz Alonso. Alonso is rumored to have boasted of shooting “two bullets into his arse for being queer.”<sup>157</sup> While Nin-Culmell may not have been familiar with the particularities of Lorca’s murder, he was aware that he had been killed by the army for being “an avant-garde poet during the Spanish Civil War, [that Lorca] was thought to be subversive.”<sup>158</sup> Nin-Culmell never did write this operatic take on *Bodas de Sangre*, but if he had, it would have been viewed by censors as subversive. It is with this subversive-opera subject in mind that Nin-Culmell began composing *La Celestina*.

Because Nin-Culmell did not complete *La Celestina* until after the end of the Franco regime, it is impossible to know exactly how it might have been received. However, by examining the reception of other works based on *La Celestina*, as well as the censorship of the arts in general, we can clearly see how the original work by Rojas, and in turn the opera, could have been viewed by censors as subversive. We may look to José Luis Sáenz de Heredia’s 1955 effort to adapt *La Celestina* into a film as an example of how the opera would have been viewed. The Francoist director eventually

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<sup>157</sup> Jeremy Treglown, *Franco’s Crypt: Spanish Culture and Memory Since 1936* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013): 18.

<sup>158</sup> Nin-Culmell, “Growing Up with Anaïs Nin,” 84.

abandoned the project, citing that “*la Celestina* era tabú en aquella época” (*Celestina* was a taboo during that period).<sup>159</sup>

A 1938 law established strict censorship and included nearly all public media,<sup>160</sup> yet did not extend to artistic subtext. In 1940, censorship expanded to the arts and focused on the the construction of nationalism, eventually transitioning to a National Catholicism.<sup>161</sup> The state insisted that “all Spaniards may express their ideas freely provided they do not contravene the fundamental principles of the state.”<sup>162</sup> This strict censorship began to relax in 1966 with the passing of the “*Ley de la Prensa*,”<sup>163</sup> but would not be completely lifted until the death of Franco in 1975. The potential for censorship is, of course, not the issue at hand, but the manner in which censorship was executed by the Franco Regime illustrates how a project such as *La Celestina* would have been viewed as subversive.

As Rojas’ *La Celestina* was written during the Catholic monarchy of Ferdinand and Isabell, one would think that it would perhaps be a part of the Francoist literary canon, which embraced the works of the *Siglo de Oro*, such as Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*

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<sup>159</sup> Santiago López-Ríos, “*La Celestina* en el Franquismo: en torno a una frustrada película de José Luis Sáenz de Heredia,” *Acta Literaria* 49 (Segundo semestre 2014), 139-140.

<sup>160</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936-1975* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 181.

<sup>161</sup> Theresa Goldbach, “Fascism, Flamenco, and Ballet Español: Nacionalflamenquismo” (master’s thesis, University of New Mexico, 2014), 22-37.

<sup>162</sup> Maureen Ihrie and Salvador A. Oropesa, eds., *World Literature in Spanish: G-Q* (Santa Barbara, Ca: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 169.

<sup>163</sup> David Herzberger, *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 167.

and Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. These works were celebrated as a part of Spain's "historical vitality,"<sup>164</sup> that Spain's existence is rooted in the greatness of its past. But the Catholic monarchies were also the beginning of the Inquisition, an epoch when subversive literature was common, a commonality shared by the Franco era. Much has been written about the *converso* nature of *La Celestina* and its author, and that the work alludes to Fernando de Rojas's secret Jewish identity. In fact, *Celestina* scholars such as Stephen Gilman and Américo Castro were accused during the Franco regime of falsely claiming a Jewish heritage for authors of Spanish literature,<sup>165</sup> a claim that questioned the Francoist assertion of a permanent Catholic-Spanish nation. During the Inquisition, the only way for *conversos* to express themselves was through covert means, and it is through these covert means that both Rojas and Nin-Culmell are able to express their feelings about the situations of their respective Spains.

While many of the covert references to *conversos* in *La Celestina* are eliminated in Nin-Culmell's operatic reduction, there are still a number of instances that remain. When Celestina visits Melibea in order to convince her that Calisto is worthy of her love, she describes him as being of "clara sangre"<sup>166</sup> (of clean or illustrious blood). The concept of clean, or pure, blood in medieval Spain signified a lack of Jewish or Moorish heritage and that one's "Christianity went back for several generations." Those without

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<sup>164</sup> David Herzberger identifies this phrase as one used by Pérez Embid to co-opt particular literary works for the Franco regime. Herzberger, *Narrating the Past*, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Manuel da Costa Fontes, *The Art of Subversion in Inquisitorial Spain: Rojas and Delicado* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>166</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, *La Celestina*, 60.

*la limpieza de sangre* were “rejected, despised, and mocked.”<sup>167</sup> And while the phrase “clara sangre” could be considered to be a non-covert message, simply meaning that Calisto was of noble lineage, it is important to understand medieval authors’ use of “techniques of disjunction in order to suggest matters that could not be discussed openly.”<sup>168</sup> This is the only explicit reference to blood purity in Nin-Culmell’s opera, being only one of many in the original work by Rojas. A number of scenes that include such references in the original have been maintained in Nin-Culmell’s *Celestina*, however, without the explicit references to Christian heritage, likely a necessary result of the text’s reduction. Blood does play an additional role in the action onstage when Celestina draws her own blood as a part of a black-magic ritual, begging Pluto to make Melibea fall in love with Calisto.

The heretical nature of *La Celestina* would have most certainly caused issues with the Francoist censors, but this too has been downplayed in Nin-Culmell’s opera. The sole exception is Calisto’s dedication to Melibea, where Sempronio questions Calisto’s Christian faith, to which Calisto answers that he is a “Melibeian” and thus not a Christian.<sup>169</sup> In the opera, Nin-Culmell avoids this by changing this questioning of religious faith into one of sanity, thus removing the heretical nature of the question. While this could possibly be seen as pandering to Francoist sensibilities, it is important

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<sup>167</sup> Américo Castro, *Hacia Cervantes*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Madrid: Taurus, 1967).

<sup>168</sup> Costa Fontes, *The Art of Subversion*, 88.

<sup>169</sup> Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina*, ed. Dorothy S. Severin (Madrid: Catedra Letras Hispánicas, 2002): 93.

to know that Nin-Culmell was a devout Catholic and that the elimination of heretical material is better viewed as being in accordance with his own faith, rather than a submission to the censors.

For Nin-Culmell, the historical Spain was not the permanent, unified one espoused by the Francoist regime. Instead he held onto the belief of multiple Spains, which is reflected in his interpretation of *La Celestina*.

In the fifteenth century one may say that there existed three Christian nations in the peninsula—three Spanish nations, not one—in addition to the Muslim people of the Granada state. The word Spain was rather a geographical than a national term. It was in fact used in the plural *las Españas* even as late as the eighteenth century.<sup>170</sup>

This historical concept of multiple *Españas* challenges the universal, unified Spain of the Franco regime and is embraced by Nin-Culmell, who explains his views in an interview from 1997:

Spain in the plural Las Españas, no España, but Las Españas. Which by the way was the way that Carlos V before Philip the II, spoke of Spain including the Americas. And if you think of it that way—which I do—then the question of separatism doesn't enter. For me Catalonia is just another Espana. And Cuba is another Espana. They don't always like it that way. . . .The over centralization in Spain is...a deplorable thing.<sup>171</sup>

By including the Americas as a part of *Las Españas*, Nin-Culmell is better able to negotiate his Spanish identity and to project this identity through the opera.

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<sup>170</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1977), 53.

<sup>171</sup> Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

Nin-Culmell embraces a regionalism in *La Celestina* that expresses *Las Españas* in contradiction to the Francoist assertion of a unified Spain. At the most basic level, to set a story associated with *conversos* during the Inquisition establishes Castilian and Aragonese identities, for *conversos* identified themselves as such.<sup>172</sup> And during this time, the Spanish Kings wanted not only to purify the peninsula of *conversos* but also to unify it and eliminate regional identities, an idea similarly embraced by the Franco regime.<sup>173</sup>

Ties to Andalusia are achieved by the inclusion of two folk songs in the opera. One is the inclusion of a *polo*, a triple-meter song associated with flamenco. This particular *polo* is an adaptation by the famed Spanish Bel Canto tenor Manuel García (1775-1832), which had been published by Nin-Culmell's father in 1924<sup>174</sup> and was also the inspiration for the *entr'acte* before the fourth act of Bizet's *Carmen*.<sup>175</sup> The second Andalusian reference comes in the third scene of the second act, with a melody lifted from the song "El Vito." This song also has ties to the Spanish Republic, the opposition to Franco's Nationalists faction during the Civil War. Its melody was used in the song "El quinto regimiento" (The Fifth Regiment), which was a prestigious battalion of

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<sup>172</sup> Stephen, Gilman, "A Generation of Conversos," *Romance Philology* 33, no. 1 (1979): 95.

<sup>173</sup> Gilman, "A Generation of Conversos," 96.

<sup>174</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell to Alexis Soriano, Correspondence with Alexis Soriano, includes correspondence regarding *La Celestina*, 2000, Box 31 Folder 86, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>175</sup> James Radomski, *Manuel García (1775-1832): Chronicle of the Life of a Bel Canto Tenor at the Dawn of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 53.

communists loyal to the republic.<sup>176</sup> It is unknown if Nin-Culmell was familiar with this connection, but this pro-Republican adaptation was well known to the point where it was performed by Pete Seeger and the basis for John Coltrane's "Olé." Ignoring its political context, "El Vito," and the *polo* included, establish Andalusia as a part of the regionalism expressed in *La Celestina*.

Nin-Culmell also includes a brief instance of Catalan in the opera, inserting two lines from the anonymous Catalan folk song *La Pastoreta* at the end of the aria "Dulces árboles."<sup>177</sup> This, of course, would have been a dually political statement. It both reinforces the regionalism of the opera as well as opposes the active suppression of Catalan by the Franco government. This aria, with the included folksong, is sung by Melibea, who is interpreted by some readers as a *converso*. But in the opera, Nin-Culmell intends for her to be the daughter of a Catalan merchant living in Salamanca.<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, Nin-Culmell attributed the survival of Catalan to its banning, stating: "If Franco had not prohibited the use of Catalan, Catalan would have died a long time ago. It's just that people are contrary, and as soon as it was prohibited, everyone wanted to talk."<sup>179</sup> There is also an association of *La Pastoreta* with the exiled Spanish music writer and composer Adolfo Salazar, with whom Nin-Culmell collaborated in 1938 on two small

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<sup>176</sup> Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 266.

<sup>177</sup> Nin-Culmell, *La Celestina*, 109.

<sup>178</sup> Jose Guerrero Martin, "El Liceu podría estrenar la ópera de Joaquim Nin-Culmell."

<sup>179</sup> Nin-Culmell, Interview with Merry Dennehy.

booklets of Spanish folk music for the Middlebury Language School. This booklet included *La Pastoreta*, along with other songs of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>180</sup>

Also included in these booklets of Spanish music is the *romance*, though often labeled a *villancico*, *Triste España sin Ventura* by Juan del Encina. A prolific poet, dramatist, and composer, Encina is recognized as not only one of the greatest Spanish Renaissance composers but is also referred to as “the founder of the Spanish secular drama.”<sup>181</sup> The inclusion of Encina’s work further expresses the regionalism in the opera, as he was born in Salamanca. Like *La Pastoreta*, both the words and music are borrowed in their inclusion in *La Celestina*. Nin-Culmell includes this and another composition of Juan del Encina in the opera. The importance of this inclusion to Nin-Culmell is illustrated with the title-page indication that Nin-Culmell’s libretto is based on works not only by Rojas but also by Juan del Encina.

The choice to include Encina’s music could have been a matter of convenience, as *Triste España sin Ventura* and *A tal pérdida tan triste* were edited and published by Nin-Culmell<sup>182</sup> in 1975, the year before the opera’s initial completion in 1976. Like *La Pastoreta*, *Triste España sin Ventura*’s association with Salazar connects the music to

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<sup>180</sup> Adolfo Salazar, “El Folklore musical Española en la historia y en la actualidad, jueves, 21 de Julio de 1938,” 7, Annotated copy of “El Folklore musical Espanol en la historia y en la actualidad” by Adolfo Salazar, 1938, Box 29 Folder 43, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>181</sup> Henry W. Sullivan, *Juan del Encina* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976): 9.

<sup>182</sup> Juan del Encina, *Triste España sin ventura*, ed. Joaquín Nin-Culmell (New York: Broude Brothers Limited, 1975).

those living in exile.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of Encina reinforces the original *Celestina's* subversive interpretations, as there are a number of similarities between Rojas and Encina. Both were born and lived in Salamanca at the end of the fifteenth century, both studied law at Salamanca University,<sup>184</sup> and both are said to have been *conversos*.<sup>185</sup> There are also a number of similarities between Encina's dramas and *La Celestina* itself<sup>186</sup> and even debates as to whether Encina was one of the authors of *La Celestina*.<sup>187</sup>

The first piece by Encina included in the opera is *Triste España sin ventura*, a *romance* that is supposedly inspired by the death of Queen Isabella in 1504.<sup>188</sup> This piece ends the first scene of Act Two, where Celestina has arranged the first meeting between Calisto and Melibea. Here Nin-Culmell replaces the word *España* with *amantes* (lovers). On the surface, the *romance* functions as a premonition of how things are to

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<sup>183</sup> Adolfo Salazar, "El Folklore musical Española en la historia y en la actualidad, jueves 14 de Julio de 1938," 2, Notes on Spanish folklore. Includes melodies by Pedrell, bibliography, and "El Folklore musical Español en la historia y en la actualidad" by Adolfo Salazar, 1938, undated, Box 29 Folder 13, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>184</sup> Sullivan, *Juan del Encina*, 19-24.

<sup>185</sup> Sullivan, *Juan del Encina*, 44-47.

<sup>186</sup> Sullivan, *Juan del Encina*, 89-99.

<sup>187</sup> Gofredo Valle de Ricote, *Los tres autores de la Celestina, el judeoconverso Juan Ramírez de Lucena, sus hijos Fernando de Rojas (Lucena) y Juan del Encina (alias Bartolomé Torres Naharro y Francisco Delicado). Tomo I, Biografía, estudio y documentos del antiguo autor de La Celestina, el ajedrecista Juan Ramírez de Lucena* (Blanca, España: Govert Westerveld, 2006).

<sup>188</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Notes on Juan del Encina, Undated, Box 29 Folder 18, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

end for the lovers. However, each line sung in the *romance* is answered by an instrumental retrograde, a compositional technique rarely used by Nin-Culmell, which reorders the initial tone row, opening up to interpretation the possibilities of further meanings behind its inclusion. Here also, Nin-Culmell replaces the singular word, Spain, with a plural word, lovers, hinting at *Las Españas*. By using compositional techniques that rare for Nin-Culmell, the allusion to *Las Españas*, and its association with the death of a beloved Spanish monarch, I posit that the inclusion of this *romance* is political in nature. By knowing that this section of music was included in early manuscripts, before the death of Franco, I believe that this premonition on the fate of the two lovers can be reinterpreted, much in the way Nin-Culmell reinterpreted the musical notes via retrograde, as a hopeful premonition for the future of Spain.

The opera ends with Melibea's suicide and Encina's *A tal pérdida tan triste*, eliminating Pleberio's famous lament. Pleberio, who is Melibea's father, gives the final words of the original *Celestina* in a lament on the death of his daughter, which has been interpreted "as a thematic epilogue, a moral summation or peroration, a contradictory—if not absurd—ending to the work as a whole, or an individual man's commentary on his personal plight."<sup>189</sup> In any interpretation, it is a personal reflection on the events, and thus *A tal pérdida tan triste* may be considered as Nin-Culmell's reflection on the work instead of Pleberio's. The lament on the great loss of Melibea is

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<sup>189</sup> Ivy Corfis, "Imagery of Love and Death in Pleberio's Lament" *Celestinesca* 25, no. 1 (2001): 47.

now doubly a lament on the great loss of *Las Españas*. Nin-Culmell follows Encina's dramatic tradition by placing a *villancico* at the end of the opera, tying the work once again, to a dramatic tradition from a region, and time period, that predates the Catholic Kings.

Both works by Encina are sung "como comentarios de un coro invisible para el público"<sup>190</sup> (as commentaries of an invisible chorus for the audience). These are comments made by the author, to the audience, on the events passing on stage without informing the characters within the drama. As Rojas' *Celestina* is a story told in dialogue, the commentaries made to the audience must be made in covert ways. As Nin-Culmell has access to the tools of opera with which to express these dual messages, one might think that it was unnecessary for him to use subversive messages in it. These tools allow the audience to enjoy the opera as a simple love story or, for those open to the messages, as a critique of Franco's Spain. Part of the appeal of *La Celestina* is its subversion, its nihilism, and any setting of *Celestina* to music must embrace these elements in order to do the work justice.

Spanish national identity in the Franco era is a complex discourse, especially for those whose identity was expressed counter to the hegemonic ideologies espoused by the regime. For Nin-Culmell, it was important that *Las Españas* have their own opera composed by one of its own people. As the Franco regime worked to create an imagined unified Spain, the necessity to undertake an operatic project that identified with *Las*

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<sup>190</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence with Opera Actual.

*Españas* required a text that was capable of functioning on two levels: a surface one that embraces Spain's history and, on another deeper level, a subversive commentary on the Francoist imagination of Spain. By adapting Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina* into a modern opera, Joaquín Nin-Culmell was able to create such a political work whose subversion, much like that of the original *Celestina*, could only be read by those open to its covert messages. Perhaps the thirty-three years that passed between the return of democracy to Spain and the premiere of *Celestina* in Madrid placed too much distance from the events of the Franco era for the subversive messages to be understood. Or, perhaps as a result of a continued failure to hold inquests into the human-rights abuses committed during the Franco era, its subversive messages were heard loud and clear.

**v. *Celestina* and the Oppression of Sexuality**

In 1989, Joaquín Nin-Culmell received numerous sympathy cards lamenting the loss of his friend and roommate, Theodore Reid. Of these, only a letter from Bruce Reid hints at anything more to Theodore and Joaquín's "close and meaningful relationship."<sup>191</sup> The nature of their relationship is made clearer by a red-inked inscription in Nin-Culmell's handwriting on a photograph identifying Theodore as

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<sup>191</sup> Bruce Reid to Nin-Culmell, Correspondence regarding Theodore Reid, 1989, undated, Box 10 Folder 4, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

“Joaquin’s life partner.”<sup>192</sup> Through informal interviews conducted with acquaintances and friends, it appears Nin-Culmell never openly acknowledged his homosexuality nor his relationship with Theodore Reid. This, of course, is reasonable as homosexuality has not always been socially acceptable, and the political ramifications of being “out” could be costly. Because their relationship was never publicly acknowledged, it is difficult to know exactly when it began; however, an unpublished document from 1993 acknowledges their twenty-seven years of “amistad” (friendship), making 1962 the year that they met.<sup>193</sup> The years that led up to the death of Theodore Reid saw relatively little activity on *La Celestina*. After Theodore’s passing, the number of revisions increased. While their relationship may not have informed the initial composition of the opera, it most certainly was on the mind of Nin-Culmell as he finished what would become the final completed work in 1991. The published scores of *La Celestina* come with a dedication: “In memoriam Theodore Jacob Reid.”<sup>194</sup>

Nin-Culmell’s homosexuality and his relationship with Reid were known only to a few close acquaintances. D.A. Miller refers to this as an “open secret,” that their interest in a level of secrecy in their relationship was “not to conceal knowledge, so much as to

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<sup>192</sup> Photographs of Theodore Reid, Undated, Box 10 Folder 5, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>193</sup> Joaquín Nin-Culmell, Correspondence regarding *La Celestina*, 1993, Box 37 Folder 64, Joaquín Nin-Culmell and José Joaquín Nin y Castellanos family papers (MS.076), Special Collections & University Archives, UCR Library, University of California, Riverside.

<sup>194</sup> Joaquín. Nin-Culmell, *La Celestina*.

conceal the knowledge of knowledge.”<sup>195</sup> And it is through this public/private binary, and its paradoxical acknowledgment, that we may find another subtext in Nin-Culmell’s *La Celestina*.

It is not my intention to “out” Nin-Culmell but instead to open a hermeneutic window through which to understand *La Celestina*. Nor is it my intention to imply that all works composed by homosexual composers are subversive or covert.<sup>196</sup> In her *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick notes that “the relations of the known and the unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition—have the potential for being peculiarly revealing.”<sup>197</sup> By deconstructing this narrative that segregates homosexuality to the private sphere it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of *La Celestina*. More importantly, I wish to argue that these hermeneutic understandings are not a result of Nin-Culmell’s homosexuality per se, but of the internal and external repression he faced as a gay man in the twentieth century. For it is not that homosexuality, or any sexuality for that manner, imply any sort of *différance*, but that there are instead modern societal constructions of heterosexual, normative roles imposed by hegemonic structures. Much like sexuality itself, the closet too is a cultural construction of a heterosexist society.

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<sup>195</sup> D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 206.

<sup>196</sup> Alan Sinfield, “Private Lives/Public Theater: Noel Coward and the Politics of Homosexual Representation,” *Representations* 36 (1991): 43-63.

<sup>197</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 3.

In the composition of *La Celestina*, Nin-Culmell greatly reduced the text, as illustrated earlier in Chapter III. As Rojas' is a story whose plot is carried on solely through spoken dialogue, the silencing and removal of voices is a powerful act. As Foucault has noted:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.<sup>198</sup>

The choices Nin-Culmell made in his reduction of text expose deeper meanings and the "silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech."<sup>199</sup>

As I have already established, *La Celestina* comes from a tradition of silenced voices as it is the work of a *converso*, a converted Jew in Inquisitional Spain. During the Inquisition, the only way for *conversos* to express themselves was through covert means, and it is through the use of "metaphor, irony, parody, and allegory"<sup>200</sup> that both Rojas and Nin-Culmell are able to express their feelings in their repressive situations. The repression of the Inquisition against the Jewish Rojas, and the repression of homophobia against Nin-Culmell. Fernando Lázaro Carreter writes that when faced with repression, those who can, emigrate, and those who cannot, are forced into an internal

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<sup>198</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurly (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 49.

<sup>199</sup> Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, 4.

<sup>200</sup> Costa Fontes, *The Art of Subversion*, xi.

exile.<sup>201</sup> Both Rojas and Nin-Culmell were forced into their own particular inner exiles, but for differing reasons. Being of Jewish descent, Rojas witnessed his family's persecution, while Nin-Culmell's homosexuality forced his own inner exile as a result of repression in the United States and the illegality of homosexuality in Franco era Spain.

Sexual metaphors in both Rojas's *La Celestina* and in Nin-Culmell's opera are plentiful, but perhaps two of the most important are phallic metaphors that bookend the work. Calisto and Melibea's initial encounter, which happens as a part of the prologue in the opera, is the result of Calisto chasing his falcon into Melibea's orchard. The history of the falcon as a phallic symbol and as a metaphor for the "hunt for love" have been explored by E. Michael Gerli.<sup>202</sup> The opera closes with phallic imagery as well. The ladder that Calisto uses in order to visit Melibea in her orchard is ultimately the cause of his death and possibly the death of Melibea. Calisto falls to his death after hearing fighting outside. Melibea in her grief, chases after her lover up the ladder, followed by the close of the curtain and her implied suicide. Thus the heterosexual relationship that pushes the story together is initiated by a phallic symbol, and then ultimately ended with one as well.

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<sup>201</sup> Fernando Lázaro Carreter, *La fuga del mundo como exilio interior: Fray Luis de León y el anónimo del Lazarillo* (Salamanca, Spain: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1986): 10-13.

<sup>202</sup> E. Michael Gerli, "Calisto's Hawk and Images of a Medieval Tradition," *Romania: Revue Consacree a l'Etude des Langues et des Literatures Romanes* 104, no. 413 (1983).

One of the more obvious interpretations of *La Celestina*, is that it is a story of courtly love between a man and a woman. It has been argued that heterosexuality is a modern invention<sup>203</sup> and that it is a fallacy to assume that the medieval concept of courtly love is heterosexual.<sup>204</sup> It would be inaccurate to claim that Nin-Culmell was aware of such constructions of sexuality, but he and his audience, would have likely held heteronormative assumptions about courtly love. As a literary figure, the courtly lover is devoted to and a servant of his lady, who will grow sick with unrequited love if the object of the lover's affection receives him with indifference, as in the case of Melibea to Calisto. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan writes of courtly love as "a highly refined way of making up for the absence of the sexual relationship, by feigning that we are the ones who erect an obstacle thereto."<sup>205</sup> The man desires the woman but identifies her as an obstacle in her attainment. The historicization of courtly love is thus coded as heteronormative.

Both Dorothy Sherman Severin and June Hall Martin have argued that Calisto, the male lead in *La Celestina*, is a parody of a courtly lover. Their analysis of the literary *Celestina* suggests that it is a parody of particular contemporary works. However, for

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<sup>203</sup> Jonathan Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Dutton, 1995).

<sup>204</sup> See James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, The Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncracies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>205</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Encore 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton., 1998), 69.

our purposes, we may view the parody as not of the ridiculousness of courtly love but instead of heteronormative love. In the opera, the parody of heteronormative love begins almost immediately with Calisto calling for his servant Sempronio, begging him to shutter the windows and sing him a song so that he may wallow in the sorrow of not being able to love his beloved Melibea, whom he had just met. Before Sempronio begins singing, Calisto asks a rhetorical question about the pain of his unrequited love in “blandly rhymed octosyllables.”<sup>206</sup> “¿Cuál dolor puede ser tal/que se iguale con mi mal?” (What pain could be equal to that of mine?)<sup>207</sup> The ridiculousness of courtly love is further heightened by the famous inclusion of the *romance* titled *Mira Nero de Tarpeya*, which Calisto sings describing Nero who callously watches the burning of Rome. Calisto interjects that the pain of his unrequited love is even greater than the suffering of the people of Rome, creating a metaphor for his longing as the burning of human beings. Nin-Culmell expands the *romance* to include lines that were left out of Rojas’s work, heightening “Calisto’s masochistic egocentrism [which] is displaced by a sadistic vision of monstrous indifference to real suffering.”<sup>208</sup>

Of course, neither Calisto nor Melibea suggests legitimizing their love through marriage, perhaps as a part of the parody of courtly love or perhaps because Nin-Culmell himself would be unable to marry his love. It is difficult to know about Nin-

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<sup>206</sup> George A. Shipley, “Qual dolor puede ser tal...?: A Rhetorical Strategy for Containing Pain in *La Celestina*,” *MLN* 90, no. 2 (1975): 144.

<sup>207</sup> Nin-Culmell, *La Celestina*, 5.

<sup>208</sup> Shipley, “Qual dolor puede ser tal...?,” 144.

Culmell's relationship with Theodore Reid, but they too would have not been able to legitimize their love through marriage, as same-sex marriage would not be legalized in Spain until 2005, and California until 2008.

Calisto and Melibea's match-maker, Celestina, contributes to ambiguities of the opera on several levels. When Sempronio first mentions Celestina to Calisto as someone who could help cure him of his lovesickness, he describes them as a "*vieja barbuda*," a bearded woman. In the gender binary, this mixing of masculinity and femininity would be seen as ironic. This first description of Celestina is immediately followed with Sempronio singing that Celestina is a "*hechicera astuta, sagaz en cuantas maldades hay*" (crafty, cunning sorceress of the evil things there are). Thus this indicator of non-binary gender is directly tied to her powers of black magic that will alleviate Calisto's suffering.<sup>209</sup> Later, in the second scene of the first act, Celestina, in Areusa's room, exclaims her desire to see her naked. And while this homoerotic scene is certainly shorter and less graphic than the original's, it is still included into the opera, and thus important in Nin-Culmell's concept of the work. After seducing Areusa, Celestina performs an act of black magic in order to will the love of Melibea towards Calisto. As she performs the ritual, Celestina cuts her arms to add her own blood to the magical elixir. This is not to falsely equate gender and sexuality; but rather to highlight the ambiguities of gender and sexuality in the work.

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<sup>209</sup> Jean Dangler, "Transgendered Sex and Healing in *Celestina*," *Celestinesca* 25, nos. 1-2 (2001): 73.

While there are no explicit references to Nin-Culmell's sexuality in the opera, we may view the work through the hermeneutic lens of his "open secret" closeted homosexuality. By embracing a work as subversive as *La Celestina*, Nin-Culmell was able to create an allegorical work of art that works on two levels, both as a classic story of the Spanish canon and as a deeper work that reflects Nin-Culmell's life. The *converso* reading of *La Celestina* allows for an understanding that not everything that is said can be taken literally, that the ridiculousness of the relationship between Calisto and Melibea can be read as not only a parody of courtly love but also of normative sexuality heightened through the use of metaphor. Celestina's usage of irony and departure from expected gender and sexual norms, and their attachment to black magic, suggests that these concepts may not be strict binaries in the world of *Celestina*, or in the world of Nin-Culmell. The relationship between Calisto and Melibea is brought on by a phallic symbol, the falcon, encouraged by the black magic of Celestina, and then finally brought to an end by another phallic symbol, a ladder. The original *La Celestina* by Fernando de Rojas was a complex and multifaceted work, which allowed Joaquín Nin-Culmell a medium of expression through which to work out the internal and external repressions of his sexuality.

#### **vi. Conclusion**

The thirty-year journey towards the posthumous premiere of *La Celestina* was fraught with difficulties, and while the audience was likely oblivious to some of its more opaque meanings, that does not discount the credibility of my claims. Despite having

spent relatively little time in Spain, Nin-Culmell expressed his Spanish and Catalan identities in his music, and he filled *La Celestina* with messages that embraced a construction of Spanish-ness that was built upon the many different regions that make up the modern nation. This expression of regionalism ran counter to the ideological construction of a unified Spain espoused by the Franco regime. Ultimately, the opera was welcomed as a nationalist work, much in the same vein as Pedrell's *Celestina* a century before. By further understanding Nin-Culmell's closeted homosexuality, his necessity to keep this homosexuality a secret, and its contradictions with his devout Catholicism, we may view *Celestina* as an expression of that oppressed homosexuality as well. Joaquín Nin-Culmell was a complex and contradictory man, and these aspects of his personality are reflected in his magnum opus, the complex and contradictory opera that is *La Celestina*.

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