

ESPECTACULOS

FOUR CELESTINA PRODUCTIONS

[The following report was compiled and written by the editor from information forwarded by Dorothy S. Severin, Eric W. Naylor, Alvaro Custodio, Erna Berndt-Kelly, and David Gilmore.]

1. The first of the four is a Spanish adaptation of *Celestina* prepared for television by its director, Juan Guerrero Zamora. It was seen in three parts, or "capítulos", as the 10:05 evening offering of the Primer Programa on October 4, 11 and 18, 1983. Guerrero Zamora's version was first staged, however, in 1982, and this was a further adaptation of that stage offering. Alvaro Custodio has promised a detailed commentary for a future number of *Celestinesca*, but his low opinion of this production is also somewhat reflected in an anonymous review from «ABC» of October 20th, from which the following excerpts: "Es probable que si la adaptación ... hubiera sido algo menos libre, hubiera logrado una mayor aceptación [...] Una vez más insistimos que nuestro cine, para la pequeña o gran pantalla, carece de muchas cosas, entre las cuales no se encuentran el talento de guionistas, directores y actores" (p. 109).

One major alteration can be reported (from the middle "chapter"): it appears that the "moços" (who looked over thirty) actually proceed to Celestina's house to retrieve their share of the gold chain while Calisto is busy at his first encounter with Melibea. The murder scene takes up a good ten minutes amid many blows struck as the servants rampage across the set in search of the chain. Finally, Celestina is struck the mortal blow by a large pot wielded by one of the murderous servants: she dies and the gold chain falls to the floor as the pot shatters on contact with Celestina's head.

2. Could Celestina, as a winsome lass, have had shady dealings with a homosexual Enrique IV? To suggest such a combination of fiction and history would require great imaginative daring, but this is what has come about recently on the Madrid stage in José Martín Recuerda's «El carnaval de un Reino» (formerly «Las conversaciones»).

José Martín Recuerda has had several recent stage successes, among them «Las salvajes en Puente San Gil» and «Las arrecogías del beaterio de Santa María Egipcíaca.» This new play (it was written, with the earlier title, in 1981) now reaches the stage under the direction of Alberto González Vergel, in a presentation of Carmen Bernardos at the Centro Cultural de la Villa de Madrid, in October of 1983.

In the program notes, the dramatist shares with us the genesis of his concept for the play:

"Desde que empecé a hacer teatro, allá por los años cincuenta, como director del Teatro Universitario de Granada y adaptando para éste a los clásicos españoles y extranjeros o montando mis propias obras, siempre me dio vueltas en la cabeza un personaje, un mito clásico nuestro: Celestina de Fernando de Rojas.

"¿Cómo habría podido ser este personaje, esta mujer, a los quince años de su vida? Investigué cuanto pude sobre la España en la que vivió Rojas, por aquello de que todo personaje tiene mucho de su creador. Siempre he creído más en el ambiente social que han vivido los hombres, que en los propios hombres. Y por ello fui en busca de la España, de la Castilla, de la Salamanca de Celestina, para acabar dando rienda suelta a la imaginación y recrear dramáticamente y poéticamente mi verdad sobre la España de los Trastámara."

What develops from this is that the action of the resulting dramatization is set in the two decades of Enrique's kingship (1454-1474), and presents a curious amalgamation of historical data and imagined detail in the interest of pursuing a broad picture of Trastamarian decadence. Enrique and the young Celestina, for example, find themselves both in love with the same young monk, a situation ended when Enrique later orders his death. Claudina, Celestina's "maestra", is a character, too, in the play, teaching her young charge all her special arts. Celestina, a tailor's daughter, is presented as rather licentious and teasing: for all her coquettish powers, she is still capable of provoking anger in others, and it is at Enrique's hands that she receives the famous "cicatriz" with which she is already endowed by Rojas' time.

Perhaps to underscore the licentiousness of this era, only Celestina herself--of the main characters--is played by a person of the same sex as the figure portrayed. The others are all *travestí*: Carmen Bernardos appears, for example, as Enrique IV: Enrique's mistress (?), Lucas, is played by Esperanza Alonso, Claudina is Francisco Portes, Juana de Portugal ("reina y arcángel") is Carlos Piñeiro, the archbishop in love with the queen is María Teresa Cortés, and so on. What is responsible for this is the idea that Enrique's reign was a carnival of vice. As the director writes in the program: "En Carnaval la mujer se viste de hombre y éste simula ser hembra, el rico se pasa a pobre, el clérigo a seglar, el cobarde a valeroso y el tímido a lengua-raz. Satán aparece como rey indiscutible del liberador travestismo carnavalesco que exalta los valores paganos de la vida, en contraste con los valores cristianos que exalta la Cuaresma."

The only review of this production that has reached me as of this writing is Lorenzo López Sancho's, from the "Espectáculos" section of "ABC" (October 23, 1983), p. 75. For him, obviously, the idea didn't really work theatrically: it was hindered by too much talk. By curtain fall, the conceptual outline was in place but there had been little devel-

opment by way of dramatic action. It was, in the end, a "fantástico desacierto." The following excerpt gives a good idea of the tone of López Sancho's review:

"González Vergel ha tratado de levantar el texto a una dimensión que no tiene y le ha dado un tratamiento entre oratorio y tragedia. El personaje de Enrique IV está puesto en trágico. El pelele configurado por el autor no puede calzar el coturno. Así, todo el admirable esfuerzo de Carmen Bernardos es inútil porque su sentido está equivocado, como lo estaría interpretar un solo de violín con trombones.

"González Vergel ha hecho un esfuerzo, un trabajo creador considerable, desde el momento en que el telón levanta y el carro de Téspis aparece con toda su parafernalia, casi como una bella y exquisita falla valenciana. Pero el empleo de los actores secundarios, curtidores, cortesanos, clérigos, prostitutas como actores utileros, añade énfasis y lentitud al énfasis literario. La suma acrecienta el desasosiego ante la serie de relatos que sustituyen a la verdadera acción dramática en las estampas sucesivas, de suyo hilvanadas caprichosamente, sin causalidad dramática."

The concept is interesting, however, and *Celestinesca* would appreciate hearing from anyone who has seen "El carnaval de un Reino".

3. THE FRUITS OF LOVE. This adaptation of *Celestina* is by David Gilmore, Artistic Director of the Nuffield Theatre (Southampton, England), whose repertory company performed the play February 3-19, 1983. Mr. Gilmore was kind enough to correspond with me about the play, and to send me newspaper announcements and a copy of the play programme (as did both Profs. Severin and Deyermond); however, he was unable to balance his work load in order to find time to write a piece for *Celestinesca*. Gilmore elaborated this adaptation from the Mabbe version of 1631 (not 1610, as in some of the announcements circulated). I have made the following observations after a perusal of the 55-page mimeographed typescript of *The Fruits of Love*:

The action reflects the *Comedia* and is divided into three acts. John Ginman directed, with sets ("splendid" according to BBC Radio Solent) by Patsy Large, costumes by Glenn Willoughby and lighting by Richard Caswell. Eight characters play out the tragedy: we do not have in this version Alisa, Pleberio, Crito, Tristán, Sosia or Centurio [although the latter is an offstage presence]. Alterations in the familiar unfolding of events would have to include: Lucrecia's admitting Celestina directly into Melibea's unchaperoned presence; Melibea's entertaining Calisto in her home during the first tryst; Lucrecia's announcing the news of the death of Sempronio and Pármeneo to the lovers in the garden; Calisto's being tricked out of the garden by a faked call for help from Elicia and Areúsa, to be run through by the sword of Centurio; Calisto's returning to the garden, mortally wounded, to declare his eternal love for Melibea; and, at the end of the play's action, Lucrecia's departure to seek comfort in the arms of the Church.

Sheila Burrell, the lone newcomer to the company for the production, was Celestina, Paul Clarkson appeared as Sempronio, and Gary Powell was Pármeno. The lovers were portrayed by Jason Carter and Edita Brychta. Samantha Bond, Adrienne Thomas and Helena Little were, respectively, Elicia, Areúsa and Lucrecia.

The production's advertisements all stated that *The Fruits of Love* was "not recommended for children." Anne King notes ("Southern Evening Echo", January 29, 1983, p. 20) that "in a historical and literary context, [*Celestina*] is one of the first of the 'picaresque' tradition," an antecedent of *Tom Jones*. She quotes the director, John Ginman, saying "Really the play is showing a divided society, about those with wealth and those without it and what people will do to get it. Prostitution plays a large part in the play and indeed, it shows a great understanding of prostitution--it is quite a moral little tale." The same critic tells us in her review of the production (February 8, 1983) that it was played in period costume and with semi-period dialogue. She thought the acting was adequate but found the play "predictable." It is interesting to observe that in this review, and in notes found elsewhere, Celestina is compared to Brecht's Mother Courage (here: "a sort of Mother Courage figure without the maternal instinct"; the BBC critic refers to "Celestina, the Bawd, Witch and general Brechtian old Ratbag").

The BBC Solent radio reviewer described the production as "a cynical, darkly comic and realistic portrayal of human behaviour at any time in any place." He found, not surprising to *celestínófilos*, the play more full of "baddies" than "goodies", and especially praised the psychological verisimilitude in the presenting of Celestina and the servants; the lovers were too much entrapped by conventional characterization to be very effective in moving the public. His final-but-one comment bears quoting, as it seems to me that something of the ultimate message of the original came across to some playgoers:

The play "The Fruits of Love" is really all fustian and bombast until the end. Here, Melibea reminds us, in her beautiful pool of moonlight, that most humans are either foolish or corrupt, that life "is a labyrinth of errors" and that most of our behaviour is like dark shadows running in the night.

4. There has already been a brief notice of the Mexico City, summer 1982, production of *Celestina* in *Celestinesca* 6, no. 2: 25-26. Now I have a copy of the program from the Teatro de la Nación del IMSS presentation of the play at the Teatro Julio Prieto (antes Xola), and to the first notice (details, names of the players, etc.) I would like to add two commentaries printed in the program. Each separately, and both together, records something about the ideology behind this new adaptation by Tina French and Salvador Garcini. First off we have a presentation of the rationale for this new production from Dr. Carlos Solórzano (Executive Coordinator of the Teatro de la Nación):

"Como es bien sabido *La Celestina* (*Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*) ha sido adaptada para el teatro en diferentes ocasiones. Del rico material narrativo expuesto en el original en forma dialogada, cada adaptador elige los pasajes más significativos en su contenido dramático.

"En México obtuvo buen éxito en años pasados la refundición y adaptación de Alvaro Custodio, pero el Teatro de la Nación ha querido llevar a escena la versión teatral de Tina French y Salvador Garcini, este último director de la obra, para lograr un espectáculo en el que se armonizara el sentido del texto con su propio lenguaje escénico. Como se sabe, [...] las adaptaciones de *La Celestina* denotan sólo una variación en la intensidad de los elementos, según el sentido que cada generación da al texto. En todos ellos habrá de denominar, sin embargo, el acento tomado de las comedias latinas de Terencio; la lucha entre el bien y el mal (Dios y el Demonio para el mundo cristiano), en la que se llega al final por caminos insólitos e inesperados."

The second series of ideas we may treat as the guiding force for the texture of the new production. They basically deal with the monolithic presence of *Celestina* and were written by the director-adapter, Salvador Garcini:

La Celestina: si definiéramos la tragedia como una perturbación del orden cósmico provocado por una o varias acciones humanas, *La Celestina* se nos antojaría como la obra ejemplar. Porque *Celestina* está tratada por su autor quizás como el personaje más perturbador de la historia del teatro.

"Desde su oficio principal de explotadora de la lujuria ajena y su participación en ella, sus mañas para ocultar corrupción y remediar virginidades hasta lo más profundo del mal que es la invocación al demonio ante quien se identifica como su más conocida 'cliéntula'.

"*Celestina* se las ha arreglado con años de trabajo monstruoso a través de un oficio al que respeta y una religiosidad vulgar y firmemente asida a unos pocos conceptos consoladores y muchas prácticas rituales vacías de sentimiento y moral pero magníficamente eficaces en este mundo y en el otro, logrando convertir una ciudad entera en un antro infernal, una ciudad que ella recorre con infinita diligencia manejando todos los hilos entrando en las casas, en las iglesias, en los conventos, en el corazón y en el sueño de todo este universo, este universo establecido por ella es lo que se convierte en la circunstancia trágica de Calisto y Melibea quienes jamás hubieran sido afectados de no tener exactamente la debilidad humana que para realizarse necesita de los oficios de *Celestina* la gran transgresora."

Para redondear este informe, se nos ha dicho que una de las próximas presentaciones de La Compañía Amigos del Real Coliseo Carlos III será precisamente una reposición de la *Celestina* de Alvaro Custodio, aludida arriba como durante mucho años un éxito en los escenarios de México.



Valencia: Castalia, 1946.
Ilustración al Acto I
de José Segrelles
"Vete de ahí, torpe . . ."