



Representación de LA TRAGICOMEDIA DE CALISTO Y MELIBEA. Compañía  
TEATRO DEL AIRE (MADRID). En una gira por los EEUU.

MICHELLE S. DE CRUZ-SAENZ  
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

On March 2, 1982, the Spanish company, "Teatro del Aire," presented its version of *La tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* at the Lisner Auditorium of the George Washington University, Washington, D. C. The group is touring the U. S. on a grant from the Spanish North-American Joint Committee for Education and Cultural Affairs. This version was designed and directed by Angel Facio. The play has been performed in Madrid for the past two years, and will resume production in Spain after April 15. The troupe will have performed at Hunter College-CUNY, Wellesley, and the University of Chicago.

Facio has fashioned his play in thirteen scenes without an intermission. Scene one opens with Calisto and Melibea as Adam and Eve. Just as they are to make love, a sword, thrown by "the Grand Inquisitor," interrupts the action, and the plot returns to its more familiar development. The lovers are then robed by monks and admonished. At this point, one becomes forcefully aware of the set. The rest of the production will take place on levels of two scaffolds, the tops of which provide perches for Calisto and Melibea for the remainder of the action. Between the scaffolding lies a net which leads to a web-like construction from where Celestina, spider-like in costume and make-up, plays out her role. In the center of this web is fashioned a Star of David. [When questioned about its significance, Angel Facio responded that he meant Celestina to be the Jew in the play.]

With Calisto and Melibea perched atop their respective scaffolds, Sempronio, Pármene and Tristán remain below Calisto, as do Areúsa, Elicia and Lucrecia beneath Melibea. Symbolic ropes are attached to the ankles of each of the players, who climb the scaffolds like flies working their way into the entrapments carefully woven by Celestina. At this point simultaneous dialogues are recited by the men and women in each camp, which device serves to advance the action of the plot effectively.

## CELESTINESCA

It seems feasible to the observer that this might be the only way in which twenty-one acts could possibly be enacted in any reasonable amount of time. However, the student of *Celestina* is quickly made aware that Facio has taken great liberties with Rojas' text: lines were omitted or occasionally placed in the mouth of another character.

Celestina mounts both scaffolds to make her visit to Melibea and her deal with Calisto. The traditional exchange of girdle for gold chain, the frolicking, feasting orgy of the servants and Celestina constitute the climax of the onstage action. The latter scene is well-played by the principals: fruit, meat, wine and fowl are sensuously consumed in a scene reminiscent of one in *Tom Jones*. The sex-play by the three couples is portrayed comically, and is evidently symbolic of struggling insects caught in a web even now being tightened around them. Pármeno and Sempronio climb Celestina's nest to claim their portion of the chain. Capping the argument which ensues, they stab the old bawd, who remains lying motionless on the set for the rest of the play. Soon, Pármeno and Sempronio appear, at either wing of the stage, hanged for their crime. The three corpses form a triangular tableau while the action now shifts to the top of the scaffolds. Calisto and Melibea come alive. They meet briefly, brought together on two ladders horizontally extended between the scaffolds, seemingly defying the laws of balance. As they undress for a second encounter, a net is thrown across the scaffolding. It is there where their love is consummated. Calisto's fall and Melibea's suicidal leap are both staged, as each is hoisted upward by the ankle clamps and ropes placed on him at the beginning of the play's first scene. Tristán mournfully views the resultant tableau.

Calisto, played by Fernando Romo, and Melibea, played by Charo Amador, interpreted their roles more as symbolic figures than as the well-developed personalities Rojas so carefully created in the original text. Their tragic plight and their inability to change their destiny were clearly communicated in this production. As a couple they came across as a Romeo and Juliet; he tall, slim and dark; she, slight and well-proportioned, unlike the descriptions provided in the *Tragicomedia*. The supporting couples, Pármeno, Daniel Moreno; Sempronio, Paco Menéndez; Tristán, David Alvarez; Elicia, Lola Casamayor; Areúsa, Gloria Villalba; Lucrecia, Cristina Vázquez, all played their roles well, seemingly enjoying their frolicking about the stage. They would do well, however, to work on their diction: many of their lines were unintelligible, and their speech seemed slurred. Asunción Sancho, a slight woman in her forties, played Celestina. Dressed in black, looking more like a nun than a witch or a spider (perhaps intentionally?), she was credible within the framework of the interpretation. She left little doubt as to her considerable talents as an actress. The additional role, that of the Grand Inquisitor, was played by one Santi Ugatz, probably the troupe's manager, Santiago Ganuza.

Lighting techniques and the multi-purpose set assisted effectively in the advancement of the plot at a pace which maintained the interest of the audience. Angel Facio must be commended for his ability to effect a compromise between the lengthy dialogues and monologues of the original text and the pace of plot demanded by some tastes in modern drama. Although the scenery appears rustic and simple, the skilled technical staff, manipulating cables, ropes and netting, used the stage facilities to the full.

## CELESTINESCA

The introduction of the Adam-and-Eve theme both at the outset and conclusion of the production, coupled with the tableau of the dead principals, does not render clearer the meaning of Rojas' work. However, if one reflects that this version was specifically produced for a general population, and designed to be a long-running production, then the universal theme of Adam and Eve, the frequent nudity, the overt references to Judaism and the Inquisition, meshed with political and ethnic readings of hanging by one's feet, all combine to satisfy dramatic ends, even as they leave Rojas far behind.

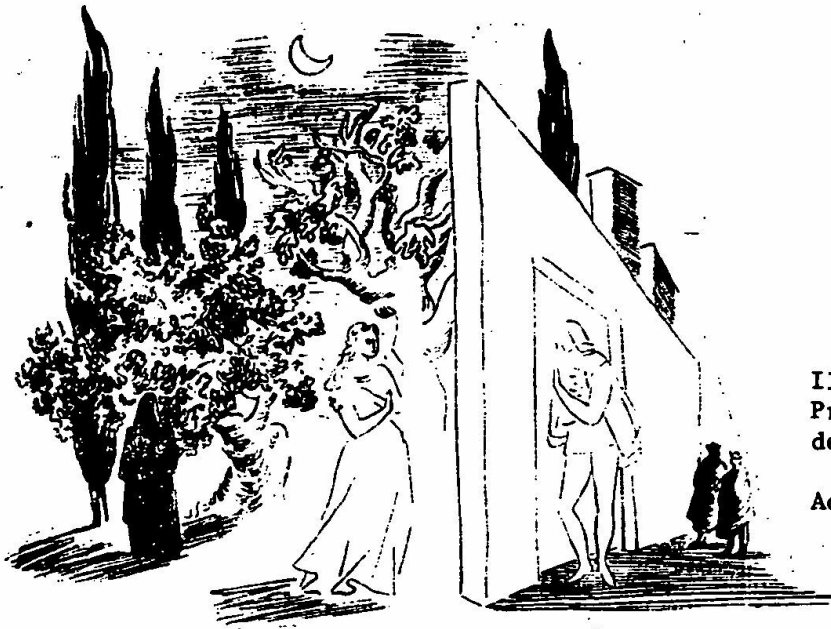


Ilustración de Miguel Prieto para la edición de Mexico: Leyenda, 1947.

Acto XII.



Treatment of a celestinesque theme by

GOYA