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Critical Periods in Vision: Why my Friend Was Wearing an Eyepatch.

Kaelyn Brown
kaelynbrown@college.harvard.edu

Julien Grimaud
jgrimaud@g.harvard.edu

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Critical Periods in Vision: Why my Friend Was Wearing an Eyepatch.

Abstract

Our brain is plastic: it changes and adapts in response to our environment. While some circuits in our brain remain plastic during our whole life, others are capable of plasticity only at a certain age, and for a limited amount of time. These confined periods of intense development are called critical periods. Through the example of the visual system, we will explore the concept of critical periods in the brain, how they were discovered, what causes them, and how they contribute to the brain development in health and pathology.



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“Mi amparo y Fortaleza”: Seeing Psalms through a Trans-Iberian Worldview in *Espejo fiel de vidas* (*Life’s True Mirror*)

CATHERINE L. WOJDA

University of Portland, Katie.wojda@gmail.com

JOSHUA HENDERSON

University of Portland, hendersj22@up.edu

MATTHEW WARSHAWSKY

University of Portland, warshaws@up.edu

Abstract

This article studies *Espejo fiel de vidas* (*Life’s True Mirror*, 1720) of Daniel Israel López Laguna as an example of Baroque Spanish poetry that reworks the book of Psalms for an audience that like the author were conversos, or New Christians, that is, Spanish and Portuguese Catholics of Jewish origin and their descendants. Likewise, it studies the geographic and spiritual journey of one such Iberian New Christian through the Hispano-Portuguese Jewish diaspora who became a practicing Jew upon settling in Jamaica. Besides showing elements of this journey in López Laguna’s paraphrase of Psalms, the article explores how the poet incorporates features of Golden Age Baroque Spanish into his text. As a result, it positions López Laguna as a Jewish and Spanish author in ways that never seem incongruous, despite the exclusion of Jews from Spain and Portugal during the two centuries before he wrote the poem. Our analysis of specific passages of *Espejo fiel de vidas* shows how López Laguna navigates a hybrid worldview reflective of his years living first as a New Christian and subsequently as a “New Jew.” The following pages accompany the poet on this journey by situating *Espejo fiel* within his lived experiences; connecting the poem to trends of converso and Baroque Spanish literature; and discussing how the spiritual wandering, or *peregrinaje*, and Inquisitorial consciousness that permeate the text represent the converso condition.

Keywords

crypto-Jews, Daniel Israel López Laguna, Inquisition, New Christians (conversos), Psalms, Sephardic Jews

Peer Review

This work has undergone a double-blind review by a minimum of two faculty members from institutions of higher learning from around the world. The faculty reviewers have expertise in disciplines closely related to those represented by this work. If possible, the work was also reviewed by undergraduates in collaboration with the faculty reviewers.

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This article studies *Espejo fiel de vidas* (*Life’s True Mirror*, 1720) of Daniel Israel López Laguna as an example of Baroque Spanish poetry that reworks the book of Psalms for an audience that like the author were conversos, or New Christians, that is, Spanish and Portuguese Catholics of Jewish origin and their descendants. Likewise, it studies the geographic and spiritual journey of one such Iberian New Christian through the Hispano-Portuguese Jewish diaspora who became a practicing Jew upon settling in Jamaica. Besides showing elements of this journey in López Laguna’s paraphrase of Psalms, the article explores how the poet incorporates features of Golden Age Baroque Spanish into his text. As a result, it positions López Laguna as a Jewish and Spanish author in ways that never seem incongruous, despite the exclusion of Jews from Spain and Portugal during the two centuries before he wrote the poem. Our analysis of specific passages of *Espejo fiel de vidas* shows how López Laguna navigates a hybrid worldview reflective of his years living first as a New Christian and subsequently as a “New Jew.” The following pages accompany the poet on this journey by situating *Espejo fiel* within his lived experiences; connecting the poem to trends of converso and Baroque Spanish literature; and building on the work of scholars such as Ruth Fine, Laura Leibman, and Ronnie Perelis to discuss how the spiritual wandering, or *peregrinaje*, and Inquisitorial consciousness that permeate the text represent the converso condition. Our emphasis on these themes in multiple psalms throughout the collection differentiates the article from previous scholarship on *Espejo fiel*, which has tended to focus in greater detail on the prefatory texts of the work and certain individual psalms.

Historical Background

Little is known about López Laguna beyond information he provides in an acrostic poem in the extensive introductory text of *Espejo fiel de vidas*. This poem, whose initial letters of each line spell out the words of a title that precedes it, establishes some of his whereabouts and literary propensity:

Inclined towards the Muses	A las musas inclinado
I have been since my childhood;	He sido desde mi infancia,
[My] adolescence in France	La adolescencia en Francia
[A] sacred school gave me;	Sagrada escuela me ha dado,
In Spain the arts polished	En España algo han limado
My youth somewhat;	Las artes mi juventud,
Opening my eyes in virtue	Ojos abriendo en virtud,
I escaped from the Inquisition.	Salí de la Inquisición
Today Jamaica in song	Hoy Jamaica en canción
Gives the Psalms to my lute. (n.p. in text, 60 of PDF) ¹	Los salmos da a mi laúd.

Scholars have added important details to this outline, although the biography of López Laguna is far from complete. He was born in approximately 1650 to a converso family in either Portugal or southwest France and grew up in the latter region, most likely in a community of other New Christians of Hispano-Portuguese origin who settled there. López Laguna reversed this well-worn migration of conversos by traveling to Spain to obtain a university education. The Holy Office of the Inquisition prosecuted and imprisoned him for Judaizing heresy, but at the end of this ordeal, he managed to escape the Iberian Peninsula. Traveling to Jamaica, he settled among the small but prominent Sephardic, or Hispano-Portuguese Jewish, community on the island. Conversos had lived in Jamaica since at least 1530, and their descendants and subsequent “Portuguese” (i.e., New Christians) could live openly as Jews once the English captured the island from the Spaniards in 1655 (Arbell 227-28).

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López Laguna spent over two decades writing *Espejo fiel* in Spanish, the literary language of the western Sephardic diaspora, and in 1720 traveled to London, one of the centers of this dispersion, to publish the work. The laudatory texts in prose and verse by leading members of London’s Sephardic community preceding the paraphrase show its positive reception there. For example, in his endorsement of the work, David Nieto, rabbi of the Hispano-Portuguese synagogue of London, emphasizes that López Laguna illumines the “innumerable benefits” of Psalms for former conversos with little previous knowledge of the biblical text (n.p. in text, 17 of PDF). In his prologue, López Laguna also acknowledges two other Sephardic scholars for their influence on *Espejo fiel*: Jacob Judah León Hebreo (Templo), author of a 1671 Spanish translation and paraphrase of Psalms called *Alabanzas de la santidad (Praises of Holiness)*; and Menasseh ben Israel, a writer, printer, and leader of the Jewish community of Amsterdam of Portuguese origin who came to London in 1654-55 to argue for the readmission of Jews to England. Upon publication of *Espejo fiel*, the poet returned to Jamaica and lived there with his wife and their three sons until his death in approximately 1630.²

Espejo fiel within Converso and Spanish Literature

Besides expressing the spiritual journey of its New Christian author from the shadow of the Inquisition to an openly Jewish identity, *Espejo fiel* aligns in content and form with works by other converso authors and with Spanish Golden Age literature. New Christians of the post-expulsion era, both in Spain and beyond, frequently translated and paraphrased Psalms, perhaps because, as Miriam Bodian has noted, “The direct emotionalism of the many psalms dealing with suffering at the hands of an enemy and eventual redemption must have seized converso attention” (176-77, n.35).³ For example, Fray Luis de León, a priest of the Augustinian order and canonical Spanish author of converso origin (1527-1591), translated into Spanish twenty Psalms from the Latin of the Vulgate Bible. Due in part to this translation, as well as that which he prepared of *Song of Songs* from Hebrew to Spanish, Fray Luis spent five years in an Inquisition prison. The conclusion of David Gitlitz regarding variants to the Vulgate that Fray Luis introduced in his translation foreshadows the paraphrase of Psalms by López Laguna:

In his [Fray Luis’s] view, the Bible was both an inspired source of eternal truths and a mirror to be held up to everyday reality. . . . That the enemies of man were aligned to persecute him at every chance . . . That only by steadfast will, by faith, and by God’s grace could man hope to remain on the narrow path of righteousness. (102-03)

A second example of a converso who turned to Psalms was the Portuguese Fernão Alvares Melo (1569-1632). After suffering an Inquisition trial in Lisbon, he escaped to the large Sephardic community of Amsterdam where, as a Jew now called David Abenatar Melo, he paraphrased the Psalms in rhymed Spanish verse (Bodian 34-36). Similarly, Ronnie Perelis has observed that “by expanding on the original biblical verse [of Psalms], which is in and of itself fundamentally autobiographical, Laguna is able to ‘find his own voice,’ express his own sentiments and reflect on his own life of tumult and salvation” (323).

Additionally, *Espejo fiel* shares essential features of the Spanish Baroque, notwithstanding the fact that López Laguna spent only a portion of his life in Spain. Most noteworthy of these attributes are the twenty types of poetic forms with which the author paraphrased the 150 Psalms, including twenty-four *romances* (ballads), a quintessentially Spanish verse of Medieval origin, as well as *décimas* (poems of ten-line stanzas) and *octavas* (poems of eight-line stanzas).⁴ His language also shows grammar typical of 1600s Spanish poetry, including hyperbaton, or inverted word order, often for the sake of rhyming; enclitics, or pronouns attached to conjugated verbs, instead of being placed before them; the subjunctive mood to express influence or will, without a preceding clause such as “We want you to...”;

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the auxiliary verb *haber de* (to have) used with the infinitive to form the future tense; and the future subjunctive, a form no longer in use.

The Converso as Wanderer

Part of the identify of a New Christian and then a New Jew is being a *peregrino*, a pilgrim or wanderer. In 1492 the edict of expulsion mandated that Jews in Spain convert to Christianity or leave the kingdoms of the monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, on pain of death. Five years later, in 1497, the Portuguese king Manuel ordered the conversion of all Jews in his country, most of whom were exiles from Spain. These decrees forced every Jew and former Jew to become a pilgrim, spiritually (if they chose to remain in Spain and subsequently Portugal), geographically (if they chose to leave the Iberian Peninsula), or a combination of both. López Laguna shows both sides of the pilgrim identity in his *Espejo fiel de vidas*, through his emphasis on Jewish people being spread out throughout the world, and through the narrator’s frequent protestations to God that he has remained faithful even during his spiritual journey. In fact, López Laguna often ties together the spiritual journey and the physical condition of exile and general displacement in his paraphrase of the Psalms.

López Laguna’s paraphrase is important for studying Sephardic identity because at times it contrasts so much with the psalms themselves that it seems he draws on his own experience for his poetic expression. A perfect example of this autobiographical nature of his writing occurs in his paraphrase of Psalm 46. As Laura Leibman points out, López Laguna adapts Psalm 46 such that the natural disaster described reflects more closely the earthquake that wreaked havoc on Port Royal, Jamaica, in the 1690s (53). The original psalm reads, “Therefore we are not afraid / though the earth reels, / though mountains topple into the sea-- / its waters rage and foam; / in its swell mountains quake” (*The New Jewish Study Bible*, Psalm 46.3). However, López Laguna writes in the equivalent verse,

So, we never fear ruin, In moving the earth, even though they slip To the bottom of the sea the obelisks. (Psalm 46.4, 84)	Por esto, nunca estragos temeremos En moverse la tierra, aunque resbalen Al profundo del mar los obeliscos.
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In these verses, López Laguna’s use of “obelisks” makes the natural disaster much more related to the destruction of Port Royal, where even the tallest buildings sank into the sea in the wake of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

Psalm 46 also emphasizes God’s title as “Author over the earth” to serve as comfort to people who feel the effects of natural disasters all over the world. The speaker says,

He who puts his breath in God, does not fear The severity of water, earth, fire, and wind. Because today, though scattered, persistent we wait, To see the end of our captivity. (Psalm 46.4-5, 84-85)	Que no teme quien funda en Dios su aliento Rigores de agua, tierra, fuego, y viento. Porque hoy, aunque esparcidos, esperamos Constantes ver al fin del cautiverio.
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López Laguna focuses on spiritual consistency even amid a turbulent world:

Come and see the works of the Supreme Lord, who put desolation In the land of our enemies. (Psalm 46.9, 85)	Venid y ved las obras del Supremo Señor, que puso las desolaciones En la tierra de nuestros enemigos.
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This verse refers intentionally to Exodus. The Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt and persecuted by the Egyptians before God saved them. Similarly, New Christians in Spain and Portugal were persecuted to varying degrees by Christians who were not of Jewish ancestry (and by some who were), so López Laguna writes the speaker asking for God’s help in their time of need, pointing out again that God is God of every nation.

López Laguna’s Psalm 105 shows the physical journeying embodied in Jewish identity. Sometimes his additions or adaptations to the Psalms are indicative of his own experience, and perhaps

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that of other Sephardic Jews. Thus, when his paraphrase matches almost exactly the original psalm, it seems telling as to why López Laguna and other Sephardic writers turned to the Psalms for inspiration: these texts were so relatable to begin with. López Laguna’s Psalm 105 is an account of much early biblical history, and he tells of the twelve tribes of Jacob and their origin:

<p>Of these distinguished men The number, and pilgrims, Were few on the earth then. They walked from people to people Wandering in foreign mountains, From one kingdom to another in the towns. Because of hunger and persecutions. (Psalm 105.12-13, 204)</p>	<p>De estos insignes varones, El número, y peregrinos, Eran en la tierra entonces. Andaban de gente en gente Vagando en ajenos montes. De un reino en otro en los pueblos, Por hambre y persecuciones.</p>
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In these verses López Laguna writes about the physical movement of ancient Israelite people, an experience that could easily be applied to the Sephardic reality of needing to travel far and wide. López Laguna adds the words “hunger” and “persecution” into his psalm, making the comparison even more evident, since Sephardic Jews did not wander solely because they had no land of their own, but because they were persecuted in their land of origin.

López Laguna emphasizes the experience of traveling far and wide through Psalm 103 as well, while at the same time weaving the theme of God’s steadfast love for the chosen people into the verses. This theme of God’s constant love seems to be the only constant in the life of a Jew forced to wander the earth:

<p>And see, chosen people, That although God has scattered you God’s love is internal. (Psalm 103.8, 197)</p>	<p>Y ves, pueblo escogido, Que aun que Dios te ha esparcido, Que su amor es interno.</p>
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These three verses are an addition to the original psalm, which does not mention the scattering or “internal” love of God. These verses communicate a message of hope for wanderers, because they can rely on their love of God and God’s love for them to sustain them through their journeys.

Throughout López Laguna’s other psalms, he inserts themes of Sephardic identity by emphasizing the speaker’s spiritual journey of faithfulness to God through suffering and among enemies. The speaker’s trust in God through his suffering is the overarching theme in Psalm 16, where he says,

<p>Because in front of me I place the most high, I will never slip from my right hand.” (Psalm 16.8, 21)</p>	<p>Porque enfrente de mi puse al supremo, Nunca resbalaré, de mi derecha.</p>
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The word “right” in this context points to Laguna’s frequently used theme in the paraphrase of righteous men, and the righteous pathway. He says here, then, that when he places God before him, focusses on and trusts God, he will never stray from the right spiritual “path.” He also entreats God to

<p>Guide me on the path of life, And abundant joy in your presence, Crowned with glory Is the one who comes to you with penitence. (Psalm 16.11, 22)</p>	<p>Guíame por camino de las vidas, Y harturas de alegría en tu presencia, Coronado de glorias conocidas, Al que se llega a ti con penitencia.</p>
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This verse demonstrates particularly the traveling nature of the speaker’s identity, and his longing for God’s guidance and presence through his suffering and spiritual journeying.

López Laguna often writes that the *fieles* (“faithful ones”), the Jewish people, are like Daniel amongst the lions. This comparison refers both to the spiritual resilience of Jewish people and their condition as a nationless people, scattered all over the world, surrounded everywhere by enemies

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among Gentiles. It is important to understand the story of Daniel in the lions’ den to make sense of López Laguna’s frequent reference to it. In the Book of Daniel, Daniel is a very successful Jew and when he is promoted by Darius, the Persian king, some of his Persian Gentile contemporaries are jealous and set him up for failure. They make a decree that everyone pray only to the king, and no other god, for thirty days. Since Daniel continues to pray to the God of Israel, he is thrown in the lions’ den. Daniel is not harmed, however, because God comes to his aid since he has been faithful and trusted in God (Daniel 6.1-25). This story, then, is more than just an analogy of the physical danger of being a Jew among Gentiles. It implies the necessity of continued faithfulness and trust in God. In Psalm 39 of *Espejo fiel*, the speaker asks God,

Now that I know the truth	Ahora que conozco el desengaño
About the world, great Lord, what is it that I wait for?	Del mundo, gran Señor, ¿qué es lo que espero?
.....
I place my hope in the faithful	Mi esperanza fundar con tu rebaño
.....
Scattered throughout the nations,	Por mi culpa, esparcido en las naciones
Like Daniel surrounded by lions. (Psalm 39.8, 69)	Cual Daniel arrojado a los leones.

Psalm 44 is also full of the theme of people needing God to know that although they have suffered much, and are amongst evil people throughout the world, they are ever faithful:

Like Daniel amongst a lake of lions, We are persistent in the law that you gave. Supreme God, your holy and good name, Did not leave our hearts, Even though we raised our hands to a foreign cult. (Psalm 44:20-21, 80)	Cual Daniel, entre lagos de leones Constantes, en la ley que encomendaste, No se apartó de nuestros corazones, Supremo Dios, tu nombre santo, y bueno, Aunque manos alzando a culto ajeno.
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The narrator here speaks closer to the crypto-Jewish experience in Spain and Portugal, the “foreign cult” being Christianity. In the rest of Psalm 44, the speaker pleads with God to have mercy, insisting that in his heart he has always been faithful to God.

While López Laguna’s speaker often insists on being faithful to God through the persecution and suffering he endures, López Laguna was probably aware that many conversos, especially crypto-Jews, might have felt varying degrees of shame for their conversion, and a longing for God’s mercy. The Psalms themselves go back and forth on this issue as well, but the necessity and desire for God’s mercy seems to be a particularly important message for López Laguna throughout his paraphrase. Psalm 44 is a perfect example of the conflicted feelings that a Sephardic Jew might feel, since in one part the speaker insists on faithfulness to God, yet in another he writes,

Like humble sheep, you make us The flock scattered amongst lions You put us amongst the people (Gentiles) And fearful surprise of other people. My shame follows me all day. (Psalm 44.12-16, 79)	Cual humildes ovejas, ya nos pones, Por rebaño esparcido, entre leones. No pones por ejemplo entre las gentes Y admiración de pueblos diferentes. Mi vergüenza me sigue todo el día.
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Again, López Laguna uses the comparison with Daniel in the lions’ den to illustrate the dangerous situation of conversos in the Iberian Peninsula. In these verses, however, the speaker admits to being ashamed. He begs for God’s mercy throughout the psalm, though it is not entirely clear why he needs that forgiveness. However, his insistence on his continued faithfulness to God “even though we raised our hands to a foreign cult,” paired with shame and begging for mercy, points to a shame that perhaps many conversos did not want to state explicitly. This could be part of the reason Sephardic writing from this time period does not consist of spiritual autobiographies as did much of the Christian writing

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at the time. This shame reflects the hybrid identity of authors of the early Sephardic diaspora whose guilt for having lived as Christians weighed on their subsequent identity as Jews.

Psalm 6 is another example of the speaker calling out for God’s mercy in his broken and shameful state. He asks God,

<p>I await your medicine My bones disjointed; My turbulent soul Was amongst the cruelty of the blasphemers. (Psalm 6.2-3, 7)</p>	<p>Tu medicina espero Descoyuntados y a los huesos míos Pues mi alma conturbada Fue entre el rigor de los impíos.</p>
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He goes on to ask God for mercy, and to return his soul to him. The medicine throughout this psalm is a metaphor for the spiritual healing power of God, and the speaker’s broken body may be a literal or perhaps figurative description of his state while he was a prisoner of the Inquisition, but more likely his broken body represents his broken soul. His soul needs repair, perhaps because it was twisted or broken in his forced conversion to Christianity. There are many other examples of the speaker recounting his mistakes and asking God for forgiveness in López Laguna’s Psalms. In Psalm 25, the speaker writes,

<p>Do not remember my crimes That I committed blindly in my tender youth, Erase if they are written The sins that my arrogance caused me to commit, Remember me, God, with your mercy. (Psalm 25.7, 38)</p>	<p>No miembros los delitos Que ciego cometí en mi tierna infancia, Borra si están escritos Los que causan pecados mi arrogancia, Miébrame Dios, cual tu misericordia.</p>
---	---

This is almost a direct translation from the original psalm. However, instead of discounting the possibility that López Laguna included these verses because of his experience, this example seems indicative of the relatability of the Psalms to Laguna and other “New Jewish” writers. In fact, the theme of God’s mercy must have been particularly relevant to Laguna because his paraphrase of the Psalms contains both close translations of these merciful verses, as well as his own creative additions that highlight human shame and God’s saving mercy.

Inquisitorial Consciousness of the Converso

During the life of López Laguna, the presence of the Inquisition was ever felt in the New Christian and crypto-Jewish consciousness and is reflected in the writings of *Espejo fiel de vidas*. The most obvious expression of this existence is through constant references to the Inquisition itself. He writes in Psalm 39 of the “tyrannical tribunal,” a clear reference to the Office of the Holy Inquisition not present in the original Hebrew (Psalm 39.9, 69). Its usage reflects events during his life, as the following stanza demonstrates:

<p>Wash me, Just Judge, of my crimes, Without allowing that the tyrannical tribunal, Enact against me false edicts. (Psalm 39.9, 69)</p>	<p>Lávame justo juez de mis delitos, Sin permitir que en tribunal tirano, Promulguen contra mí falsos edictos.</p>
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This cry for help further demonstrates the state of fear maintained by the Inquisition. Not only did López Laguna seek absolution from his own sins, but he also needed protection from false accusations that could have been made against him to the Inquisition. He writes one stanza earlier of his “guilt” (Psalm 39.8, 69), which points to the challenge of having to deny his Jewish faith. Living as a crypto-Jew was very much a hardship and weighed on his conscience as a sin.

Within the Inquisition, several important aspects affected the potential well-being of New Christians. One of these facets were edicts of grace and edicts of faith. Inquisitors would travel to different cities throughout Spain with populations of converts, where they would gather townspeople, read and then publish the edicts. These decrees were a list of practices associated with Judaizing that

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the Church deemed heretical. The inquisitor would urge the audience to clear their conscience by denouncing themselves or other converts: that “the inquisitor or his representative would hold a crucifix in front of the congregation and ask everybody to raise his right hand and cross himself and repeat after the inquisitor a solemn oath to support the Inquisition and its ministers. He would then proceed to read the edict” (Kamen 232). In the early years of the Inquisition the edicts were edicts of grace. Converts could confess to having practiced Judaism or Islam and be forgiven during the grace period for being honest; “they would be reconciled to the Church without suffering serious penalties” (Kamen 233). After about 1,500 people had confessed in a city, inquisitors would transition to edicts of faith, which marked the end of the grace period. Any New Christian denounced under the edict of faith would suffer definite punishment if found guilty at trial. The issue, however, was the fact that any New Christian could be denounced and arrested under hearsay claims. The edicts led to a state of terror from the Inquisition and slanderers among converts. The fact that López Laguna calls out the tribunal and its edicts by name in this passage highlights his own fear, as well as that shared with New Christians and crypto-Jews among them.

In Psalm 73 an additional reference to the tribunal shows again that the presence of an “Inquisitorial consciousness” constantly weighed on the minds of converts:

Confused, sad, alone,	Confuso, triste, y solo,
I continuously live,	Continuamente vivo,
Tolerating the ups and downs of fortune.	Tolerando vaivenes de fortuna.
From one pole to another,	De uno a otro polo,
As a fugitive vagabond,	Vagando fugitivo,
I only find always troublesome condemnations	Solo hallo reprehensión siempre importuna
In the fatal tribunal	En la fatal tribuna
Of inhumane people. (Psalm 73.14, 141)	De gentes inhumanas.

Inquisition trials were not only arduous for López Laguna, but unforgettable as well. The context in which he and many New Christians, especially crypto-Jews, lived was a constant threat to their safety and according to this excerpt had a significant impact on their mental health. These lines from Psalm 73 represent just how much instability converts experienced and the painful marginalization they were subject to at the hand of the Inquisition.

A second important characteristic of the Inquisitorial consciousness was the presence of the *malsín*⁵, a Spanish term of Hebrew origin used to describe an informant. Often converts themselves, these individuals were feared for their nature as slanderers or spies. *Malsines* might report to the tribunal if a convert was secretly practicing Judaism, or if they desired to ruin another New Christian’s life by starting a rumor for reasons not necessarily related to faith. Per Inquisitorial procedure, these “witnesses” could maintain full anonymity. Often, their statements were nothing more than hearsay and could be made without the accuser having witnessed the practice of a Jewish act itself. Sanford Shepard writes that “the *malsín* might be spontaneously generated by personal resentment, the passion to settle grudges, by lover’s quarrels, [or] the longing to free oneself from the anxiety of perilous secret” (72). In this regard, the *malsín* was a dangerous force and threat to the safety of New Christians. Furthermore, López Laguna writes of the *malsín* and the Inquisition in Psalm 37:

The rebels will all be as one	Los rebeldes serán todos a una
Ruined, and the future fame of the slanderer,	Deperdidos, y la de los Malsines,
Will be brought down with his tribunal. (Psalm 37.38, 63)	Posteridad postrada y su tribuna.

To López Laguna, the notion of ruin coming to the slanderer would have been a gratifying wish. The poetic justice would remind him that God was still present in his life and offering protection. Not only did he want to see the tribunal brought low for the pain it caused, he wished to see *malsines* punished. This apparatus of the Inquisition was a powerful force and contributed to the Inquisitorial

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consciousness. In that vein, various Psalms involve the theme of dishonesty in a more general sense, such as Psalms 4, 5, 40, and 62. Particularly, López Laguna writes in Psalm 5:

To he who tells lies,	Al que habla mentira,
You [God] destroy his flights,	Abate los vuelos,
You abhor his deceptions,	Que engaño abominas,
And the bloody traitor. (Psalm 5.7, 6)	Y al traidor sangriento.

This excerpt addresses God and how he will respond to the liars in the community. It is a violent way to warn others against dishonesty, but also highlights how angry the *converso* and crypto-Jewish consciousness was to see betrayals by *malsines*.

Another way the Inquisition, *malsines*, and crypto-Jews are represented in the Inquisitorial context is through the symbolism of animals. In multiple psalms López Laguna writes of lions, snakes, and sheep; doing so draws parallels to the aforementioned components of the Inquisition. Each of these animals possess traits that López Laguna would have wanted to highlight. Sheep represent crypto-Jews for their pure nature and representation as a flock tended by God. Furthermore, lions represent the more violent parts of the Inquisition because of their nature as powerful predators. Lastly, snakes represent the *malsín* because of the archetype of this creature as a venomous traitor who deceives the innocent. López Laguna demonstrates strong lyrical talent using these symbols to show antithesis. These representations show how distinct each group is while also building tension in the poems. This personification of animals as symbol of key groups during the Inquisition is clearly demonstrated in Psalm 66:

And although the sheep	Y aunque andan sus esparcidas
Are scattered among the Gentiles,	Ovejas, entre las gentes,
God guards them, always bright,	De resbalar a sus dientes
From sliding into the teeth [of Gentiles]. (Psalm 66.9, 120)	Las guarda, siempre lúcidas.

This psalm petitions God to protect the scattered sheep of Israel from lions into whose teeth they are now in danger of falling. On a literal and historical level, López Laguna experienced this challenge during the Inquisition, but the specific symbols he chooses highlight the intense difference between Inquisitors and crypto-Jews among New Christians. A similar poem that focuses on this theme is Psalm 57, where predators are once again mentioned as vicious foes:

My soul is seen amongst flames,	Mi alma se ve entre flamígeros,
Lions, children of the fast men,	Leones, hijos de hombres rápidos,
Their teeth are arrows, and the asps,	Sus dientes son flechas y áspides,
Their tongues are swords and horseflies. (Psalm 57.5, 105)	Su lengua es espada y tábano.

Once again, the violent imagery starkly juxtaposes the pure sheep of Israel, the rabid lions, and snakes of the Inquisition. Like many crypto-Jews, López Laguna would have identified closely with the image of the sheep of Israel. Living in Jamaica, he would have felt far from the Promised Land, but yet he still recovered his formerly forbidden Jewish faith. For López Laguna, the sheep would have been a powerful symbol. As for the predators, the tongue of the snake shows that the *malsín*'s lies are just as potent as the sharp teeth of Inquisitors because of what the *malsín* can do with their tongue. The lies they tell about converts cut just as deeply as the arrows of the tribunal itself. He also chose to represent the *malsín* with the image of the horsefly, an aggressive, bloodsucking insect known for the large bites it leaves on humans. This representation is especially appropriate when one compares this insect to the slanderer. The lies told by *malsines* felt just as painful as the bite of the horsefly and caused even more harm. From causing loss of property, to imprisonment of conversos in inhumane settings, the sting of their lies was truly brutal.

“Mi amparo y Fortaleza”: Seeing Psalms through a Trans-Iberian Worldview in *Espejo fiel de vidas* (*Life's True Mirror*)

Conclusion

As López Laguna notes in the acrostic at the end of the prefatory pages, he conceived the idea of writing *Life's True Mirror* while a prisoner of the Inquisition. He reflects this singular position and a New Christian worldview throughout his paraphrase of Psalms in a way both circumspect and indicative of his spiritual journey to becoming a “New Jew.” Given the marginalization, otherness, and exile López Laguna experienced during this journey, themes of suffering, betrayal, mercy, and redemption in the biblical text permeate his work. His paraphrase communicates the original message of the psalmist in a way that would resonate with other conversos returning to Judaism and hungry for affirmation of divine favor as a salve for their many tribulations. For readers today, *Life's True Mirror* illuminates a converso worldview during the Inquisition era that too often has remained hidden in plain sight while also claiming space as a representative work of the Spanish Baroque for its careful adherence to poetics of the time.

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Endnotes

¹ All translations of *Espejo fiel de vidas* are our own. The first part of the title of our essay, “Mi Amparo y Fortaleza” (My Support and Strength) is a quote from Psalm 3, stanza 3, of the paraphrase (4). The initial letters of the acrostic spell out the following message: “To the zealous reader, the assistance of King David is now equal. And if the sign of the law gives a light, only the Torah enriches life.” The introduction to the work covers more than 50 pages but is not numbered; the above text comes four pages before the end of this section.

² As a result of this effort by ben Israel, shortly after 1655, when former conversos could live openly as Jews in Jamaica, England accepted Jews after having expelled them in 1290. Many original returnees were Portuguese Jews living in Amsterdam, then the most important city of the western Sephardic diaspora. See Gerber 202-05 for a summary of this history.

³ The authors first saw this citation to Bodian in the analysis of *Espejo fiel* by Laura Leibman (51).

⁴ See Leibman 62n67 for a list of these forms and the frequency with which they appear in *Espejo fiel*.

⁵ According to Corominas in the *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, *malsín* means “‘informer’, ‘one who sows discord.’ From the Hebrew *malsín* ‘denouncer’ (deriv. of Hebrew *lashon* ‘tongue’, ‘language’)” (“‘delator’, ‘que siembra discordia’. Del hebreo *malsín* ‘denunciador’ [deriv. de *lashon* ‘lengua’, ‘lenguaje’]”) (375). We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting “the possibility that it [*malsín*] is doubly derived from the plural of Hebrew *moser* (informer, esp. in the sense of one Jew turning another over to non-Jewish authorities during a time of active persecution), *mosrim*, which when pronounced (with primary stress falling on the last syllable, as in Spanish), sounds suspiciously like *malsín*. The verb form is *mesirah* ‘handing over.’”