


  
 REVIEW

[Disk] CALISTO AND MELIBEA (ascribed to John Rastell). Directed by John Barton for the British Broadcasting Company's The First Stage: English Theatre From Its Beginning to the 1580's. Album commentary by David Berington. © 1970, Dover Publications. Library of Congress no. R68-3183.

The unique copy of this "new comodye in englysh in manner of an enterlude" reposes at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It appeared in a Malone Society facsimile reprint in 1908 and was printed that same year by H. Warner Allen (London: Routledge and Sons). Whether Rastell was or was not its author remains a matter for conjecture, but he was its printer (ca. 1525-20). The playlet freely adapts materials from the early acts of *LC* in order to demonstrate a moral point. A useful discussion of the two works' relationship to each other is Albert J. Geritz, "Calisto & Melebea (ca. 1530)," *Celestinesca* 4:1 (mayo, 1980), 17-29.

What follows is a summary of the presentation as it takes place on the recording. There is, first, a musical opening to set the period. Melebea, alone, is the first to speak and her words catch us by surprise. She speaks of her beauty in terms most direct, incorporating into her words parts of Calisto's scene 1 address from *Celestina*. She notes the approach of an anguished Calisto, who proceeds to laud Melebea as an angel. Melebea, in this version, has already been pursued by Calisto before the onset of the action, and is pained by his attention here and rejects him, swearing she will nevermore appear to him. End of the first scene. Music.

In the following vignette, Calisto is with Sempronio. The swain, declaring he "serves a goddess," calls for a lute that he might sing his "unhappiness." The lute, untuned, is like his universe. The heretical terms he uses to praise his lost Melebea are picked up quickly by Sempronio, who incites the flames of Calisto's passion by condemning women as "devil's nets," artful dissemblers, vainglorious, painted, lusty souls. Calisto, new passion aroused, promises to Sempronio a "chain of gold" if he will help. Well, it happens that the wily servant does know a neighbor lady, a "mother of bawdry," who has mastered a thousand virgins. Calisto, in wonderment at this sudden hope given him, promises more rewards to Sempronio for speedy deliverance. The scene ends with a desperate Calisto,

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aflame, urging Sempronio: "Go, speed, my Sempronio, to quench the flames of this fire." Music.

Celestina opens the next scene and we are now before her house. She speaks to the public, introducing herself and giving an account of what has gone before; she exalts her skills by narrating how cleverly she solved the dilemma of Elicia, a ward, who was with a certain Crito upstairs, when her lover came by one day. Celestina's crackling glee is unmistakable: she is happy and fulfilled in her profession.

Sempronio approaches and informs her of what matter he has in hand and Celestina exclaims that she is as glad of this as a surgeon. No time is wasted and in a flash we are again at Calisto's door. Parmeno is allowed here only a brief diatribe against the evils of the old bawd before the procuress makes her entry. Calisto, thrilled, overexclaims his passion, until Celestina must remind Sempronio to get Calisto to seal a bargain. The passion vs greed comes across quite strongly in this well-played scene.

Calisto goes off with Sempronio, leaving a priggish Parmeno with the cagy Celestina. The recognition scene is swift and Celestina, never in this version a waster of words, offers money for the compliance of the servant in this little venture. Parmeno is allowed to retain his innocence in this scene, for his rejection if the bribe is quick and final. It is only when Calisto has returned, given Celestina 100 pieces of gold and sent her off to work her magic, that Parmeno sees that his warnings, restated, are working against him and he decides to seek henceforth his own advantage. Music.

Melebea, troubled, speaks of her hate for Calisto's desire but also manages to convey her own warm feeling for the fellow. Onto the scene bursts Celestina, with no Lucrecia or Alisa to intervene. Why has she come, wonders Melebea, as she recognizes the old woman as one who "lived by the riverside." "Good works" is the bawd's reply. And she proceeds to tease Melebea by hiding the name of the person whose need of Melebea is great. When the fatal name is out, Melebea is mightily angered and shouts to Celestina: "Go hence in the devil's way. . . . Make amends to God." Celestina calms her with the same toothache ruse of Rojas' original and Melebea softens by acceding to all Celestina's wishes, asking her to return on the morrow, secretly, for a prayer. She bids Celestina an accomplice's farewell: "Tomorrow is a new day. I shall perform that I have you promised."

The performance ends after Celestina, again alone, and en route to Calisto's house, has another opportunity for self

praise, in which she calls attention to her worthiness to bear the rank of "noble." In the text version of ca. 1530, the interlude ends with the sudden appearance of Danio, Melebea's father, and their discussions round out the moral lesson central to the adaptation. This has been excised from this recorded performance.

The main textural features of the Rastell text are conserved by the recording, although many other lines have been omitted also to compress further the action; music is added to evoke the passing of time. The rhymed couplets of the original are so nicely delivered that they are really only noted belatedly. The flavor and flow of the language is preserved and enhanced by fine performances by all the principals: June Tobin as Melebea, Peter Howell as Calisto, Manning Wilson as Sempronio and Vivienne Chatterton as Celestina.

Aside from its merits as recorded theatre, this English adaptation of Rojas' *Celestina* would be useful in a class or seminar whose principal focus was the continuing impact of LC in and out of Spain. The plot lines so skillfully articulated in the original *novela dialogada* are surely given, in this work, one of its earliest clearly theatrical forms. We ought to mention, in this regard, the 1513 Eclogue of Calisto & Melebea by Urrea, which adapts material from Act I of *Celestina* in the form of a verse-play, but we do not know that it ever was actually staged. The historical value of the interlude's place in the history of *Celestina* studies alone might justify its being used in the classroom, but it is a bonus to have so charming and well-performed a piece available. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I express my gratitude to my colleague, Pedro Garay, of Presbyterian College (South Carolina), who made a special tape of this recording for me.

**A** new comode in englysh in maner  
 Of an enterlude ryghte elygant & full of craft  
 of rethorick / wherein is shewed & descrybed as  
 well the bewte & good properties of women;  
 as their byres & capriciosities / with a morall  
 conclusion & exhortacion to decrete



Celestina le trae a Calisto el cordon de su Melibea. En una ilustracion a la traduccion hungara [1979]. Artista: Gyula FELEDY.