

THE *CELESTINA* PHENOMENON IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY:

CHRISTOF WIRSUNG'S TRANSLATIONS OF 1520 AND 1534

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When the young Christof Wirsung (1500-71) returned from a stay in Venice to his native Augsburg--then a bustling city, home of the rich and powerful Welsers and Fuggers and a place of special significance for two emperors (Maximilian I and Charles V)--he brought with him a copy of Alfonso Hordognez' translation of *La Celestina* (first published in Rome, 1506).¹ Very soon Wirsung joined the ranks of celestinesque authors: his 1520 rendition of Hordognez' *Tragicocomedia* stands second in the long line of translations of Rojas' work. Yet this jewel of an edition, with its superb woodcuts and exquisite type, represents only half of Wirsung's contribution: in 1534 he published another translation of *LC*. Not merely a revision of his earlier effort, Wirsung's second text shares with the first little more than the typeface and most of the woodcuts. It is this unusual phenomenon--the existence of two entirely different translations of the same work by a single author--that makes Wirsung's endeavors to render *LC* into German particularly worthy of study, and not by *Celestina* specialists alone.² Because of the historical period in which they appeared, they also deserve the attention of scholars interested in the development of the German language, the history of printing and book illustration, and the cultural ramifications of the Reformation.

While Wirsung's two translations have long impressed antiquarians, bibliophiles, and experts in the art of printing, they had to wait in the wings for nearly 400 years before coming onto the stage of *Celestina* scholarship. In 1894 Lorenzo González Agejas reported his surprising discovery in the Biblioteca de San Isidro of the 1520 German translation of *LC*. Shortly thereafter both this work and Wirsung's 1534 version are discussed in the Krapf-Menéndez y Pelayo *Celestina* edition, but their information on the 1534 translation is clearly second-hand, which explains why Menéndez y Pelayo continues to refer to its date of publication as 1533 in his Orígenes de la novela.³

The only monograph on Wirsung, Wilhelm Fehse's doctoral dissertation, appeared in 1902.⁴ Fehse's principal concern is to demonstrate

through examples selected from both German *Celestinas* that they are two distinct works, each based on Hordognez' translation. The stylistic comparison of the 1520 and 1534 versions, which Fehse illustrates with a minimum of textual citations, leads him to assert the clear superiority of Wirsung's second effort.

Even though some of Fehse's findings were quickly challenged, his preliminary study has, as if by default, been accepted as the authoritative, if not the definitive, word on Wirsung's translations.⁵ In 1974 Dietrich Briesemeister, who finds in the Wirsung phenomenon a unique opportunity for studying the art of translation and sixteenth-century genre theories, defers to Fehse on most questions of language and style.⁶ And, while the chapter on Wirsung in Sylvia Simpson Genske's 1978 N. Y. U. dissertation, "LC in Translation before 1530," contains some first-hand observations on the 1530 version, it relies heavily on Fehse, particularly in the section devoted to the 1534 rendition.⁷

Much primary research on Wirsung's two translations remains to be done. Fehse's book, while suggesting some interesting avenues of study, is now mostly out of date. Moreover, as Gustav Siebenmann pointed out in 1975, "La alemana es la única trad. antigua sin ed. crítica."⁸ In light of this fundamental lacuna, it is encouraging to read that Norbert von Prellwitz "piensa en una edición diplomática de esta primera traducción alemana de 1520."⁹

The pressing need for critical studies on and modern editions of the two Wirsung translations is underlined by Siebenmann when he cites these items as the first in his list of "zonas en barbecho" in *LC* scholarship (p. 167). On another occasion he had pronounced this lack of basic research tools "curioso."¹⁰ Given the intrinsic merit of Wirsung's work and the intriguing fact of its two different redactions, it does indeed seem strange that it has been neglected to such a degree--until one stops to ponder the complexities of any attempt to come to terms with the German *Celestina* phenomenon. Even by isolating Wirsung's translations from the mainstream of *Celestina* research (temporarily, of course), the prospective investigator cannot escape confronting widely diverse areas of learning: the history of the *Reichsstadt* Augsburg in the early sixteenth century; the development of the art of printing in the same time and place, with special attention to book illustration; and, closely related to both of these, the consequences of Luther's Bible--for the development of German language, literature, and society. A glance at the lives of those involved in the production of the 1520 and 1534 versions of *LC* will show why this background is important.

The central figure in this web of personalities, Christof Wirsung, belonged to one of the patrician families of renaissance Augsburg. Born (like Charles V) in 1500, he was sent by his merchant father to study in Venice. His humanistic training notwithstanding, for Wirsung writing was a secondary occupation, and yet one to which he devoted much energy. Professionally, he was a pharmacist--a fact of more than passing interest to *Celestina* specialists, given the often mystifying ingredients in the "laboratory" of the *alcahueta*. Late in life, Wirsung managed to combine

CELESTINESCA

his dual interests when he published his *Artzneybuch* (1568), his only original work to have been identified so far and his chief claim to fame.¹¹

Translation was Wirsung's literary forte. Besides his two *Celestina* versions, his German renditions of theological writings by the Italian heretic Bernardino Ochino are especially noteworthy. Wirsung's choice of this anti-papal model for the exercise of his translator's skill was no accident. Augsburg had early felt the magnetic pull of Luther's teachings. The Augustinian gadfly had been summoned there by Cardinal Cajetan in 1518 (the year after posting his 95 theses in Wittenberg), leaving behind some loyal supporters when he had to be spirited out of the city because his intransigence had so enraged the Pope's representative. When Ochino, who had been granted refuge in Augsburg in 1545, preached a series of sermons there, it was Wirsung who translated them from the Italian for publication in German. Perhaps the newly appointed member of the city council, with special duties related to local schools (a post Wirsung assumed in 1543) deemed these translations a useful service to his native city. Later, when he rendered Ochino's *Apologii* (1554) into German, he dedicated the first edition (1556) to Ottheinrich, then Kurfürst in Heidelberg. Possibly he was at that time looking ahead to retiring in that vigorously Protestant city, which he did in the 1560s. It was there that he died, in 1571.

The next individuals in sixteenth-century Germany whose lives were touched by *LC*, the publishers of the 1520 edition, had a direct connection with the translator. They were Sigismund Grimm and Christof Wirsung's father Markus, whose recently founded printing establishment was to become known as one of Augsburg's finest.¹² It is probable that a third person, a "Faktor," handled the actual printing of *Ain Hipsche Tragedia*, as the 1520 edition was entitled, since neither of the firm's partners was a printer by trade. For Grimm, a physician in the employ of the city who was married to a member of the Welser family, and for the senior Wirsung, a wealthy businessman who had earlier purchased a pharmacy, the publishing house that they launched in 1518 must have seemed a sensible investment, given Augsburg's leading role at the time in the production of illustrated books. The city offered them such outstanding artists as Hans Burgkmaier, a native son, and Hans Weiditz as well as expert woodcutters. Since Grimm and Wirsung had managed to acquire the valuable type that had first been used for the *editio princeps* of the Emperor Maximilian's *Teuerdank* (1517), and since the works they published were prepared with the utmost care, they had every reason to expect that their joint publishing venture would be successful.

In the end, however, events intervened, upsetting this happy prospect. In 1521, the year after the publication of *Ain Hipsche Tragedia*, Wirsung senior died, leaving Dr. Grimm to face the competition alone, without benefit of his experienced merchant partner's advice. Grimm proved to be no match for the task: not only did he squander his time and resources on alchemic experiments, he also failed to show good business sense in selecting the works to be printed. His finances exhausted, he was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1527.

The person who most profited from Grimm's misfortune, Heinrich Steiner, also played a key role in Germany's *Celestina* phenomenon. He came onto the Augsburg scene in 1522. Steiner forms an almost perfect contrast with Grimm, some of whose equipment he bought after his business failed. Destined to become the head of Augsburg's largest and last great sixteenth-century printing house, he was a shrewd businessman who knew how to use to advantage his technical expertise and his instinct for what would appeal to his customers.

Unlike his predecessor, Steiner--who printed Christof Wirsung's second *Celestina*, *AInn recht Liepliches buechlin vnnd gleich ain traurige Comedi* (1534)--recognized the single most significant fact of the German book trade in his century: the certain popularity of Reformation literature and, in particular, of works by Martin Luther:

Luther's treatise, *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation*, a tract which helped to set in motion the Reformation, sold 4,000 copies within five days when it was published in 1520. All of Luther's tracts sold well, but their sales were exceeded by his German translation of the New Testament. The first edition, in September 1522, was quickly sold out and a second edition appeared three months later. Altogether fourteen authorized and sixty-six pirated editions appeared within the next biennium. The first whole Bible in Luther's translation appeared in 1534, and no fewer than 430 editions of the complete Bible or parts of it were issued in Luther's lifetime.¹³

While Steiner regularly exploited other dependable markets--the classics, for example, which must have been snapped up by humanists and their pupils, and practical handbooks on such subjects as gardening, cooking, and health care--the staple commodities in his catalogue were the works sparked by the spiritual commotion of his time, especially the Early New High German writings of Luther. Already in 1524 he published two of these (the *Betbüchlein und Lesbüchlein* and Luther's *Psalter deutsch*), and three years later he issued both the *Neues Testament* and *Altes Testament*. From then on, editions of Luther's Bible rolled off Steiner's presses one after the other until at least 1539, and they, together with repeated printings of Cicero's *Officien*, must have ensured the printer's solvency for many years.¹⁴

Other reasons for this industrious entrepreneur's success show him in a less favorable light. In his apparent eagerness to turn a profit, he was not averse to issuing unauthorized reprints of works published by others.¹⁵ Financial considerations no doubt also led him to introduce a practice that was to spell the end of Augsburg's renown as a center of fine book illustration: by using over and over the woodcuts in his possession, often in texts where they were not at all appropriate, Steiner ushered in an era in which esthetics had to bow before economic reason.¹⁶

Fortunately for the German translator of *LC*, when Steiner decided to print *AInn recht Liepliches buechlin vnnd gleich ain traurige Comedi*, he had at hand the remarkable set of blocks that had been prepared for the 1520 *Ain Hipsche Tragedia*, so that he had no need to resort to unsuitable woodcuts. The illustrations designed for Dr. Grimm and Markus Wirsung--

formerly attributed to Hans Burgkmaier and now, usually, to Hans Weiditz--could be used for the new translation.¹⁷ The only blocks that had to be discarded were those that had been executed for the title page and the colophon because these bore the heraldic insignia of the original printers and of Mattheus Lang von Wellenburg, to whom the 1520 work had been dedicated (see the reproductions at the end of this article). Thus it is that Wirsung's 1534 *Celestina* is nearly as handsome a production as its forerunner, and almost the only sign that it came from a workshop where quality was not always of prime importance is a mixup in the order of the illustrations toward the end of the work.¹⁸

From another perspective this apparent slip may be viewed as an indication that Steiner recognized how profoundly different Wirsung's two versions of *LC* were, since the newly arranged woodcuts appear in a section of the 1534 text that contrasts sharply with the 1520 rendition. Originally, Wirsung had written an expanded ending for *LC* (in which Alisa plays a somewhat less passive role), but the second time around he was content to reflect faithfully Rojas' conclusion.¹⁹ One should not infer from this that Wirsung had lost his creative touch during the fourteen years that separate his two attempts to translate *LC*. In fact, in 1534 he had moved so far from his original conception of his role as translator that he scrapped not only the dedicatory letter composed for his 1520 version, but the whole notion of such a dedication (inherited from Rojas via Hordognez), which he replaced with a preface entirely of his own invention: a dialogue whose two characters (Urbanus and Amusus) discuss the nature of dramatic literature and its potential influence on behavior, for better or for worse.

This evidence of Wirsung's heightened awareness of the power of literature--an awareness undoubtedly nurtured by his humanistic studies and by the intellectual ferment of the Reformation--gives us one insight into why he undertook a second translation of *LC*. But this is only a small part of the story. Even more responsible for his decision to prepare a completely new version of his source must have been the superior linguistic tools at his disposal in 1534. In this regard the importance of Luther's 1522 New Testament, which had effected a revolutionary change in the German language, cannot be overstated. In short, the world in which Wirsung moved in 1534 was very different from the one that had witnessed the appearance of *Ain Hipsche Tragedia* in 1520.

Because of this fact, and because of their literary merit, Wirsung's two translations deserve closer attention. For critics and historians of literature they offer largely unexplored territory that holds rich rewards. Specialists in Rojas' masterpiece, for example, can investigate the *Celestina* phenomenon in sixteenth-century Germany as yet another avenue to understanding the Spanish original and its *descendance directe*.²⁰ But for humanists in general this phenomenon represents much more: the opportunity to study a fascinating hybrid of two parallel cultural forces--the Renaissance and the Reformation.



• NOTES •

¹ This article is an outline of major points to be covered in the Introduction to our planned edition of Wirsung's two *Celestina* versions. We wish to express here our gratitude to Dr. Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr., Director of the Hispanic Society of America, who has generously assisted us in our search for materials. For convenience, whenever possible references in these notes will be author and Snow number only [=LCDB, in *Hispania*, 59 (1976), 610-60, and in the supplements published to date in *Celestinesca* (these numbers are preceded by an S)].

² These specialists will note a rough parallel between Wirsung and James Mabbe, whose two English translations of *LC* (one in manuscript, the other in published form) were also different. See Guadalupe Martínez Lacle, ed., LCDB 238.

³ Lorenzo González Agejas, "La *Celestina*. ¿Está completa según hoy la conocemos? Una traducción alemana de 1520. Pasajes nuevos que contiene," *La España Moderna*, 6 (julio 1894), 78-103. Fernando de Rojas, *La Celestina. Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, ed. Eugenio Krapf, estudio crítico de Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, 2 vols. (Vigo: Librería de Eugenio Krapf, 1899-1900); see esp. Vol. I, pp. xlvii-xlviii, Vol. II, pp. lxxxiii-xcvi and c. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, LCDB 65, pp. 189-92 (in the 1970 rpt.). All of these studies contain obsolete information alongside penetrating insights. The erroneous date for the second Wirsung translation has been often repeated. Even the very careful Clara Louisa Penney, LCDB 69, p. 119, relying on Krapf, gives the date as 1553; in addition, the entry following this one in her book should read 1534, not 1634.

⁴ *Christof Wirsungs deutsche Celestinaübersetzungen* (Halle, 1902).

⁵ Arturo Farinelli's negative review in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, 23 (1 Nov. 1902), 2786-94, overlooks one area of Fehse's research that deserves praise; his investigation into Wirsung's life. Sylvia Simpson Genske, LCDB S242, pp. 97-102, adds a few details to the account of Wirsung's life given by Fehse (pp. 5-20). Preliminary research permits us to correct some of their findings: Wirsung's profession and data about his father; see below.

⁶ See Briesmeister, LCDB S117 (=S68), p. 55.

⁷ Genske states: "Information for this edition [i.e., 1534] is taken exclusively from Fehse's dissertation because this writer has not consulted the text" (p. 91).

⁸ Siebenmann, LCDB 496 [corregida, aumentada], p. 185.

⁹ See Siebenmann, pp. 165-66, at p. 166, who reports here that von Prellwitz is collating the German 1520 version with the chronologically appropriate editions of Hordognez in order to determine Wirsung's source and to establish what he added to and subtracted from his model.

¹⁰ Siebenmann, *LCDB* S163, p. 534.

¹¹ This book, essentially a compilation of remedies, went through many editions in German; Fehse (p. 20) mentions reprints in 1569, 1572, 1577, 1582, 1584, 1588, 1592, 1597, 1605, 1619, and 1661, saying that even this list is incomplete. He also cites a Dutch translation, which had three printings. A sign of the enduring importance of Wirsung's *Artzneybuch* is its presence (in English translation and often on microfilm) even in American university libraries. The University of Pennsylvania libraries, for example, own three microfilms of the work (1598, 1605, and 1617 London editions) as well as an imperfect bound copy of London: Edmund Bollifant, 1598, whose title reads: *Praxis medicinae uniuersalis; or A generall practise of physicke: wherein are contained all inward and outward parts of the body, with all the accidents and infirmities that are incident unto them, even from the crowne of the head to the sole of the foote; Also by what meanes (vvith the help of God) they may be remedied: very meete and profitable, not only for all phisitons, chirurgions, apothecaries, and midwiues, but for all other estates whatsoever. The Like whereof as yet in English hath not beene published. Compiled and written by the most famous and learned Doctour Christopher Wirtzung [sic] in the Germane tongue, and now translated into English, in diuers places corrected, and with many additions illustrated and augmented, by Iacob Mosan.* It should be noted that in the 1568 German edition Wirsung's name is not preceded by the title "doctor."

¹² Our biographical data on the printers of the German *Celestina* translations will be updated through research in European libraries and archives. The sources we have used for the provisional information given here are classics in the areas of printing and book illustration: Alfred Götze, *Die hochdeutschen Drucker der Reformationszeit*, 2nd ed. (1905; rpt. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963); Richard Muther, *German Book Illustration of the Gothic Period and the Early Renaissance (1460-1530)*, trans. Ralph R. Shaw, 2 vols. in 1 (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1972), of the original, Munich, 1884; Karl Schottenloher, *Das alte Buch*, Bibliothek für Kunst- und Antiquitäten-Sammler, Bd. 14 (Berlin: R. C. Schmidt, 1919).

¹³ Colin Clair, *A History of European Printing* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 123.

¹⁴ Schottenloher gives several reasons why Steiner's successful business seems to have deteriorated over the years (pp. 136-38).

¹⁵ While this practice was not unusual at that time, Steiner seems to have made it a specialty at which he was quite proficient, to judge from his first edition (1535) of the whole Luther Bible, which was an exact copy, complete with woodcuts, of the original, printed by Hans Luft in Wittenberg just one year earlier. See Muther, p. 155.

¹⁶ For example, Steiner, who had bought the wood blocks (prepared back in 1520 for Grimm and Wirsung, but not used by them) for both the Cicero and for the German translation of Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque*

fortunae, not only brought out repeated editions of these works; he also used many of the outstanding illustrations in them for almost all his publications after 1532. See Muther, pp. 128-30, 151-52, 267-68, and Schottenloher, pp. 42-46.

¹⁷ Thome, *LCDB* S341, praises these illustrations, which regular readers of *Celestinesca* will have already admired in every number of this journal. Isolated reproductions of some of the woodcuts have appeared elsewhere; see, for example, *German Renaissance Title Borders*, selected by Alfred Forbes Johnson, Facsimiles and Illustrations issued by the Bibliographical Society, No. 1 (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1929), p. 11 and plate 28; and Penney, p. 118 (where additional sources containing illustrations from the 1520 edition accompany copies of its title page and colophon). A facsimile of all the woodcuts and of the *Argumente* [*LCDB* S22], was issued in Augsburg, without date. Penney, p. 119, mistakenly lists this book as a facsimile of the entire original, but the date she ascribes to it (1923) is probably correct, or nearly so.

¹⁸ See Fehse (pp. 42-43), whose discussion of this point is summarized in Genske, p. 103.

¹⁹ Wirsung's 1520 addition to the standard *Celestina* ending has been variously explained. González Agejas surmises that "es la conclusión verdadera del acto 21.º de la *Celestina*" (p. 101). This theory, which was reasonable in 1894 when numerous early versions of Rojas' work (in Spanish and in translation) still awaited discovery, no longer seems plausible. Fehse (p. 43) and Genske (p. 89) relate Wirsung's innovation to a wish to balance the roles of Melibea's parents. It can be noted that Hordognez also seems to have felt the need to heighten Alisa's part: in Act XII he assigns to her two of Pleberio's speeches (see Kish, ed., *LCDB* 242, p. 22 and n. 18); and Jacques de Lavardin expands the ending of his French translation (c. 1560) by bringing in "Ariston, frère d'Alise" (see Alan Deyermond, *LCDB* 512).

²⁰ The term is borrowed from Heugas, *LCDB* 57.



Celestina llega a la casa de Melibea.
Acto IV. Burgos, ¿1499?





Title page of the 1520 edition of the
German translation of Celestina by C.
Wirsung.



Colophon of the 1520 edition of the German translation of Celestina by C. Wirsung.