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Celestina as Chameleon: The Early Translations[1]

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> «Le traducteur n'est ni correcteur ni interprète, il est copiste et reproducteur; il doit, lorsqu'il s'agit d'un livre de la valeur de la *Célestine*, en respecter même les fautes et s'estimer heureux quand il parvient à en conserver les beautés».
>
> (A. Germond de Lavigne, «Préface,» *La Célestine*, 3).

> «No translation is an innocent transparent rendering of the original.»
>
> (Luise von Flotow, «Translation in the Politics of Culture,» 14).

> «[S]e nota un intento de apropiación, por no decir de aculturación de la obra española.»
>
> (Florence Serrano, «*La Celestina* en la Francia del Renacimiento y del Siglo de Oro,» 274).

What would the writers of the early translations of Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina* have thought of the views on translation expressed above? Would they have been more likely to view themselves as essentially invisible, as artistic activists, or as outright raptors? In what follows I will try to convey something of the distinct flavor of the multilingual offspring of the Spanish *Tragicomedia* as a means of establishing that this

1.– A preliminary version of this paper was presented at Texas A&M University in May, 2009.

special branch of the celestinesque genre deserves attention still today. The discussion will also include a brief excursion into the field of Translation Studies. My hope is that examining translation in light of the divergent theories regarding the very process will give us a greater appreciation of both the task and the world of the early interpreters of Rojas's masterpiece.

Governing the Spanish classic's transformation in other climes during its first two centuries of life was the existence of a particular social subset, the international merchant society active in the early days of printing. This group enjoyed «a special power of endurance and an invigorated energy resulting, in all probability, from the immigrant experience and from the crossing of German, Belg[ian], Swiss, Italian and Spanish bloodlines» (Dyer 75). *Celestina* quickly became a favored product in this eclectic immigrant context, making itself at home in a long chain of recreations all across Europe. Translations of the work even appeared in some places where editions in Spanish were being printed, for local consumption as well as for export. In fact, this «runaway best seller» (Greenia 355), among Europe's first, was destined to keep printing presses busy for a full century and a half, producing «unas 90 ediciones en Italia, Francia, Países Bajos y Portugal, amén de bastantes traducciones» (Torres Nebrera [9]). Emilio Blanco, reviewing the history of the book's reception in the first 200 years after its appearance in print, makes a good case for its importance at the time, shining a spotlight on what he calls «Otro poco de sociología euopea: Ediciones, traducciones y traductores» (23). Granted, this record is impressive; but why should these musty artifacts matter to us today?

That they do, indeed, have value, especially to *Celestina* scholars, is evidenced by the flurry of modern editions of the early translations,[2] whose original dates range from 1506, the first edition of the Italian version by the Spaniard Alfonso Ordóñez (Kish *Edition*), to James Mabbe's 1631 publication of his English translation (Severin), the successor to his abridged manuscript version.[3] Add to these a partial adaptation in English verse, published by John Rastell between 1525 and 1530 (López Santos and Tostado González); the two German translations by the Augsburg pharmacist Christof Wirsung, one in 1520, the other in 1534, after Luther's 1522 New Testament had worked its magic on the German language (Kish and Ritzenhoff); three French versions: the anonymous one in 1527 (Brault), the one by Jacques de Lavardin in 1578 (Drysdall), and the anon-

2.– Modern editions of the early *Celestina* translations are identified by editors' names in the body of this article and in the list of Works Cited.

3.– Martínez Lacalle maintains that the «Alnwick manuscript, entitled *Celestine or the Tragick-Comedie of Calisto and Melibea*… [was] completed between 1603 and 1611» (91).

ymous 1633 bilingual edition;[4] the anonymous 1550 Dutch translation (Behiels and Kish); a lost 16th-century Hebrew translation by Samuel Sarfati (Hamilton); and the 1624 Neo-Latin rendition by the German Kaspar Barth (Fernández).

The Rome 1506 Italian *Celestina* holds pride of place on this list. Not only is it the first translation; it is also the oldest surviving text of the *Tragicomedia*, notwithstanding the existence of several Spanish editions bearing a bogus date of 1502 (Norton 155). Ordóñez's model «bien pudo haber sido la princeps de la *Tragicomedia*» (Di Camillo 145). For textual scholars, this fact, together with the translation's antiquity and fidelity, makes it a bona fide witness for the reconstruction of the lost Spanish original. Here is a case in point. In Act IX, the banquet at Celestina's house, Elicia and Areusa take turns criticizing Melibea's famous beauty, claiming it is anything but natural, alleging that her toilette includes mud-packs made with honey and gall as well as other cosmetic treatments. In some early editions of the *Tragicomedia* the reading of this passage differs from the one found in the *Comedia* by specifying the additional ingredients in these concoctions as «burnt … grapes and dry… figs» (Singleton 276, n. 89):

> –*Comedia*: enuiste su cara con hiel y miel, con vnas y con otras cosas (Rojas h2r)
>
> –*Tragicomedia*, with interpolation: enviste su cara con hiel y miel, con unas tostadas y higos passados y con otras cosas (Marciales 2: 162)
>
> –Rome 1506: imbratta suo uiso de fele et mele con uue abrusticate e fighi secchi e con altre brutture (Kish 156

I have purposely left the spelling of the letters «v» and «u» as observed in the 1499 and 1506 printings to demonstrate how easy it would be to mistake «unas» for «uvas» or vice versa. It seems plausible that Ordóñez's source here read u-u-a-s, and that he read it correctly as «uvas» 'grapes'. It is not uncommon for typesetters to turn letters upside down while filling a tray and for the mistake to be overlooked by the proofreader. Modern editors may disagree over which reading might be preferable; in fact, that is precisely what happens with this passage, when Peter E. Russell calls the interpolation containing the grapes and figs «adición del todo innecesaria» (407, n. 29), whereas Miguel Marciales declares that «se trata de una omisión» in the 16-act version (2:152, n. IX.22). Whatever the case, both the first French translator and Mabbe include the dried fruits in their versions:

4.– The 1633 Spanish/French publication «servía de manual didáctico de la lengua española para los francohablantes y viceversa» (Serrano 273); it awaits a modern edition.

> –Paris 1527: elle couvre son visaige de fiel et de miel avec des passees tostees et figues seiches et avecques autres choses (Brault 123)
>
> –Mabbe manuscript: She bedawbes her face with honie and gall, with the berries of grapes dryed to powder and figgs beaten and pressed togeather (Martínez Lacalle 208)
>
> –Mabbe 1631: she anoints her face with gall and honey, with parched grapes and figs crushed and pressed together, with many other things (Severin 229)

It is likely that this was one of the occasions when the first French translator chose to follow not his Spanish source, but rather his Italian predecessor; perhaps Mabbe did so here as well. In contrast, Jacques de Lavardin, whose primary model was the Italian translation, makes no mention in his 1578 French version of grapes, dried or otherwise, presumably taking his lead from a Spanish source for most of this passage: «elle salist son visage de fiel, et miel, auec figues seiches, et autres vilanies» (Drysdall 155); the anonymous 1550 Dutch translator's treatment of the passage had been similar: «besmeert si haer aensicht met gallen ende honich ende met gebraeyen vijghen ende met anderen dinghen» (Behiels and Kish 230). Christof Wirsung, translating exclusively from the Italian, only muddies the waters. In 1520 he replaces grapes with «verprenten ayern» 'fried eggs' (Kish and Ritzenhoff L1v), but in 1534 he reverts to «geroesten trauben» 'desiccated grapes' (Kish and Ritzenhoff S2r). For his part, Kaspar Barth interpreted «unas tostadas» as «pane asso» 'toasted bread' in his 1624 Neo-Latin translation: «caput melle et felle obfucat, ficubus passis, pane asso, mille talibus pigmentis et polituris» (Fernández 189).

This kind of attention to detail is essential to the work of scholarly editors, whose painstaking effort is important to researchers because of their need for solid texts. Matters peripheral to the text proper of the early translations also merit scrutiny. Consider, for example, the original dedicatory pieces that accompany some of them, such as the letter that Wirsung addresses to his distant cousin Matthäus Lang von Wellenberg in his 1520 translation. In his excellent and exhaustive study of the reception of *Celestina* in 16th-century Germany, Fernando Carmona-Ruiz has shown that this relative of the translator was in the service of another Matthäus Lang von Wellenberg, the Cardinal Archbishop of Salzburg, for whom he had been named. Not surprisingly, since «en 1534 el luteranismo era confesión oficial de Augsburgo» (Carmona-Ruiz 394), this Catholic orientation to Rojas's work was replaced in Wirsung's 1534 retranslation by a learned dialogue invented by the translator to stress the book's didacticism. Another notable translator's preface is the letter addressed by Ordóñez to the person who had commissioned his *Celestina*. What is intriguing here is less the letter's content than the identity of

its dedicatee: one Gentile Feltria de Campo Fregoso, illegitimate daughter of Federico da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, and wife of Genoese nobleman Agostino Fregoso.[5] This lady undoubtedly moved in exalted circles at the Renaissance court, where she would have come into contact with «alcuni tra gli spiriti più vivi delle lettere italiane» (Scoles 168, n. 3). Perhaps one of them directed her to Ordóñez, who was attached to the papal court of Pope Julius II. The translator mentions in the letter that in Italy «questa opera non e diuulgata» (Kish *Edition* 29), a situation that was soon to change, as *Celestina* was to be printed over and over in Italy, in both Italian and Spanish. Among its readers there could have been Iberian Jews who had settled in Venice, according to Hilaire Kallendorf.[6] Speaking of the Venice 1556 second printing (the first was published in 1553) of a Spanish edition by Alfonso de Ulloa, printed by Gabriel Giolito de Ferraris, she asserts, «The *marrani* in Venice were one potential group of consumers which the producers of this cultural artifact may have been targeting» (100).[7] Also contemplating the possible readership of Spanish printings of *Celestina* in Italy, Augustus Pallotta remarks: «The frequent reprints of some works in the original, such as the *Celestina*, show that they were intended for different social groups within the Spanish community» (25). Lucia Binotti ponders similar issues: «Who in Italy was meant to read the *Tragicomedia* in Spanish? And why the *Tragicomedia*?» (312). Her findings indicate that, whereas one type of purchaser would have bought the book for its educational value (including its usefulness as a language textbook), another would have been a «multicultural [book] collector» (331).

Another continental city with «a potential community of readers»[8] of Spanish in the sixteenth century was Antwerp. Many of the presses in this cosmopolitan center of the printing industry in the Spanish Netherlands turned out books in Spanish, principally for export to Spain and its colonies, but also for consumption at home, both by Spanish merchants and by members of the cultured class who could read Spanish works in the original language. Add to these readers some high-ranking mili-

5.– Gentile's sons Federigo and Ottaviano Fregoso were among the courtiers named in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. For information about their careers, see Clough (36-37, 46-47) and Bréhier.

6.– Kallendorf is careful to acknowledge the evolving treatment of Jewish people in Venice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (97-99). According to Pallotta, Venice «proved less than hospitable to Iberian Jews» until the last quarter of the sixteenth century (27).

7.– Carmona-Ruiz also remarks on Venice's role in the publication of books in Spanish: «Entre otras razones, porque en la península itálica existiría tal demanda, tras la llegada de numerosos judíos expulsados de España y tras la elección del Papa Borgia» (141). Pallotta asserts that «Venice became known in the Cinquecento as the printing center for Spanish books,» adding that «the books were produced in large part for readers outside Venetian territory» (21).

8.– Kallendorf (96, n. 11) acknowledges having borrowed the phrase from Fish.

tary officers who began arriving in Antwerp in 1567 with the Duke of Alba's troops. By the close of the century, at least eight *Celestina* editions in Spanish had appeared in the Netherlands, alongside the anonymous 1550 Dutch translation, which added three more editions to the list by the year 1616.[9] By that time, «a person walking along the streets of Paris or Antwerp must have heard more languages than are heard today [late in the 20th century] in New York City: His language was only one among many» (Berman 2). According to Daniel Russell, even though during the Renaissance «most people were as culturally place-bound as their medieval ancestors,… increased travel drew the attention of the more sophisticated and powerful elite to works from different cultural spheres,» a stimulus to which «internationally active printers responded by transporting successful works from one culture to another through the vehicle of… translation» (32).

Among the numerous early *Celestina* translations, what makes the Dutch version stand out? For one thing, it alone adds beers to the list of wines rattled off by Celestina, reflecting a preference that still characterizes the region's populace.[10] Another of its peculiarities is the imperial privilege, granted by the Emperor Charles V to the printer of the first edition after the text had been approved by the ecclesiastical censor. This individual did not simply rubber stamp the translator's effort; instead, he authorized the book's printing only after certain corrections were made. The most striking of these appears to have generated an addendum to Pleberio's closing monologue, following the large «Finis» that must have signaled the original end of the work. In this addition the heartbroken old man laments his lack of diligence as a father, urging other parents to learn a lesson from his plight. The new last sentence, while echoing the Latin words in the Spanish source, replaces despair with Christian hope. Here it is in English: «I must and I wish to offer everything up to the Lord: may He be our help and refuge in this miserable vale of tears» (Behiels and Kish 43, n. 104).

This was by no means the only altered ending in the early translations. For Francisco Márquez Villanueva the liberties taken by some translators amounted to «las más absurdas manipulaciones» (185). One example that he singles out is the French translator Lavardin's introduction of a stock character, Ariston, the name he invents for Alisa's brother-in-law. This figure, known as Cremes in the Spanish text, was barely mentioned there, never appearing in person. In this French rendition, though, he has a speaking role. Ariston chides Pleberio for not having kept a tighter

9.– Behiels and Kish discuss *Celestina* printings in the Spanish Netherlands in the Introduction to their edition of the Dutch translation (13-26).

10.– For comparisons of the treatment of Celestina's wine list in the early translations, see Kish, «Celestina Speaks Dutch» (176-77) and «The Wines of *Celestina*.» Ardemagni cites the former in her discussion of formal and dynamic equivalences in *Celestina* translations (385-86).

rein on Melibea and persuades him to adopt a fatalistic attitude, which results, in the words of the translation's editor, in a «facile peace» that is completely at odds with the Spanish Pleberio's ultimate despair (Drysdall 20). As the spokesman for Lavardin's practical didacticism, Ariston spares nothing in his condemnation of the one person he blames for the entire catastrophe: not Calisto or even Celestina, but rather Melibea. According to Eukene Lacarra this same object lesson is at the heart of the Spanish *Tragicomedia*: «quien es más castigada es quien más exalta su voluntad de placer y su libre albedrío», that is, Melibea, whose suicide ensures her eternal damnation (207).

In contrast, the German Melibea is portrayed as the innocent victim of love. In his 1520 translation Christof Wirsung gives the girl's mother a more prominent role at the end of the work than had Rojas; the book's artist, Hans Weiditz, follows suit. The last of the beautiful woodcuts that he designed to adorn the work shows a fully dressed Alisa cradling the dead body of her daughter.[11] This illustration follows Pleberio's woeful plaint, which ends with the German translation of the Latin phrase for «in this vale of tears.» On the next page, which begins with an ornamental capital letter, Wirsung then gives both parents something more to say. Alisa wallows in grief, while Pleberio instructs Lucrecia to help him carry her into their chamber so that the couple can decide what to do next. By the time he comes to the end of his 1534 retranslation, Wirsung has changed his mind about the work's message. Not only does he remove the new ending; he also makes it clear that it is Alisa who is most at fault for the tragedy that has befallen her daughter, and it is therefore fitting that she has not merely fainted, but instead has, in Pleberio's words, «gone with the spirit of her daughter» (Kish and Ritzenhoff 42). In this transformation of the story, Melibea professes a willingness to consider marriage, although only if Calisto can become her husband. Her motivation is love, not desire, so that her death seems sadly undeserved. This new, bourgeois leading lady accords well with the Protestant stance taken by Wirsung in his second translation. Still, as Carmona-Ruiz reminds us,

> el luteranismo de Wirsung era poco beligerante y en absoluto radical. Augsburgo, como ciudad imperial, no podía permitirse la animadversión de Carlos V, lo que hubiera significado el fin de muchos privilegios económicos. (280)

Many years after Wirsung had produced his pair of German translations two other Protestant translators took different approaches to the work's

11.– Likening the illustrations to a graphic *argumento*, Carmona-Ruiz rightly points out that «Weiditz adapta los grabados a su audiencia como Wirsung hace lo propio con la traducción que lleva a cabo,» dressing the characters in German fashions and showing them in architectural settings that would have been familiar to the work's readers in Central Europe (369).

ideological content. Kaspar Barth wanted his 1624 text to appeal to all cultivated Christian readers, Protestant and Catholic alike, who could read Neo-Latin; but he especially wanted to attract the attention of well-heeled young men who were living away from their German homeland and who therefore needed to be especially vigilant so they would not fall prey to evildoers. Only very occasionally does Barth omit a passage that might offend his Protestant readers, unlike his English counterpart James Mabbe, who so sanitized his 1631 translation of the *Tragicomedia* that it has been called a «paganization» of Rojas's work (Houck). Guadalupe Martínez Lacalle summarizes Mabbe's idiosyncratic method in his second *Celestina* as follows: «In short, all atheistic, blasphemous, profane or obscene language, plus references to the Christian religion, are either removed or changed» (26), except for an occasional slip.

While reviewing *Celestina*'s peripatetic grand tour of Europe, which took the old bawd to half a dozen countries and covered 125 years, we have established several reasons why the work's early translations continue to deserve attention. They can be useful to scholars seeking to reconstruct the lost first edition of the Spanish *Tragicomedia*, and they can provide clues to the meaning of puzzling passages in the work. When they introduce variants that are departures from their source(s), they can open a window on the sociocultural context that gave rise to the translations. Finally, «translations can enrich the experience of literary texts, even for readers who know the originals» (Round 151).

Translation Studies theorists disagree over the relative «rightness» of the approach taken by a given translator. Because it was meant «for insertion into the target culture,» the Dutch *Celestina* translation, for instance, can be said to be an instance of the «acceptable,» rather than the «adequate» type, to use one set of the binary terms employed by critics (Behiels and Kish 34-35 and n. 86; see also Behiels 2001). Carmona-Ruiz finds that the German translator gravitated less to the kind of translation identified as *ad litteram* and more toward the one known as *ad sensum*, thereby heeding the humanists' call to observe «la fidelidad al sentido y por ende, la lealtad a su público humano» (74). Enrica J. Ardemagni evokes a different pair of terms, formal vs. dynamic equivalence, stating that most of the early *Celestina* translators mixed the two. Their treatment of Celestina's wine list, she believes, shows how «dynamic equivalence is an adjustment of language to [the audience's] experience» (386).[12] Lawrence Venuti, on the other hand, would find that by crafting this type of adaptation a translator would be guilty of committing «ethnocen-

12.– Carmona-Ruiz adds useful information on the wines in *Celestina*, especially regarding the German translations (92, 207-09, 278).

tric violence.»[13] Antoine Berman also considers «ethnocentric translation» bad. He states that «a translation that 'smacks of translation' is not necessarily bad (whereas, conversely, it might be said that a translation that does not smack at all of translation is necessarily bad)» (155). Berman and Venuti have been labeled as champions of the «foreignizing,» as opposed to the «domesticating» approach to translation. Berman, however, uses different terminology, proclaiming his preference for «authentic» over «inauthentic» translation (147-49); and Venuti reminds us to be chary of oversimplification

> Despite the claims of my critics, therefore, the terms 'domestication' and 'foreignization' do not establish a neat binary opposition that can simply be superimposed on 'fluent' or 'resistant' discursive strategies, nor can these two sets of terms be reduced to the true binaries that have proliferated in the history of translation commentary… (19).

After this brief foray into Translation Studies theories, we can appreciate why one approach to translating may come closer to meeting the needs of some of today's scholars, while a different method might better match the aims of another set of modern readers. Thus, while a more «faithful» translation is most useful to textual scholars, a translation that seeks to move the author to the reader by adapting the text to its new setting using what Round (152) calls «target-assimilative strategies» offers valuable insight into the world of the translator and his clientele. Common sense dictates that anyone who was counting on a share of the profits from sales abroad of *Celestina* would have preferred a translation designed to appeal to the locality's clientele. This tendency to practice «la lealtad al nuevo público como principio funcional» (Carmona-Ruiz 375) explains the chameleon-like tendency of the early translations. In any case, as Garry Wills points out in his review of a fresh translation from the Latin of Vergil's *The Aeneid*, «One service that translation of a masterpiece provides is reminding us how unreachable the original remains» (42).

13.– Although Venuti uses the term «ethnocentric violence» to speak of a particular translation of Catullus (191), and not of Rojas, it is apt in the current context as well.

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RESUMEN

Las traducciones antiguas de *Celestina* surgieron del interior de un contexto social dotado de una próspera clase mercantil internacional. Una colección ecléctica de inmigrantes a través de Europa apoyó la producción y venta de la *Tragicomedia* en multitud de lenguas, entre las que se incluye el español, durante 150 años. Este artículo proporciona una visión de conjunto de aquella historia para establecer por qué estas traducciones siguen siendo importantes: ofrecen indicaciones para la reconstrucción de la primera edición perdida en castellano e indicios para descifrar pasajes enigmáticos de la obra original, que permiten vislumbrar las culturas que las produjeron y enriquecen la experiencia literaria para los lectores de hoy. Como el camaleón, las traducciones antiguas generalmente procuran acomodarse al nuevo ambiente en el que se encuentran. De esta manera pueden considerarse como ejemplos de uno de los métodos principales de la traducción. Así contrastan con las traducciones que se esfuerzan por ser netamente auténticas. Éstas incluso demuestran, al fin y al cabo, que su fuente es inaccesible

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Celestina*, traducción, siglo XVI, siglo XVII, imprenta, difusión, sociedad.

ABSTRACT

The early *Celestina* translations arose from a social context that boasted a thriving international merchant class. An eclectic array of immigrants throughout Europe supported the *Tragicomedia's* production and sales, in a host of translations as well as in Spanish, for 150 years. This article provides an overview of that history in order to establish why the early translations continue to be important: they offer hints for reconstructing the lost Spanish *editio princeps*, clues for deciphering puzzling passages in the original, a glimpse of the cultures that produced the string of translations, and an enriched literary experience for readers today. Chameleon-like, the early translations leaned toward the approach to translation that seeks to adapt a work to its new setting. After all, even a would-be thoroughly authentic translation leaves its source unreachable.

KEY WORDS: *Celestina*, translation, 16th century, 17th century, printing, diffusion, society.