James Mabbe, The Spanish bawd, represented in Celestina: or, The tragick-comedy of Calisto and Melibea (London: Printed by J.B. And are to be sold by Ralph Mab[be], 1631; STC 4911 and 4911.2)

After its publication in Burgos in 1499, Fernando de Rojas’s Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea, subsequently known as La Celestina, gradually became an international success. Nearly ninety editions were printed between 1500 and 1644 in Spain, Italy, France, the Low Countries, and Portugal. It was also very soon translated into Italian (Alfonso Ordóñez, 1506), German (Christof Wirsung, 1520), and anonymously into French in 1527. In 1550 there appeared an anonymous Dutch translation, then a new French translation by Jacques de Lavardin (1578), and even a Latin translation by Kaspar Barth (Pornoboscodidascalus Latinus, 1624), to name just a few of them. In a century and a half La Celestina had become a European bestseller, spawning a host of critical and reader responses across several linguistic communities.

La Celestina opens with Calisto entering Melibea’s orchard in search of a runaway falcon. Once there, he declares his love for Melibea, who rejects him. Dejected, the young lover returns home, where his servant Sempronio suggests he hire the services of the pander Celestina to win Melibea’s favour. Sempronio then plots with Celestina to get as much money as they can from Calisto’s foolish passion. Pármeno, another of Calisto’s servants, warns the young lover against Celestina and her evil arts. But seeing that Calisto will not listen to reason, and persuaded by Celestina, he also joins her and Sempronio in their ploy to bring about the union of Calisto and Melibea, and obtain as much profit as possible from the whole process. In order to persuade the teenager Pármeno, Celestina also arranges sexual intercourse between him and Aréusa, one of her protégées. Another of Celestina’s wenches, Elícia, already had the other servant, Sempronio, as one of her lovers — Celestina always advises her young protégées to have more than one lover, since this is a way of diversifying and maintaining several sources of income as well as of obtaining sundry favours. Not without some resistance, Celestina manages to persuade Melibea of Calisto’s good intentions, and with the apparent help of a charmed thread which Celestina sells to the innocent young girl, Melibea falls under the spell of a powerful passion for the young man. After the first clandestine encounter between the protagonists, the two servants, Pármeno and Sempronio, visit the old bawd to demand their share in the booty she has obtained from Calisto. They argue, and the two servants slay Celestina. Pármeno and Sempronio are immediately arrested and executed. Another of Calisto’s servants, Sosia, gives his lord the bad news amidst the young lover’s musings after his first encounter with Melibea. Calisto prepares his next meeting with his paramour, for which he recruits the aid of his servants Sosia and Tristán. When the two young wenches, Aréusa and Elícia, hear about the murder of Celestina and the subsequent execution of their lovers, they decide to take revenge on Calisto and Melibea. They hire the services of a bragging but cowardly mercenary, Centurio, who then outsources the job to his comrade Traso. In their new encounter, Calisto enjoys Melibea’s company in her garden while his two servants keep watch on the other side of the wall. Traso and others arrive with the intention of making trouble. They quarrel with Tristán and Sosia, and upon hearing that his two servants are in danger, Calisto hastens to aid them, accidentally and fatally falling off the ladder he had previously used to climb into Melibea’s orchard. Desolated after the death of her lover, Melibea commits suicide by throwing herself from the tower of her father’s mansion. La Celestina ends with the heartfelt lament of Pleberio, Melibea’s father.


4. The subtitle of the interlude ran like this: A new comedy in English in maner Of an enterlude ryght elygent & full of craft of rethoryk wherein is shewd & dyscrybyd as well the bewte & good propertes of women as their vycys & euyl codicios with a morall coclusion & exhortacyon to vertew. See Frederick G. Fleay, A Chronicle History of the London Stage 1559–1642 (London, 1890), p. 379. See also Fleay, A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama 1559–1642 (London, 1891), vol. 2, 290; Braut (1960), pp. 308–10, discusses this issue and provides evidence to reject the claims that this was a restaging of the early sixteenth-century interlude Calisto and Melibea.


8. See Ungerer (1956), p. 40, who also points out (p. 36) that La Celestina was known to John Florio, ‘who excerpted the book for his Italian-English dictionary called Queen Anna’s New World of Words (1611).


14. Incidentally, Fonseca is one of the candidates for the authorship of the apocryphal second part of Don Quijote, the so-called Quijote de Avellaneda.

15. For more detailed information on the editorial avatars of this work, which ended up with the title Policie Vnveiled, Or Maximes of State in its fifth, 1650 edition (and in spite of being a Spanish book
La Celestina was rendered into English for the first time around 1530 in the form of a very free adaptation that shortened the original and modified the tragic outcome of Rojas's plot. The Interlude of Calisto and Melebea was printed by John Rastell, Thomas More's brother-in-law, and thus reflected the didactic and moralising ethos of the circle of humanists around Henry VIII's chancellor. A hundred years after the Interlude, James Mabbe's The Spanish Bawd, Represented in Celestina: or, The Tragicke-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea became the first full extant translation of Rojas's work into English. Mabbe's text was printed by John Beale in 1631, although it was probably carried out 25 or 30 years before. In contrast with the changes imposed by the Interlude upon La Celestina, it is a reasonably faithful version. The full title of the translation runs thus: The Spanish Bawd, Represented in Celestina: or, The Tragicke-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea. Wherein is contained, besides the pleasantness and sweetenesse of the stile, many Philosophical Sentences, and profitable Instructions necessary for the younger sort: Shewing the deceits and subtleties housed in the bosomes of false servants, and Cunny-catching Bawds.

The title points to the controversial nature of the text, and reflects the need to emphasise its moralising function, lest any of its readers be led to the conclusion that this was an indecent book. The introduction by Don Diego-Pueche-Ser (Mabbe's Spanish pun on his own surname) elaborates on this idea, apologising for the bawdy aspects of the plot and encouraging the reader to focus on the morals and the wisdom to be gained from its appropriate reading. All of this apologetic and pre-emptive material echoes the contents of the introduction by Fernando de Rojas to the Spanish original, and confirms that more than a century after its appearance, and beyond the modifications introduced by Mabbe in his English rewriting of the text, La Celestina was still considered as a dangerous book, albeit one whose literary merit deserved praise and perpetuation.

No other translation or adaptation, if any, that may have been published or staged between Calisto and Melebea and The Spanish Bawd has reached us. But there are certain traces of Rojas's work in England, some of which point to the likelihood of a play based on La Celestina. Some of these references also confirm the scandalous nature of the work, and the kind of reactions it elicited from critics and commentators. The earliest of these testimonies originates in the 1566 inventory of Sir Thomas Smith's library at Hillhall, which contained a volume with the title Comedia Celestina. Another reference to a play based on La Celestina appears in Anthony Munday's 1580 puritan pamphlet Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plaies and Theaters (STC 21677). Munday established a parallelism between the seduction of Melibeia by Celestina (her 'shrewd mentor') and the seduction of English audiences by comedies, and refers to the fact that the London stage absorbed plots and characters from foreign plays:

There can be found out no stronger engine to batter the honestie as wel of wedded wiues, as the chastitie of vnmarried maides and widowes, than are the hearing of common plaies. There wanton wiues fables, and pastorical songs of loue, which they use in their comical discourses (al which are taken out of the secret armorie of Venus, & practising bawderie) turne all chastitie vpside downe, & corrupt the good disposition & manners of youth, insomuch that it is a miracle, if there be found anie either woman, or maide, which with these spectacles of strange lust, is not oftentimes inflamed euern vnto furie.

The nature of the Comedies are, for the most part, after one manner of nature, like the tragical Comedie of Calistus; where the bawdresse Scelestina inflamed the maiden Melibeia with her sorceries.
Munday echoes the same concerns voiced several decades before by early sixteenth-century commentators regarding literature and its effect on female readers. The response of the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives epitomises the tone of sixteenth-century critics of La Celestina: he acknowledged its literary merit as he elsewhere dubbed it a *liber pestifer*. *La Celestina* and its European translations struck a chord that was part of a widespread preoccupation with certain new types of fiction, with the role of literature, and with the function of plays in a social context where book distribution had increased to cater for the demand of new reading audiences, and the staging of plays had become a popular form of entertainment. Stephen Gosson’s *Plays Confuted in five Actions* (1582, *STC 12095*), provides one more reference to *La Celestina* as one among the numerous bawdy foreign texts that had been used as quarries for plots subsequently displayed on the English stage. In England drama was the most important agent in the creation of a market for literature which responded to a demand for popular, public entertainment. Beyond England, all over the rest of Europe, one of the main genres in demand by the new reading market precipitated by the invention of print was chivalric fiction. This is significant because Munday’s condemnation was far from the last appearance of *La Celestina* in a blacklist. Frances Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (London: P. Short, 1598; *STC 17834*) mentions *La Celestina* in the company of a series of popular titles of chivalric fiction that deserve reprehension. The following text appears in a chapter entitled ‘A choice is to be had in reading of books’, in which Amadis de Gaule, Celestina, and the like, appear in the worst of companies, that bogeyman of the age, the wicked Machiavelli:

> As the Lord *de la Noue* in the sixe discourse of his politike and military discourses censur eth the booke of *Amadis de Gaule*, which he saith are no lesse hurtfull to youth, then the workes of Machiavell to age: so these booke s are accordingly to be censured of, whose names follow; *Bevis of Hampton, Guy of Warwicke, Arthur of the round table, Huon of Burdeaux, Oliuer of the castle, the foure sonnes of Aymon, Gargantua, Gireleon, the Honour of Chialurse, Primaleon of Greece, Palmerin de Oliua, the 7. Champions, the Myrro of Knighthood, Blancherdine, Meruin, Howleglasse, the stories of *Palladyne, and Palmendos*, the blacke Knight, the Maiden Knight, the history of Celestina, the Castle of Fame, *Gallian of France, Ornatus and Artesia*, &c. (1598, 268f–268v)

The popularity of chivalric fiction, with its unanimous condemnations by moralists all over the continent because of its damning effect upon the private morality of its readers and its pernicious impact for the commonwealth, would famously culminate in Cervantes’s parody of the foolish and undiscerning reader in his extremely popular *Don Quijote*. Edward Topsell, another puritan moralist, also condemns this type of popular book in his *Times Lamentation: or An exposition to the prophet Joel, in sundry Sermons or Meditations* (London: Edmund Bolllifant, 1599; *STC 24131*). Topsell talks about ‘Italian follies, Spanish inuentions, or French-fayne-wanton-volumes’, works which are then translated (‘they are taught to speak English’) for their plots and plays by many

histrionicall plaiers, whereby many good soules are endangerd. There are few or no Italian follies, Spanish inuentions, or French-fayne-wanton-volumes, but in our daies for the times succeeding they are taught to speak English, I thinke for this purpose, that now whiles religion rules, it might bee troubled by them, and when christianitie is remooued, by their meanes iniquitie may be enthronized. I haue read many of them, and considered of them too long, & I must freely confesse that they be the vices forerunning and preparing a way for Atheisme, idolatrie, heathenisme, or any kind of impietie: And therefor all good Christians should do with them as the Ephesians did Actes 19.19 with their booke: for I protest vnto you either you must foresake God or them. (1599, pp. 63–64)

We even have one false trace of Celestina’s impact in the period, and another indirect but potentially revealing reference. The first of them is *The Comedy of Bewtie and Huswyfery*, the title of a play performed at Windsor soon after Christmas in 1582. The similarity between the title of this play and that of the interlude printed by Rastell around 1525–1530 mistakenly led some scholars to suggest that this may have been a restaging of *Calisto and Melibea*. Another misleading title appeared in 1591, *The Delightful History of Celestina the Faire*. But far from being a translation of Rojas’s work, this text is just a pirated version of Book II of *Palmerin de Oliva* — that is, *Primaléon*, and it was probably translated from the French by William Barley. The use of the name *Celestina* in the title invites speculation on whether it was the printer or the translator’s intention to boost the sales of the book by trying to associate its contents with those of Rojas’s masterpiece.

Martínez Lacalle suggests that a full version of *La Celestina* may have been published before Mabbe’s 1631 translation. She uses two references in the Stationers’ Register to support this claim. One dates from 24 February 1591: ‘John Wolf Entred for his Copie vnder th[e] [h]andes of Master HARTWELL and the wardens A booke entituled Lacelestina Comedia in Spanishe...’ According to Ungerer and Brault, this is not a translation, but an edition of the original Spanish text: John Wolf’s record as a printer shows that he had published books in Spanish some years before. Whatever the case, this proves the existence of an English demand for books printed in Spanish, and that *La Celestina* was one of the commodities traded in this market. There is another entry in the Stationers’ Register on 5 October 1598 that reads: ‘Wm aspley Entred for his copie vnnder the handes. of Mr Samuell Harsnett, and both the wardens, a booke intituled. *The tragick Comedye of Celestina. / wherein are discoursed in most pleasant stile manye Philosophicall sentences and
Further proof of the popularity of *La Celestina* stems from John Minsheu’s *Spanish Grammar (A Spanish Grammar, A Dictionarie in Spanish and English, and Pleasant and Delightfull Dialogues in Spanish*, 1599; STC 19622). This handbook is full of examples for the study of Spanish taken from Lazarillo de Tormes, Montemayor’s *Diana* and *La Celestina*. Randall concludes that the presence of these works in Minsheu’s grammar represents ‘impressive evidence of England’s interest in Spanish during the final decade of the sixteenth century’ (p. 20). Ungerer also points out another likely reference to *La Celestina* in William Haughton’s 1598 play *Englishmen for my Money*, where the following line appears: ‘Madame celestura de la I know not what’ (line 983). Ungerer takes this to be a misprint for ‘Celestina’.8 Randall also mentions Henry Reynolds’s reference to *La Celestina* in his *Mythomistes* (the ‘trifling though extolled Celestina’).9 Fitzmaurice-Kelly described the enormous popularity of *La Celestina* in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and mentioned the fact that Robert Burton was also influenced by the text of Rojas’s work, this time through Kaspar Barth’s *Pornobscodidascalus Latinus*, the Latin translation published in 1624.10 This constitutes one more piece of evidence to confirm the existence of a European network of translations within which texts found their ways into other linguistic communities. These diverse and intricate paths determined the way in which these texts were interpreted first by their translators and then by the expectations and reactions of their reading communities.

The English public was thus no stranger to *La Celestina* when Mabbe decided to publish his translation in 1631. Born in 1572, James Mabbe was from his youth attached to Magdalen College, Oxford: he became a fellow in 1594 and over the course of his life went through the usual academic and administrative *cursus honorum*. His diplomatic activity facilitated his first contact with Spain, which he visited in 1611 as a member of an English legation led by Sir John Digby. This two-year mission in Spain gave him the opportunity to become familiar with Spanish literature and cultural life. A manuscript letter dated in 1612 proves that he was acquainted with the thriving world of Spanish Golden Age theatre, where Lope de Vega was the reigning author. We also know that from Madrid Mabbe sent to Oxford a copy of the 1613 edition of Lope’s *Rimas*. Mabbe’s friend and fellow Hispanist and translator Leonard Digges had the opportunity to read this edition of Lope de Vega’s poetry, as attested by Digges’s own manuscript comments on the flyleaf of this same copy of the *Rimas* (in which Digges famously declared that Lope was as famous in Madrid as Shakespeare was in London).11 Mabbe was granted another leave of absence late in 1620 from his position in Magdalen College. Martinez Lacalle and Russell have speculated with the possibility that this leave of absence may have been motivated by another mission to Spain, which took place at around the time Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham went there in their famous secret mission to negotiate a wedding between the Prince of Wales and the Spanish Infanta María. However, this seems unlikely since there is proof that in 1623 (the actual year in which the Prince of Wales and the Duke travelled to Spain) Mabbe was back in Oxford.12

Mabbe has been described as the first serious critic of Spanish literature in England.13 The fact that his translation was not an isolated undertaking or an occasional assignment, but part of an almost systematic dedication to the translation of Spanish works into English, gives his work significant depth and dimension. Mabbe’s most famous and prestigious translation is *The Rogue* (STC 288), the English version of Mateo Aleman’s *Guzmán de Alfarache* (first part, Madrid, 1599; second part, Lisbon, 1604). Published for the first time in 1622, *The Rogue* enjoyed tremendous popularity and was reprinted on several occasions. *The Rogue* was also Mabbe’s first translation, followed in 1629 by *Devout Contemplations* (STC 11126), a popular collection of sermons authored by Fray Cristóbal de Fonseca (*Discurso para Todos los Evangelios de la Cuaresma*, Madrid, 1614).14 Mabbe also translated Juan de Santa María’s *República y policia cristiana para reyes y principes* (Madrid, 1615), printed in 1632 as *Christian Policie: or, The Christian Commonwealth. Published for the good of Kings, and Princes, and such as are in authoritie vnder them, and trusted with State Affaires* (London, 1632; STC 14831).15 His last translated work was a partial rendering of Cervantes’s *Novelas ejemplares* (Madrid, 1613), published in 1640 as *Exemplarie Novels; in Sixe Books. The two Damosels. The Ladie Cornelia. The liberaller Lover. The force of blood. The Spanish Ladie. The jealous Husband. Full of Various Accidents Both Delightfull and Profitable*. By Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra; One of the prime Wits of Spaine, for his rare Fancies, and wittie Inventions. *Turned into English by Don Diego Puede-Ser* (London: John Dawson; STC 4914). An occasional poet, and the author of a treatise called the *Dyet of Health* (1598), he also wrote poetry in Latin and Italian, which he did on the occasion of James I’s coronation in 1603. He also contributed an anagram to John Florio’s Italian dictionary, *Queen Anna’s New World of Words*, published by Edward Blount in 1611 (STC 11099).

The first translation of *La Celestina* into a European vernacular appeared just seven years after its first 1499 Spanish
editions in the form of an Italian version by Alfonso Ordóñez printed in 1506 — which was in turn followed by several other Italian versions. Ordóñez's text became a frequent source for translations to other European languages, whose authors consulted the Spanish text side by side with this early Italian version, or simply translated directly from it. Translation through the mediation of a third language was frequent in the Renaissance — many chivalric novels were translated into English from French versions. As previously mentioned, an anonymous French translation was printed in 1527, followed by numerous other editions (no less than ten of them) until Jacques de Lavardin authored a new translation in 1578. Mabbe seems to have consulted both the first Italian translation, and then also Jacques de Lavardin’s French translation, which in its own turn was to a considerable extent based on Ordóñez’s Italian rendering. That Mabbe did know and use the Italian version is confirmed by the final sonnet that he added to his translation, entitled ‘To the reader’, and which he took from Ordóñez. This sonnet was not part of Rojas’s original, and it did not appear in Lavardin’s text either. There has also been speculation as to which of the Spanish editions Mabbe may have used. The two main candidates are an edition published in Madrid in 1619, and a Plantinian edition issued in Antwerp in 1595. Patrizia Botta and Elizabetta Vaccaro hold that the similarities between the Plantinian editions and Mabbe’s translation demonstrate that these were the texts used by the translator of The Spanish Bawd. Botta also claims to have found a new copy that came out of the Plantinian press in 1599. This copy, now in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, contains abundant manuscript annotations in early modern English, which Botta claims are in Mabbe’s hand.

There remains another translation of La Celestina penned by James Mabbe which preceded the printed version of The Spanish Bawd. This is the so-called Alnwick version (Alnwick Castle MS 510), which remained unpublished until Martínez Lacalle’s edition of 1972. Martínez Lacalle dates this manuscript at some point between 1603 and 1611 (see Martínez Lacalle, p. 34). Botta establishes an interesting genealogy between the Alnwick manuscript, the annotations in the Plantinian 1599 edition, and the printed translation of 1631. She also suggests the existence of a second manuscript, between the Alnwick text and the printed edition of 1631. The production of this manuscript soon after 1622 may have been facilitated by Mabbe’s release from academic duties in this period, and the encouragement he received from the recent success of The Rogue. One of the most interesting features of the Alnwick manuscript is that it provides first-hand information about Mabbe’s response to the most controversial aspects of the work in the form of annotations with his comments on the plot. Mabbe’s reactions as they appear in the manuscript refer for example to Calisto’s overblown admiration of Melibe (‘Thus Louers make their mistresses Goddesses and, blaspheminge the trewe God, idolatrice’). They also respond with scandalised indignation at Calisto’s rejection of salvation and his immortal soul for the love of Melibe (which Mabbe dubs ‘atheistical sensualitie’). Mabbe also comments sternly on improper references to Scripture in the wrong context, notably in the mouth of Celestina when she resorts to biblical quotations to argue in favour of her illicit business (‘text of Scripture profaned’, Mabbe claims in this particular case). Martínez Lacalle also lists some cases in which obscenities or heretical remarks which appeared in the Alnwick manuscript were attenuated in the printed edition. In general, the printed edition shows more caution with obscenities, references to God, or matters related to church doctrine. Martínez Lacalle attributes this to the fact that in 1606 Parliament issued an Act of Abuses, which dictated heavy fines for authors who ‘doe or shall in any Stage play, Interlude, Shewe, Maygame, or Pageant jestingly or profanely speake or use the holy Name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghoste or of the Trinitie’ (p. 37).

The manuscript is also a somewhat abridged version of the original, which led Martínez Lacalle to speculate that it might have been devised as a script for a staged performance or for some kind of public reading. This would also account for the considerable revision that the manuscript underwent before the translation went to press in 1631 as The Spanish Bawd. The title which heads the Alnwick manuscript is closer to the original title of Rojas’s work: Celestine or the Tragick-Comedie of Calisto and Melibe. Although the manuscript has many features in common with the 1631 Spanish Bawd, Martínez Lacalle holds that it cannot be ‘the direct source for the 1631 edition since the latter is a complete, though revised, version and the earlier manuscript is incomplete and altogether more literal’. In spite of its omissions and its abridging of parts of La Celestina, the Alnwick version is much closer to the Spanish text than The Spanish Bawd. Martínez Lacalle (p. 34) concludes that the Alnwick manuscript and The Spanish Bawd derive from the same source, which she suggests is the book registered by William Aspley on 5 October 1598 in the Stationers’ Register (see above). One of the changes involved in the evolution from the Alnwick manuscript to the printed version of 1631 is the different dedicatee: whereas the manuscript was dedicated to Sir John Strangeways, the printed edition is dedicated to Sir Thomas Richardson. Some minor changes can be detected as well in Mabbe’s introduction to the main text.

In this introduction Mabbe praises the sententious, ‘stoic’ style of Rojas, and he emphasises that La Celestina is not affected by the ‘guildings of Rhetorick’. The plain and starkly elegant style of Rojas’s La Celestina emerges in particular when contrasted with the elaborate rhetoric of contemporary romance fiction, such as San Pedro’s Cárce de amor (published in 1492, only seven years before La Celestina, and like Rojas’s work frequently translated into other European languages during the sixteenth century: John Bourchier, Lord Berners, translated it into English as The Castell of Love). This feature also contributes to an understanding of the innovative character of Rojas’s prose, which conspires with the
nature of its plot and the realism of its dialogue to yield a founding text within literary modernity. Much as Mabbe strove to reproduce the original in many of its aspects, the style of his translation is more copious, in line with the taste of the time, in particular the rhetorical flourishes of late sixteenth-century English prose. His text abounds in alliterations, synonyms, repetitions, parallelisms, and such similar figures of style. This has led some scholars to date the first version of the translation about twenty-five to thirty years before its actual publication, since the prose Mabbe used for the translation would have sounded somewhat outmoded in Stuart England.27

The most significant changes introduced by Mabbe in his text are related to some of the controversial aspects of La Celestina. They include references to God, the heretical nature of some of Calisto’s remarks, and indecent passages regarding sexual taboos.28 Some of these omissions are of a piece with the very common European concern about the overblown adoration of the lady in Petrarchist lyrics, and its prose dimension in popular romance and chivalric fiction. What Houck called in 1939 the ‘paganisation’ of La Celestina responds then to an attempt by Mabbe to soften the more conspicuously heretical passages. As an afterthought to Houck’s remarks Randall wonders about the purpose of Mabbe’s paganism.29 He could simply have produced a highly moralising work by mercilessly cutting here, and altering the plot there, as did the author of the Interlude of Calisto and Melebea before him, or other European translators of La Celestina. He chose instead to cover La Celestina in a sort of classical gloss, by turning the characters into the inhabitants of a timeless pagan world that timidly attempts to persuade the reader that he is not before a tale of his own times (which is one of La Celestina’s strengths), but a sort of pagan classical neverland, as Randall calls it.30 And so Mabbe turns the Church of Magdalene, which Calisto decides to visit, into a myrtle-grove where the young lover worships Cupid — which is the cause, by the way, for some inconsistencies in Mabbe’s translation.31

In his introduction to The Spanish Bawd, Mabbe gives us a variety of opinions and insights on the task of the translator, which range from general statements to specific cases related to his particular choices when translating La Celestina. The general tone of the prologue is decidedly apologetic, and conventionally modest, as befits someone who is addressing his patron. Mabbe also reproduces in the preface the same preventively apologetic tone of Rojas in his introduction to the original. As the two following quotations demonstrate, Mabbe asserts two of the same central ideas that Rojas articulates in his introductory epistle: that readers should look beyond the obscene surface of the text and the plot, and that the kind of exemplarity put forward by the work is negative, or, as Mabbe puts it, the work ‘is written comprehensively, and not instructively’:

For, I must ingeniously confesse, that this your Celestina is not sine scelere; yet must I tell you withall, that she cannot be harboured with you, sine vtilitate. Her life is foule, but her Precepts faire; her example naught, but her Doctrine good. (sig. A3)

[…] yet doubt I not, but it will meete with some detractors, who like dogges that barke by custome, will exclaime against the whole worke, because some part of it seemeth somewhat more obscene, then may sute with a ciulil stile; which as I not deny; so sithence it is written reprehesiuely, & not instructuily, I see no reason why they should more abstaine from reader a great deale of good, because they must picke it out of that which is bad. (sig. A3v)

Mabbe thus adds one more layer of caution and preventive information, with the aim of creating the right mood in the reader for the reception of a text which had been itself already modified by its translator. For, like any other translation, Mabbe’s rendering of the text already contains an ingrained critical response to the significance of the original. Thus both the introduction and the translation prove that the critique to established modes of exemplarity which La Celestina de facto actually embodied continued to be a source of anxiety for its translator. Mabbe emphasises that the nature of the text of La Celestina changes with the nature of its readers, and above all with their subjective moral disposition:

[…] the reading of Celestina, to those that are prophane, is as poysen to their hearts; but to the chaste, and honest minde, a preservatiue against such inconueniences as occurre in the world. (sig. A4)

[…] learne thereby to distinguish betweene good and bad, and praise the Author, though not the practice; for these things are written more for reprehension, then imitation. And the minde that comes so instructed, can neuer take harme; for it will take the best, and leave the worst: But he that reads all things alike, and equally entertaines them in his thought, that Reader shall easily shew himselfe obnoxious to many vices[…] But when a Reader shall light vpon vnworthy lines, I would haue him cry out as a Philosophier aduiseth on the like occasion; Male hoc, & inconvenienter. But when he meets with good, Recte hoc & decore. (sig. A4v)

Like Rojas did in his own preface to La Celestina, Mabbe submits himself to the reader’s ‘fauourable interpretation’. He encourages a critically and morally mature reader, who knows how to take each of the episodes and each of the characters, an active and discerning reader who is not just well educated, but who knows how to draw the right moral lessons. This amounts to an implicit recognition of the hopeless attempt by author and translator to fix meaning and interpretation. No matter how hard they try to hem in the different meanings and the potential for unintended
interpretations, once the text is loose among the public sphere of international readers, it is bound to be lost for the author, and for the translator. In the case of the translator, this anxiety is compounded by the impossibility of an exact, spotless, reproduction in the translation of the style and the artistic quality of the original:

But to leave *Celestina* to a favorable censure, I must now come to intreat some favor for my selfe, who am so farre from pleading my excuse, that I must wholy submit my selfe to your favourable interpretation; for I must ingeniously confesse, that I haue in the vndergoing of this translation, shewn more boldnesse then judgement. For though I doe speake like *Celestina*, yet come I short of her; for she is so concisely significant, and indee so differing is the Idiome of the Spanish from the English, that I may imitate it, but not come neere it. Yet haue I made it as natural, as our language will give leaue, and haue more beaten my braines about it in some places, then a man would beate a Flint to get fire; and, with much adoe, haue forced those sparkes, which increasing to a greater flame, gaue light to my darke vnderstanding; wherein if I haue been wanting to give it it’s true life, I wish, my industry therein may awake some better wit, and judgement to perfect my imperfections, which as I shall alwaies be willing to acknowledge; so I desire to haue them mended by some better hand. (sig. A5r–A5v)

*The Spanish Bawd* was far from an immediate publishing success: many of the copies of the first edition went unsold, and had to be attached to the 1634 edition of *The Rogue* (first published in 1622), Mabbe’s more successful translation of Mateo Aleman’s *Guzmán de Alfarache*. *The Spanish Bawd* would not be reprinted again until the end of the nineteenth century, in James Fitzmaurice-Kelly’s 1894 edition. In spite of the time elapsed between these two editions, and of the differences between the original and Mabbe’s text, not until the middle of the twentieth century did another full English translation appear. With his translation Mabbe managed to create a new work in its own right, in which he even devised new English expressions to stand for the idiomatic Spanish of the original, with its common, everyday language as used by the urban lower classes in their daily dealings. The inventiveness of Mabbe’s prose makes up for the copiousness which certain readers might find somewhat out of place. This is the case not just in his *Spanish Bawd*, but also in his other translations, in particular his more successful *The Rogue*. There is no doubt that Mabbe’s critical eye (in spite of the omission of several important novellas among those he translated from Cervantes) was remarkably shrewd, and decidedly prescient of the current canon. The fact that the same translator undertook the translation of texts and authors as relevant as *La Celestina*, Cervantes’s *Novelas ejemplares*, and such a representative novel within the picaresque as *Guzmán de Alfarache* gives his work as a translator a particularly interesting dimension, especially if we take into account not just Cervantes’s influence, but also the role that Spanish picaresque fiction would subsequently play on the development of the English novel during the eighteenth century.

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