

MISOGYNY AND MISPRINT IN *LA CELESTINA*, ACT I

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At three points in Act I of *La Celestina* (=LC), something in the text now seems amiss. Since the modern reader has found no blatant humor or subtle purpose in any of the three, they are judged to be stubborn misprints, or flaws perpetrated by Rojas while touching up the first act. These three narrative or rhetorical fissures have been discussed by Professor Gilman in his proof of dual authorship.¹ Two of these will be the concern of our paper.

The first is Sempronio's odd lesson to Calisto on some of the more aberrant indignities of women:

Dixe que tú, que tienes más corazón que Nembrot ni Alexandre, desesperas de alcançar vna muger, muchas de las quales en grandes estados constituydas se sometieron a los pechos e resollos de viles azemileros e otras a brutos animales. ¿No has leydo de Pasife con el toro, de Minerua con el can? (ed. Cejador, I, p. 45)

Since there is no clear mythical antecedent for a liaison between the chaste Minerva and a canine, it is assumed that the phrase is skewed; the standard emendation--suggested by Professor Otis Green--is to substitute "Vulcán" for "el can" and to assume that the author here makes use of rather complex and implausible chiasmus.²

The second textual slip is Calisto's reaction to Sempronio's vigorous lesson on the wiles of women (pp. 47-50). Though Sempronio has not made mention of David and Virgil as victims of women, Calisto replies: "Di pues, esse Adán, esse Salomón, esse David, esse Aristóteles, esse Vergilio, esos que dizes, ¿cómo se sometieron a ellas? ¿Soy más que ellos"? (pp. 50-51). (The third apparent misprint or narrative lapse--which does not concern our present study--is that Pármeno seems to know that Calisto is in love with Melibea, though at no point in the dialogue is he informed of such a state of affairs.)

Rather than read Act I as a reasonably serious unit with a flawed text, might we not try a more subtly comic reading that assumes a correct

printing, at least for our two examples? In fact, the treatment of several topics in the first part of Act I should alert us to possible comic or parodic readings. All of the elements seem selected and constructed upon themes that were approaching the category of literary frivolities toward the end of the fifteenth century. Each element is both familiar and overdrawn.

Calisto, as one voice in the anthology of literary excesses, speaks the lines and acts the part of love's fool--blind, transfigured, and obsessed.³ He talks of the prison of love, the sickness of love, love as fire or fever, etc. He is the humbled slave of love and takes the affirmative in praise of women, reciting the standard catalogue of attributes delineating the perfect female. Sempronio, in answer, takes another voice from the literary inventory. In strenuous rather than convincing tones Sempronio recites from the canons and ritual listings of the misogynist--the litany of feminine wiles and of authors who have warned against them. He has memorized the dogma of his fifteenth-century predecessors, and he entones it with a lack of logic made all too transparent for the reader. I stress that Sempronio's lines must be read at another level, because there is no conceivable tie between what we know of Sempronio as a servant, lover, and manipulator and what he recites here as an anti-feminist.

The pitting of two unrelated traditions which conflict is ingenious. It would almost allow us to construct a primitive model of *LC*, imagined along the same lines as the *Quijote*. Could the original, quickly abandoned, purpose of *LC*'s author have been a parody that stayed through the first pages, but, like the *Quijote*, took a turn so that the fiction and conflicts of the characters chosen to carry on the parody became the essential interest?

It is in such a context that the "misprints" of Act I could slip back into focus. First, consider Calisto's reaction to Sempronio's dogmatic proof of the malice of women (pp. 47-50). The "misprint" is that Calisto's rejoinder mentions certain figures--David and Virgil--who are not cited in the proof. Perhaps the material in Sempronio's diatribe can be taken as the clue to Calisto's incongruous answer. To the reader at the time *LC* was first issued, as well as to modern scholars whose bent is toward *Quellenkritik*, all of Sempronio's phrases are familiar. They are from books, from treatises: This servant has combed through all of the classical sources and cited the most venerated authorities on the subject, including Solomon, Seneca, and St. Bernard.* We could take all of his statements and document them in the heart of fifteenth-century misogyny.⁴ In other words, Sempronio has adopted, for the occasion, the role of a pedantic and self-righteous anti-feminist. Perhaps, even, there is a moment when the pompous content is associated not as part of Sempronio's private belief, but as a doctrine that he is here reciting by rote. If everyone--or, at least, Rojas' more enlightened fellow-students--knew quite well the list of victims of women, then we can

*[For a radically different identification of the text's 'Bernardo,' see E.M. Gerli's article elsewhere in this issue. Ed.]

assume that Calisto too was nodding and not really listening while Sempronio recited his inventory; instead, Calisto was anticipating what was being said and, as proof of this, he gets it all wrong! In "restoring" a misprint, then, we can confirm and revive a comic mood and a plausible literary parody in a large portion of Act I. Quite possibly, the heartiest joke for the original reader of *LC* came at the point of the textual slip.

This same parodic setting might also restore the alleged typographical blur of Sempronio's chastising query: "¿No has leýdo de Pasife con el toro, de Minerua con el can"? As I have mentioned, it is now standard practice to convert "Minerua con el can" to "Minerua con Vulcán" and thus restore a mythologic pairing--probably known to humanists of the time--that had been effaced by the printer. Yet if the author's intention was to present Sempronio as the echo of the narrow misogynist, and if the audience were assumed sophisticated enough to perceive a disparity or error of utmost humor, why should it be adjusted? Furthermore, the positioning of the blunder at the very end of the attack would make the humor more effective and obvious. And with Green's conversion ("el can" > "Vulcán"), the obvious parallelism of other animal-human linkings ("Pasife con el toro" and the probably vulgar statement uttered by Sempronio soon after, "tu abuela con el ximio")⁵ is lost. We no longer sense the blend of dogmatic, overzealous misogynist and servant-class person that the author intended for Sempronio.

On the other hand Professor Green's suggested substitution should not be discarded; rather, it should be held as the *reader's* reference beyond what is printed, correctly, in the text. It is possible that Sempronio, as a rabid, fatuous misogynist, may have heard Minerva cited in connection with Vulcan somewhere in the feminist debate; but "el can" registered instead of "Vulcán". Thus, Sempronio's error (not the printer's) is the subtlest gesture of high parody.

There is a problem: Most of the misogynist material in Act I draws upon well-known vernacular anti- or pro-feminist tracts or compendia of sayings and anecdotes of the fifteenth century. Where Minerva is mentioned in such texts, she is cited as the virgin and the ideal maiden. Furthermore, we find only one ready reference to Minerva and Vulcan. It is from Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, chapter vi, "De Minerva", a translation of which was available in Spanish in the fifteenth century:

Hanc ante alia voluere perpetua floruisse virginitate;
quod vt pleniori credatur fide, finxere Vulcanum, ignis
deum, in concupiscentie carnis feruorem diu cum ea lucta-
tum superatumque.⁶

As can be seen, when she is linked to Vulcan in this one well-known documentation, it is in reference to her noble, resolute resistance. A probable second level of Sempronio's gaffe is that he misread the details of the relationship.

In all other vernacular tracts Minerva is the paradigm who could

hardly be envisioned a participant in such an indiscretion. In Luis de Lucena's *Repetición de amores* (which I have discussed elsewhere as an antecedent to *LC*) Minerva is included as an *exception*--a virtuous woman mentioned in the condescending aside that not all women are evil: "¿Qué diré de Minerva y su pudicia, que por guardar virginidad quiso antes matar a su padre que consentirle"? (ed. Ornstein, p. 41). Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, in his poem on *Los enperadores y reys ... que la muerte cruel mató* (ed. R. Foulché-Delbosc, in *Canç. cast. del s. XV*, 1 [NBAE 19], p. 691a), includes Minerva in a special cadre of virtuous noblewomen:

Gynebra e Oriana
e la noble Yseo rreyna,
Minerva e Adryana
dueñas de gentil asseo,
segund que yo estudio e leo
en escrituras provadas,
non pudieron ser libradas
de este mal escuro e ffeo.

And in Alvaro de Luna's *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mujeres* (ed. Menéndez y Pelayo, SBE 28, ch. 34, p. 228), Minerva is praised as the "noble virgen". These multiple current views are recalled only to show that even at the most obvious level anyone reading *LC* would have recognized the type of humor that results when one posing as a rigid authority commits an error of fact.

Within the general parody of traditional anti-feminist writings in Act I, there may have been incrusted another more subtle and significant jest. Toward the end of Sempronio's lengthiest invective (p. 50), he tells Calisto:

¿No has rezado en la festividad de Sant Juan, do dize:
Las mugeres e el vino hazen los hombres renegar; do dize:
Esta es la muger, antigua malicia que a Adán echó de los
deleytes de parayso; ésta el linaje humano metió en el
infierno; a ésta menospreció Helías propheta &c.?

It has been noted that the phrase "Las mugeres e el vino hazen los hombres renegar" in this context is a misprint, since the same phrase had been cited earlier in the same speech by Sempronio ("Oye a Salomón do dize que las mugeres e el vino hazen a los hombres renegar" [p. 47]). Here, in fact, early editors caught the repetition and removed the phrase in its second usage. Only as conjecture, therefore, could we assume that the double citation of this scathing line might have been intended or read as parody. But, misprint or not, the reader may have sensed that the repetition at two points and in two contexts of the same passage was just the type of humorous slip that a vehement and dogmatic misogynist might make.

What interests us in the reference to the anti-feminist slogans read on St. John's feast, however, is more than the possibility of a misprint. If we were to sustain for a moment the possibility of a single author for

the entire *LC*, then a general attitude of Rojas--reappearing at significant narrative moments later in the work--could be documented. In the list of follies uttered by Sempronio, the most significant is that on St. John's day a prayer is read in which the malice of women is entoned.⁷ We would claim that the conflation of a religious context and an absurd secular thesis makes the passage all the more ludicrous; like all elements in Sempronio's diatribe, the reference to this curious cultish practice is meant to be read as an absurd and comic exaggeration.

Now throughout *LC* the most aberrant aspects of the cults of saints are emphasized. Still further, the important narrative episodes in the text incorporate a belief in and, at the same time, an abuse of the more bizarre facets of saint-worship by the lovers. Recall that in Act IV (p. 181) the turning point in Celestina's rhetorical persuasion of Melibea comes when Celestina reveals--only after Melibea has been led into a rage over imagined requests--that Calisto wants little more than a prayer to St. Appolonia for his toothache. (St. Appolonia, of course, merited her curious position as patroness of those so afflicted because her pagan torturers had torn out all of her teeth.) At the same time, she requests the *cordón* that has touched the relics of Rome and Jerusalem--an object that will become venerated for reasons quite apart from its alleged religious powers. Later, at the end of Act VIII and at the beginning of Act XI, Calisto has gone to the church of St. Mary Magdalene. (For the duration of Acts IX and X, while various other conversations determine his fate, Calisto prays fervently there.) Again, a desperate and central moment in the lover's history involves a strange cult made more absurd by Calisto's abuse of it. It is curious enough that Mary Magdalene should be known as the patroness of lovers; but Calisto invokes her for aid in his plan of seduction and twists her patronage into something that might have been reserved for a pagan goddess.

As isolated fragments in the work, the three uses of religious customs or beliefs--the misogynous declarations read on St. John's day, the ruse of St. Appolonia's prayer and the *cordón* that has powers from sacred relics, the intense prayers to Mary Magdalene--could be read as natural manifestations of religious practices in an otherwise secular vision of life. Yet the testimony of a consistent attitude in all three makes an interesting case for the author's general view of the events and accidents that shape the tragedy.⁸ We need not assume any faint or deliberate insolence on the part of Rojas. Nor do the three citations form a conscious anti-clerical statement. (The same cannot be said in regard to the joke about St. Appolonia's powers in Book II, chapter 7 of the *Quijote*.) But Rojas may have added these three absurd statements or settings to the large inventory of absurdities resorted to by the anxious throughout the work. In such a context, there is little difference between Celestina's invocation of Pluto (here made into a Christian devil) at the end of Act III, and Calisto's belief in the power of Mary Magdalene to stir the passions and set the conditions for seduction. The same passing but significant mention of Sempronio's belief (but only in the role of misogynist he adopts in Act I) in the truth of prayers recited in a cult festival, or of Melibea's general acceptance of the cult of St. Appolonia, would confirm a view of motives that blends powerful individual drives and sacred follies. Such a view need not be construed as the

author's critical statement nor as a residue of the possible perspective of an outsider; it is simply another manifestation of the small and frivolous events or attitudes shaping the larger tragedy.

As can be seen, a minor misprint has led us into a lengthy aside. But perhaps there is a parallel to be drawn between the humorous (and, we hope, now restored) anti-feminism of Act I and the cult beliefs of the rest of the work. The misogynous tirade of Act I, while it is comical in the extreme, serves to make Calisto's rebuttal all the more vehement. It spurs and strengthens his commitment to his project. Later, the cult practices--which have the flavor of curiosities even in a work at the close of the mediaeval era--will each take the tragedy a step further and will sustain and whet the anxieties of the lovers. We believe that the author did view the anti-feminist segment as comic and the saint-cult fragments as droll; yet all such elements in *LC* refract into the central tragic line.⁹

◆NOTES◆

¹*The Art of 'La Celestina'* (Madison, 1956), p. 211. Additional misprints, of an entirely separate order, are "Eras e Crato" for "Erasistrato" and "piedad de silencio" for "piedad de seleuco." See Keith Whinnom, "'El plebérico corazón' and the Authorship of Act I of *Celestina*," *HR*, 45 (1977), 195-199.

²"*Celestina*, auto I: 'Minerua con el can'," *NRFH*, 7 (1953), 470-474. Gilman, op. cit., p. 211, endorses Green's correction; in Dorothy S. Severin's edition of *LC*, "el can" is left in the text, but Green's emendation is cited as plausible in the notes.

³See the excellent treatment of this subject by June Hall Martin, *Love's Fools: Aucassin, Troilus, Calisto and the Parody of the Courtly Lover* (London: Tamesis, 1972), pp. 71-134. Other essential aspects of themes we discuss are found in Christine J. Whitbourn, *The 'Arcipreste de Talavera' and the Literature of Love* (Hull, 1970; University of Hull, Occasional Papers in Modern Languages 7), pp. 9-34.

⁴The "feminist debate" of the late-15th century has been studied in some detail by Barbara Matulka, "An Anti-Feminist Treatise of Fifteenth-Century Spain: Lucena's *Repetición de amores*," *Romanic Review*, 22 (1931), 99-116. An inventory of the pro- and anti-feminist treatises is provided by Jacob Ornstein in his ed. of Lucena, *Repetición...* (Chapel Hill, 1954; *UNCSRL* 23), pp. 15-16. A possible source (or reflex?) of the related sequence on cosmetics in *LC* has been studied by Stephen Gilman and Michael Ruggerio, "Rodrigo de Reinoso and *LC*," *Romanische Forschungen*, 73 (1961) 255-284.

Note that a similar anti-feminist harangue in the *Corbacho* does include the examples of David and Virgil:

"¿Quién oyó dezir un tan syngular onbre en el mundo syn

par en sabiesa como fue Salamón cometer tan gran ydola-
tría como por amores de su coamante cometyó? ¿E demás
Aristótyles, uno de los letrados del mundo e sabidor,
sostener ponerse freno en la boca e sylla en el cuerpo,
cinchado como bestia, e ella, la su coamante, de suso
cavalgando, dándole con unas correas en las ancas? ...
¿Quién vido Vergilio, un onbre de tanta ciencia qual nun-
ca de mágica arte nin ciencia otro qualquier o tal se
supo, nin se vido nin falló, segund por sus fechos podrás
leer, oír, e veer, que estudio en Roma colgado de una to-
rre a una ventana a vista de todo el pueblo romano, sólo
por dezir e porfiar que su saber era tan grande que muger
en el mundo non le podría engañar? ... Más debes saber,
como creo que byen sabes, que como el rey David, sabio de
los sabyos e profeta de Dyos sobre todos los profetizan-
tes tovo muchas mugeres e aun concubynas, e --non farto
su ultrajoso apetito de quantas a su mando tenía, e fer-
mosas e tales como un rey por poderío tener podýa--, com
mal propósyto e desfrenada voluntad amó a Versabé de-
sonestamente, muger una sola que Urías, cavallero suyo,
tenía, enamorado della..." (ed. J. González Muela [Ma-
drid, 1970; Clásicos Castalia, 24], pp. 76-78).

Or, as another sample correspondence, compare *Repetición de amores*
(ed. Ornstein, p. 85), "Es otrosí la muger principio de pecado, arma del
diablo, expulsión del paraíso, vivera de delictos..." and *LC*, (pp. 49-50),
"Por ellas es dicho: arma del diablo, cabeça de pecado, destruyción de
paraíso".

⁵Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman, "Algo más sobre 'Lo de
tu abuela con el ximio' (*La Celestina*, I): Antonio de Torquemada y Lope
de Vega," *Papeles de Son Armadans*, no. 205 (April, 1973), 17-18, n. 7,
stress an important link between the two passages; they conclude, howe-
ver, that "Vulcán" should be substituted for "el can".

I have chosen to avoid the philologic aspects of the *can* ~ *Vulcán*
logomachy. It has been pointed out that *can* appears only once in the
Comedia --precisely in the passage we discuss-- whereas *perro* is used
elsewhere in the work (see Lloyd Kasten and Jean Anderson, *Concordance to
the Celestina* [1499] [Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies,
1976], pp. 35, 175). Assuming that *can* is the correct and intentionally
comical item, would the jest involve an archaism or a learned form?
Either option would seem valid, as Sempronio is at once a pseudo-
Classicist and a servant in this passage. As Prof. Deyermond has sugges-
ted to me, the possibility that *can* (as an exceptional form in the text)
would represent a printing error of a very special sort demands further
study.

⁶We cite from the Middle English/Latin ed., *Forty-Six Lives*, of
Herbert G. Wright (Early English Text Society 214 [Oxford, 1943]), p. 26.
The Middle English version is as follows: "Thys aboue all other they

affyrme to be a perpetuall virgyne, and to make it the better to be beleuyde, they affyrme also that Vulcane longe wrestlede with hyr to haue hade hyr uirgynite, but she by strength vaynquyshede hym."

⁷F. Castro Guisasola, *Observaciones sobre las fuentes literarias de 'La Celestina'* (Madrid, 1924), pp. 110-111, identifies a sermon of St. Peter Chrysologus as a principal source for this absurd reading.

⁸To these essential references of saint-cults, one could add Centurio's mock invocation of the saints in Act XVIII: "¿Offrescer dizes, señora? Yo te juro por el sancto martilogio de pe a pa..." (ed. Cejador, p. 167) and "Juro por el cuerpo santo de la letanía, no es más en mi braço derecho dar palos sin matar que en el sol dexar de dar bueltas al cielo" (p. 170). See the fuller studies of the character Centurio by María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *La originalidad artistica de 'La Celestina'* 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires, 1970), pp. 693-720, and Dorothy S. Severin, *Memory in 'La Celestina'* (London: Tamesis, 1970), pp. 64-65.

⁹The author is most thankful for a host of corrections and suggestions made by Professor A.D. Deyermond after this article had been submitted for publication.



Aucto I^o. Sempronio aconseja a Calisto. De la traducción alemana de Wirsung, 1520.