

THE "CORRIENTE TALAVERANA" AND THE CELESTINA:  
BEYOND THE FIRST ACT

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The anonymous first act of the Celestina has provided ample grist for the mills of medieval scholarship.<sup>1</sup> In 1976, at Erich von Richthofen's urging to seek authorship for Act I of the Celestina in the "corriente talaverana,"<sup>2</sup> E. Michael Gerli compiled what he referred to as a "long and impressive list of disturbing coincidences suggesting a possible direct link between the Arcipreste, Fernando de Rojas, and the Celestina."<sup>3</sup> On the basis of the texts alone he concluded and queried:

It is in Act I of the Celestina that we find the most abundant parallels to the Corbacho: While some later passages of the Tragicomedia vaguely recall scenes and dialogues from the Arcipreste de Talavera, these interrelationships are not nearly so concrete as in the anonymous first act . . . From this evidence, either the unnamed author of Act I was steeped in the writings of the Archpriest; or was he perhaps Alfonso Martínez de Toledo himself? (41)

The uniqueness of Act I compared with the following acts has been documented by many.<sup>4</sup> That parallels between Act I of the Celestina and the Corbacho exist is also undeniable. Furthermore, Gerli's assessment regarding the abundance of these parallels in Act I is indisputable. However, that later passages only "vaguely recall scenes and dialogues from the Arcipreste de Talavera" or that they "are not nearly so concrete as in the anonymous first act" are assertions worthy of further scrutiny. In fact, a closer examination makes Alfonso Martínez de Toledo's potential authorship for Act I of the Celestina manifestly less plausible since significant similarities between the Corbacho and the Celestina exist beyond Act I. These parallels are such that suggesting Alfonso Martínez de Toledo as author for Act I of the Celestina necessitates suggesting him as author for other acts, or at least for portions of these acts.

For example, a comparison of Part III of the Corbacho, the humoral complexions of men as related to their ability to love and be loved, with the behavior of the male lovers in the Celestina reveals, in brief, that Calisto manifests the figure and characteristics of the sanguine type; Sempronio's ready wit, quickness to act, and choleric place him in the choleric category; Pármeno shows all the vile characteristics, especially the contentiousness and cowardice, of the two worst complexions, the melancholic and the phlegmatic.<sup>5</sup> Their behavior

through all the acts coincides so consistently with the humoral descriptions in the Corbacho, that on the basis of this alone, there would be little reason to suggest more than one author for the Celestina, and if Alfonso Martínez de Toledo were the author of Act I, he would have to be the author of the entire Celestina.

Citing F. Castro Guisasola,<sup>6</sup> Gerli agrees that in Act I Sempronio behaves in a fashion reminiscent of one incidence of choleric behavior in the Corbacho. In this scene Elicia aids in covering Crito's presence by chiding Sempronio, calling him "traidor" and showing vexation. Sempronio is forced to ask her what it is that has so upset her. She laments that he has not visited her for three days.<sup>7</sup> In the scene in the Corbacho the choleric man's woman is also vexed, complaining that she no longer has honor because of some insult or another, that she might as well run off with a Moor or the vilest footman in Castile. Her beau must also beg in order to find out what the problem is.<sup>8</sup> This, the vexation and the inquiry as to its cause, constitutes the similarity between the two and is a tenuous link at best, in spite of Gerli's assessment that this correspondence "doubtless, is true" (36).

A closer parallel between the choleric man and his dame and Sempronio and Elicia, unmentioned by either Castro Guisasola or Gerli, can be seen between Act IX of the Celestina and the above-mentioned portion of the Corbacho, Part III, Ch. 8. In it Alfonso Martínez exemplifies how the choleric male, if governed by reason, would or should act: after considering all pertinent details of the case for which his woman wishes him to take drastic action, the wise choleric man would say "Amiga, estás agora malencónica; e yo he ya comido e bevido. Espéralo para otra ora, que agora non puede reynar cólora en mí, que ya está exormado al presente. Presta paciencia; que yo remediaré en ello; oy en este día non" (193). Sempronio behaves similarly when Elicia wishes to quarrel with him before partaking of a banquet filched from Calisto's larder, a banquet to be shared with Celestina, Areúsa, and Pármeno. He explains to her that his responsibilities to Calisto have made it impossible to visit sooner and pleads "No hayamos enojo, asentémonos a comer" (X, 143). When she forces the issue, he suggests "Después reñiremos; comamos agora" (IX, 143). The meal, refusal to take the bait, and postponement of action are the three similarities here. The difference is that in the Corbacho the choleric man has eaten; in the Celestina Sempronio has not yet done so. This latter correspondence is, nevertheless, more forceful than the previous parallel between Act I and the choleric behavior in the Corbacho noted by Castro Guisasola and cited by Gerli.

Another element relating Act I to the Corbacho, as discussed by Gerli, concerns style. Synecdoche employed by the persona in the Arcipreste and by the choleric Sempronio beyond Act I provides an instance of a stylistic parallel worthy of note. In both texts they refer to old women. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo describes the carnal greed, the lust, of old women who marry young men, by calling them "huesos de luxuria. Pues, téngase lo que le viniere la vieja desmolada, canas de ynfierno..." (200). Sempronio twice refers to the Bawd using terms that point to her material greed, first in an aside--"¡Oh codiciosa y avarienta garganta!" (V, 104); and later, just before he

kills her--" ¡Oh vieja avariata, [garganta] muerta de sed por dinero!" (XII, 183). Greed, carnal and material--"huesos de luxuria" and "avarienta garganta"-- constitutes the nexus in this stylistic device. The Archpriest's reference to the old woman as a "vieja desmolada" leads to yet another likeness. Celestina mentions her toothless state twice. As she bids Pármeno and Areúsa farewell: "Quedaos a Dios, que voyme solo porque me hacéis dentera con vuestro besar y retozar. Que aun el sabor en las encías me quedó; no le perdí con las muelas" (VII, 132). Later in her home, after encouraging the youths, Sempronio with Elicia and Pármeno with Areúsa, to frolic at the table, she laments: "Besaos y abrazaos, que a mí no me queda otra cosa sino gozarme de vello... Que yo sé por las mochachas, que nunca de importunos os acusen y la vieja Celestina mascarà de dentera con sus botas encias las migajas de los manteles" (IX, 148). The relationship of teeth to sexuality has been noted by Burke and amply explained by West.<sup>9</sup> A molarless woman, especially in the context of "huesos de luxuria" in the Corbacho, is a lustful old woman bereft of sexual activity because of age. If a tooth is a phallic symbol, the toothless old woman is doubly so because she is a toothless hag sans beau. This describes Celestina's condition.

The Archpriest mentions teeth not only in the above-cited reference but also in connection with the infirmities of old age. In his discussion of marriage between two old people (Part III, Chapter 9), we find the two Methuselan mates reduced to aches and pains. Her first complaint is "¡Ay de la madre!"; his last is "¡Ay de las muelas!" (202). Besides the reality of uterine maladies,<sup>10</sup> the uterus is obviously related to feminine sexuality. Similarly, beyond the literal pain of a toothache, because of the sexual association and the possible equivalence of molar-phallus, the old man's lament may bemoan his loss of sexual prowess. Similarly in the Celestina, besides the pangs of love, the two ailments mentioned are Calisto's "unseemly" toothache (IV, 97) and Areúsa's suffocation of the uterus, "mal de la madre" (VII, 127). As in the Corbacho, there is a figurative, sexual aspect to each of these images. The parallels they contain are certainly as concrete as those existing between the images noted by Gerli as examples establishing a "possible direct influence" between Act I and the Corbacho. These, however, all occur beyond Act I.

Even more closely related are the references to the effects of mercury poisoning. Again in Part III, Chapter 9 of the Corbacho, the Archpriest depicts the phlegmatic lover as scared totally out of his wits, pleading with his beloved to excuse him from her presence because he wants to return to the security of his own home, and she, when she sees "que está tenblando como azogado" (198), allows him to leave. When Celestina returns with word from Melibea, Calisto, whose insanity has long been established, behaves in a manner which elicits from Pármeno: "Temblando está el diablo como azogado..." (VI, 107). The phrases are practically identical.<sup>11</sup> Should this, too, be considered an example of a direct link between the two works?

Castro Guisasa provides another correspondence: "Las imaginaciones de Melibea, con que se abre el aucto X, evocan lo de la Reprobación [i.e., the Corbacho], parte I, capítulo 4" (175); Gerli, however, declares that these "similarities are very general" (41). In

fact, the similarities are no more general than similarities he finds between the remarks in Sempronio's antifeminist diatribe and "the ones hurled by the Archpriest throughout Part II of his masterpiece" (33) and are probably closer than some other correspondences which he offers. At the beginning of Act X Melibea fears that by her delay in responding favorably to Calisto (through Celestina), he, "desconfiando de mi buena respuesta, haya puesto sus ojos en amor de otra" (X, 153). Chapter 4 of the Corbacho, titled "De cómo el que ama es en su amar de todo temeroso," develops essentially the same notion: "Porque amor asy es en sy tanto delicado que es todo lleno de miedo e de temor, pensando que aquel o aquella que ama non se altere o mude de amor contra otro" (53). Both items express one of the many possible fears endured by lovers, and the similarity between them does not deserve Gerli's rating of "very general." Like the parallels he cites, those cited, and those to be cited, however, they are commonplaces.

Castro Guisasola notes two more correspondences:

Melibea temiendo por Calisto, porque le parece que tarda algo (aucto XIV), coincide en algunos detalles (temor a la justicia, a la ronda, a los perros, a las caídas) con las reflexiones que el hombre flemático se pone a hacer antes de salir de casa (Reprobación, parte III, capítulo 9); y con la soberana descripción del carácter miedoso de este mismo flemático una vez fuera de casa tiene también muchos puntos de contacto la pintura de la animosidad y valentía de los criados de Calisto en la entrevista de su amo y Melibea (aucto XII). (175)

Gerli's dictum regarding Act XII is that "again, the relationship is much too general to speak of a positive influence" (41, emphasis added). The parallel may be less similar than in the previously cited texts; it is, nevertheless, substantial. When the Corbacho's flemático hears a noise

luego--como es muy flaco de corazón o cobarde de espíritu e de voluntad--luego se le torna el corazón tamaño de formiga e da a foyr, e tronpieça e cae, e levántase atordido, e fuye e mira fazia tras por ver sy viene alguno tras él; que piensa que son onbres armados que le van a las espaldas resollando para le matar.... (197)

Is this not the cowardly behavior displayed by Calisto's servants Sempronio and Pármeno? As they await their master they become more and more fearful until finally:

Semp: ¿Oyes, Pármeno? ¡A malas andan; muertos somos! Bota presto, echa hacia casa de Celestina, no nos atajen por nuestra casa.

Párm: Huye, huye, que corres poco. ¡Oh pecador de mí, si nos han de alcanzar! Deja broquel y todo.

Semp: ¿Si han muerto ya a nuestro amo?

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Párm: No sé, no me digas nada; corre y calla, que el menor cuidado mio es ése.

Semp: ¡Ce, ce Pármeno! Torna, torna callando, que no es sino la gente del alguacil, que pasaba haciendo estruendo por la otra calle. (177)

The Corbacho provides the blueprint for this vignette of cowardice and flight. The similarity is as close as those Gerli labels as "strongly reminiscent" (32)--Sempronio's antifeminist diatribe and the Archpriest's accusations "hurled...throughout Part II of his masterpiece" (33). To insist that the cowardice depicted in both is similar, however, is not to say that the Celestina is necessarily indebted to the Corbacho at this point. But neither does this support Gerli's contention that correspondences between the Corbacho and text of the Celestina beyond Act I are much vaguer than those found within Act I.

Castro Guisasola mentions two correspondences--the first in Act XIV, the second in Act XII. Gerli reacts to the second but ignores the first in which there is a remarkable closeness between the two texts as their juxtaposition shows:

1. [Melibea]: ¿Quién sabe si él, con voluntad de venir al prometido plazo en la forma que los tales mancebos a las tales horas suelen andar, fue topado de los alguaciles nocturnos y sin le conocer le han acometido;... (XIV, 189)

[Flemático]: Sy vo...encontraré con la justicia e tomarme ha la espada; correrme ha por las calles la ronda sy me encuentra;... (196-97)

2. [Melibea]: ¿O si por acaso los ladradores perros con sus crueles dientes,...le hayan mordido? (XIV, 189)

[Flemático]: ¡Guay, sy me muerde algund perro en la pierna,... (197)

3. [Melibea]: ¿O si ha caído en alguna calzada o hoyo, donde algún daño le viniese? (XIV, 189)

[Flemático]" e sy estropieço por ventura caeré; ensuziarme he de lodo los çapatos... (197)

As Castro Guisasola summarizes, the concerns are nearly identical. The basic difference is that of the sex of the person in the texts, Melibea in the Celestina and the male phlegmatic lover in the Corbacho. The Corbacho's tone, since it refers to a cowardly male, is more mocking.

Finally, in one other major instance beyond Act I of the Celestina, Castro Guisasola (175) notes a textual correspondance again ignored by Gerli. It concerns a woman's reaction when her man overtly notices another woman's beauty. In the Celestina, Sempronio casually refers to Melibea as "gentil," which sets off both Elicia and Areúsa; in

the Corbacho the reaction occurs in Part II, primarily in Chapter 4, "Cómo la muger es envidiosa de qualquiera más fermosa que ella" (136), but in previous chapters as well. The clearest way to illustrate the parallels is to present them side by side, with the diatribe in the Celestina (IX, 145 and 146) on the left:

1. (Elicia) ¿A quién gentil? ¡Mal me haga Dios, si ella lo es ni tiene parte de ello; sino que hay ojos que de lagañas se agradan! Santiguarme quiero de tu necedad y poco conocimiento.
 

¡O, o, o, o, Señor, cómo privas de conocimiento a aquéllos que te plazel! Ojos ay que de lagaña se agradan;. ... (138)
  
2. (Elicia) Aquella hermosura por una moneda se compra en la tienda. Por cierto, que conozco yo en la calle donde ella vive cuatro doncellas, en quien Dios más repartió su gracia que no en Melibea. Que si algo tiene de hermosura, es por buenos atavios que trae. Poneldos a un palo, también diréis que es gentil. Por mi vida, que no lo digo por alabarne; mas creo que soy tan hermosa como vuestra Melibea.
 

"¡Yuy, y cómo yva Fulana el domingo de Pasqua arreada! Buenos paños de escarlata con forraduras de martas; [there follows a long list of clothes]. ...Demás un todoseda con que cubria su cara, que parescia a la reyna de Sabba, por mostrarse más fermosa... (130)

"E ¿cómo? ¿Non so yo tan fermosa como ella, y aun de cuerpo más bastada? ¿Porqué non vo como ella arreada? Nin por eso pierdo yo mi fermosura,..." (131)

E sy por aventura su vezina tan fermosa fuese que desalabar su fermosura, non puede, que es notorio a todo el mundo, en aquel punto comiença a menear el cuello, faziendo mill desgayres con los ojos e la boca diziendo asy: "Pues, verdad es que es fermosa, pero non tanto allá como la alabades. ¿Nunca vimos otra muger fermosa?..." (139)
  
3. (Areús) Pues no la has tú visto como yo, hermana mía. Dios me lo demande, si en ayunas la topases, si aquel día pudieses comer de asco....
 

"Fallan las gentes que Fulana es fermosa... Non la han visto desnuda como yo el otro día en el baño!... asco nos tomó a las que ay estábamos, que rendir nos cuydó fazer a las más de nosotras...." (136-37)

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4. (Areúsa) Todo el año se está encerrada con mudas de mil suciedades. Por una vez que haya de salir donde pueda ser vista, enviste su cara con hiel y miel, con unas tostadas y higos pasados y con otras cosas, que por reverencia de la mesa dejo de decir. Las riquezas las hacen a éstas hermosas y ser alabadas; que no las gracias de su cuerpo. Mudas para la cara diez veces se las pone, una tras otra... que quando puestas [non] las tyene parece mora de Yndya... çumo de rávanos... favas que sean cochas con la fiel de vaca fecho todo unguento-- estas e otras mill mudas fazen por nueve días; fieden como los diablos con las cosas que ponen... (137-38)
5. (Areúsa) Que asi goce de mí, unas tetas tiene, para ser doncella, como si tres veces hobiese parido; no parecen sino dos grandes calabazas. Más negra es que un diablo;... las tetas luengas como de cabra;... (136)
6. El vientre no se le he visto; pero, juzgando por lo otro, creo que le tiene tan flojo, como vieja de cincuenta años. ¡Mal año para la vil, suzia, desdonada, perezosa, enana, biente de ytrópica, fea, e mal tajada! (131)
7. (Sempronio) Y aunque lo que dices concediese, Calisto es caballero, Melibea hijadalgo; así que los nacidos por linaje escogidos búscanse unos a otros. Por ende no es de maravillar que ame antes a ésta que a otra. Ojos ay que de lagaña se agradan; ruyn con ruyn, asy casan en Dueñas. El enxemplo byen lo dize: "Non se puede egualar synón ruyn con su par... (138)
- (Areúsa) Ruin sea quien por ruin se tiene. Las obras hacen linaje... (146)

In the first correspondence not only is the saying cited by each woman nearly identical, but the male's "lack of awareness" is also stressed. The second item manifests three points of contact: the artificial nature of the beauty of the woman being denigrated; the indication that there are others just as pretty (implied in the Corbacho's question "¿Nunca vimos otra muger hermosa?) or prettier (four on the same street as Melibea); the speaker's belief that she is just as pretty. The third correspondance is related to the second in that once the admirer/viewer gets beyond the exterior trappings of the beautiful woman the effect is nausea, loathing, asco. Still in the vein of contrived beauty, item four refers to the cosmetics employed. Not only does the word "mudas" occur in both, but so does the word "mil." Where the Celestina has "mudas de mil suciedades," the Corbacho offers "mill mudas" and then describes the "suciedades" in some detail, adding that because of them "they stink like the devil." In the fifth point of

contact the elongation of the woman's breasts forms the basis of attack: in the Corbacho they are equated with gourds and in the Celestina with those of a nanny goat. Item six continues the attack with her abdomen as the target: the Celestina refers to it as "flabby" and the Corbacho as "edemic." The last parallel, the saying "ruin con ruin," besides referring to male-female interactions within the same social class, is equivalent to the English "Birds of a feather..." and explains why a male can be enamoured of so poor a specimen as the defamed woman. The passages are nearly identical in content and in their vitriolic tone.

The various correspondences cited, from "temblando como azogado" through the anti-Melibea diatribe, more than "vaguely recall scenes and dialogues from the Arcipreste de Talavera." In the last example "of Sempronio's speech to Calisto exemplifying the great men who met their end through women [which] can only be derived from Arcipreste de Talavera" (31). It is more extensive than any single example cited by Gerli as establishing a disturbing series of parallels between Act I and the Corbacho. Based on the evidence of parallels beyond Act I, should we not consider the Archpriest author of the rest of the Celestina, and not just of Act I?

Alberto M. Forcadas provided an answer to this when he wrote that the example Gerli used to illustrate the "desastradas consecuencias del 'loco amor', era un locus classicus o locus communis de la litteratura ejemplar o satirica."<sup>12</sup> The phrase "temblando como azogado" would also be a commonplace in a country abundant in mercury deposits. Its appearance in Spanish dictionaries meaning trembling caused by mercury poisoning is proof of this. Furthermore, the use of teeth in sexual connotations is a literary commonplace as well. Correspondences in humoral lore shared by both works would not be uncommon in works treating loco amor.<sup>13</sup> Even in the last series of correspondences we find the use of two proverbs "ruin con ruin" and "ojos hay que de lagaña se agradan" that would suggest a common literary tradition.<sup>14</sup> It is quite possible that the author(s) of the Celestina were aware of the Corbacho and may even have been steeped in its tradition as Gerli mentions. Given the locus communis of the themes involved, this position is a far cry from, and substantially more acceptable than, positing Alfonso Martínez de Toledo as author of Act I. Parallels throughout both texts are obvious, close, and proof that the authors not only were aware of the tradition surrounding the loco amor motif, but also that they were a part of that same tradition, distinct but intimately related by their common cultural fund.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, items 389-412, pp. 644-46 of Joseph Snow, Jane Schneider, and Cecilia Lee, "Un cuarto de siglo de interés en La Celestina, 1949-75," Hispania, 59 (1976), 610-60, or the bibliographic studies presented in Celestinesca beginning with the first volume. See also Joseph T. Snow, An Annotated Bibliography of World Interest in Celestina since 1930 (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1985).

The author is grateful to Kathleen L. Kirk whose reading of the manuscript has improved its style. He alone is responsible for its shortcomings.

<sup>2</sup>"El Corbacho: las interpolaciones y la deuda de la Celestina," in Homenaje a Rodríguez-Moñino, 2 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 115-20, at 120.

<sup>3</sup>"Celestina, Act I, Reconsidered: Cota, Mena...or Alfonso Martínez de Toledo?" KRQ 23 (1976), 29-46, at 46.

<sup>4</sup>Many studies alluded to in note 1 above treat this matter. See esp. Alan D. Deyermond, "The Index to Petrarch's Latin Works as a Source of La Celestina," BHS 31 (1954), 141-49 and "The Text-Book Mishandled: Andreas Capellanus and the Opening Scene of La Celestina," Neophilologus 45, (1961), 218-21.

<sup>5</sup>Studied in "The 'conplisiones de los onbres' of the Arcipreste de Talavera and the Males of the Celestina," currently under publication consideration.

<sup>6</sup>F. Castro Guisasaola, Observaciones sobre las fuentes literarias de "La Celestina", RFE Anejo 5 (rpt. Madrid: CSIC, 1973), p. 175.

<sup>7</sup>Dorothy Severin, ed., Fernando de Rojas. La Celestina. Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea (Madrid: Alianza, 1969), I, 57-58. All citations are from this edition and are identified in the text by act (Roman numeral) and page.

<sup>8</sup>J. González Muela, ed., Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho (Madrid: Castalia, 1970), 193. All citations, identified by page number within parentheses, are from this edition.

<sup>9</sup>James F. Burke, "Metamorphosis and the Imagery of Alchemy in La Celestina," RCEH 1 (1977), 129-52, at 136; Geoffrey West, "The Unseemliness of Calisto's Toothache," Celestinesca 3,i (1979), 3-10.

<sup>10</sup>Beryl Rowland, ed. and trans., Medieval Woman's Guide to Health: The First English Gynecological Handbook (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1980), p. 87ff.

<sup>11</sup>The term "azogado" is defined in the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary as referring to one who has suffered mercury poisoning from

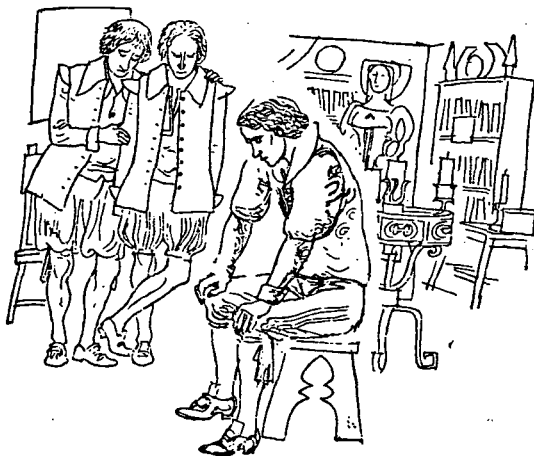
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inhalation of mercury vapors. One of the symptoms of such poisoning is trembling. Spain is and has long been known for its mercury deposits. In 1250 Alfonso X had written: "'La piedra del argent uiuo [...] la minera della es en la tierra a que llaman Adracegen, et en la de Sennen et en la de Espanna [...] et por su natura mata los pioios; et la tierra de la piedra despues que es quemada, mata los mures si gelo mezclan en algun comer. Et al omne que alcança el su fumo faz le paralitico, et tremer le los miembros et perder el oyr et otras muchas enfermedades.' Lapidario, fol. 38r, 5-24" (emphasis added, cited from Herbert Allen Van Scoy, A Dictionary of Old Spanish Terms Defined in the Works of Alfonso X, ed. by Ivy A. Corfis [Madison: HSMS, 1986], pp. 9-10). The syndrome was common enough to become a commonplace in the language and as such is not proof of textual dependence.

<sup>12</sup>"Mira a Bernardo' es alusión con sospecha," Celestinesca, 3,1 (1979), 11-18, at 12.

<sup>13</sup>One of the more important notions developed in the study cited in note 5 above is that both works treat the concepts of passion, humoral disorder, in a similar fashion but for different purposes. Lawrence Babb elucidates the relationship between morality and the humors in his The Elizabethan Malady. A Study of "Melancholia" in English Literature from 1580 to 1642 (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1951), pp. 18-19.

<sup>14</sup>González Muela, p. 138, cites the same saying from the Catalán Lo Somni of Bernat Metge.



Act 13. Illustration by Jaime Azpelicueta. Ed. Juventud.