



"LA CELESTINA", "THE CELESTINA", AND L2 INTERFERENCE IN L1

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Given that "LC", standing for "*La Celestina*", is the abbreviation adopted by this excellent journal for the (*sic*) *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, it may well seem churlish, and will in all probability prove profitless, to protest that "*La Celestina*" is incorrect in both English and Spanish: unless one prefers the lengthier but more precise titles of the early editions, the book should be called quite simply "*Celestina*" or, in Spanish, "*la Celestina*".

The potential ambiguity which eponymous heroes, or heroines, consistently create is, in fact, negligible in English, since *Celestina* may be distinguished from *Celestina* as easily as *Hamlet* from *Hamlet*. Modern Spanish removes even this possible source of confusion by some perfectly clear and simple rules: "Se antepone el artículo ... con los nombres que son títulos de obras; como EL *Edipo*, LA *Raquel*" (Real Academia Española, *Gramática de la lengua española*, nueva edición reformada, Madrid, 1931, §578 (b)); or, possibly even more explicitly, "cuando una obra tiene por título un personaje, pues se dice 'el *Otelo*' aunque en la obra sea solo 'Otelo'" (Niceto Alcalá-Zamora, "Observaciones" to §§865-68 of Andrés Bello and Rufino J. Cuervo, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, Buenos Aires, 1945). It is true that these rules are not scrupulously observed by all modern Spanish-speaking critics, and that one can readily find numerous examples not only of "*La Celestina*" but also of the converse solecism (unnoticed, to my knowledge, by the grammarians), which consists in removing an article which properly belongs to the title and preposing it as a qualifier, as, for instance, in "*la Vida es sueño*". But a number of careful scholars (Menéndez Pelayo, Foulché-Delbosc, etc.) do invariably refer to "*la Celestina*"; and just as "*el Otelo*" translates back into English as "*Othello*", so "*la Celestina*" should be translated simply as "*Celestina*".

It may be important to emphasize that, despite sundry modern editions, the "unofficial" substitute title of the *Tragicomedia* was not originally *La Celestina* but *Celestina*. While we may perhaps disregard an early edition of the Italian translation entitled *Celestina: Tragicomedia di Calisto e Melibea* (Venice, 1519), the Spanish Golden-Age editions which use this title have no article: Alcalá, 1569 (copied in Antwerp in

1595 and 1599) is *Celestina: Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, while the expurgated edition of Madrid, 1632, is *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea vulgarmente llamada Celestina*. But long before 1569 the title of *Celestina* was in widespread use. Although his Latin does not constitute evidence for the non-use of the article, Luis Vives calls it "*Celestina*" in his *De institutione feminae christianae*, I, 5 (1529) and in his *De causis corruptarum artium* (1531). But later examples are unequivocal. In 1534 Feliciano de Silva published his *Segunda comedia de Celestina*; in 1535, in his *Diálogo de la lengua*, Valdés speaks more than once simply of "*Celestina*": "el autor de *Celestina*", etc.; in 1536 Gaspar Gómez entitled his sequel *Tercera parte de la tragicomedia de Celestina*; in 1539 Guevara, in his well known attack on profane literature in *Aviso de privados y doctrinales*, writes of the "libros, que es afrenta nombrarlos, como son *Amadís de Gaula*, *Tristan de Leonís*, *Primaleón*, *Cárcel de Amor y Celestina*"; in 1540, in his *Diferencias de libros que ay en el universo*, Alejo de Venegas, "para dar a entender que todo género de perversidad se encerraba en ella", called it *Scelestina*; and so it goes on. In 1605 López de Úbeda in *La pícaro Justina* is still saying "en *Celestina*". I cannot find a "*la Celestina*" before the seventeenth century (Quevedo, Gracián, Salas Barbadillo), and then, although one might contend that the evidence is not entirely unequivocal, the references are clearly to the work and not the character, and I believe that we may legitimately suppose that in each case these writers are anticipating the modern rules ("*la Celestina*") rather than Amarita or Cejador ("*La Celestina*").

There are, of course, two other possible Spanish uses of the article which may have helped to confuse the issue. One, with a proper name, is seen in such forms as "*la Gómez*" (which might be translated as "the Gómez woman" or "the Gómez girl") or, as in Correas's proverbs, "*la Marikita*". Except in the case of professional women--actresses, *prime donne* or novelists ("*la Guerrero*", "*la Callas*", "*la Pardo Bazán*")--the article appears to have a mildly pejorative or despectuous function. But I see no justification for its use with "*Celestina*", who in the text of the work is never referred to (if we may ignore "*madre*", "*puta vieja*", etc.) except as "*Celestina*". The other occurs when a proper name becomes a common noun, so that one is obliged to refer, with the article, to "*la celestina de un prostíbulo*", "the madam of a brothel", but, while conceivably a contributing factor to the confusion, this is logically irrelevant to the present problem.

The reluctance of editors, and even compositors, to accept these simple facts is curious, and in various articles and books in which I have alluded to *Celestina*, the title of the work has emerged in print as "*La Celestina*". "*La Celestina*", although I believe it is wrong, is, however, as nothing in comparison with the barbarism of "the *Celestina*", which is no more and no less than a blatant hispanism, demonstrating the interference of L2 in L1.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I am moved to offer this modest protest primarily because I have the impression that this gross solecism is spreading with virus-like rapidity. Alongside such old-established forms as "the *Laberinto de Fortuna*" and "the *Cárcel de Amor*" (for which it might be possible to make some sort of feeble case) we now have not only "the *Quijote*" and "the *Celestina*" (for which see any bibliography of *Celestina* or some previous numbers of *Celestinesca*) but also "the *Diana*",

"the *Lazarillo*", "the *Guzman*", and so forth. No one speaks of "the *Hamlet*" or "the *David Copperfield*", and while there exists a very obvious explanation for terms like "the *Quijote*", namely unthinking literal translation from the Spanish, there is surely no possible justification for it. If I *am* wrong, I should be most grateful if someone would tell me why.



## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> For this and other phenomena of linguistic interference see my forthcoming article (in which I cite "the *Celestina*" as one example), "Non-Primary Types of Language", in *Mélanges Coseriu*, 5 vols, II: *Sprachkontakt, Lenguas en contacto, Languages in Contact, Langues en contact* (Madrid: Gredos).



Calisto parte para la iglesia de la Magdalena. Ilustración de la traducción alemana de 1520 de Christof Wirsung.

**LA HIJA  
DE CELESTINA,**

**POR ALONSO CERONYMO  
De Salas Barbadillo :**

*Impressa por la diligencia y cuidado  
del Alferoz Francisco de  
Segura.*

*Entretenido cerca de la persona de Señor  
Virrey de Aragon.*

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*Al Molto Illustré Sig.*

**FILIPPO TROTTI.**



**EN MILAN, Por Iuan Bapt. Bidelo. 1616.**  
*Con licencia de Superiores.*

Portada de la obra celestinesca, LA HIJA DE  
CELESTINA, Milano: J. B. Bidelo, 1616, obra  
de A. J. de Salas Barbadillo.