

ALVARO M. CUSTODIO (1913-1992)

Alvaro Muñoz Custodio (Ecija, 1913) passed away after a long illness at age 79, in Madrid on April 27, 1992. **Isabel Richart Sotes** (Madrid, 1914), his wife of over 50 years, and collaborator in many ventures, devastated, went to Los Angeles soon after to be with their daughter, Victoria. Absent Alvaro, her own decline came all too rapidly and she followed her husband on June 2, barely 5 weeks later.

I received news of this double tragedy from Los Angeles, from Victoria, on June 10, literally moments before the taxi would come to take me to the airport. My destination was Madrid. One of the projects I had in hand for the summer of 1992 was one Alvaro and I had spoken of often earlier, but it had been, for varied reasons (one his uncertain health) delayed: we had hoped to conduct an interview which would range over his long and varied associations with *Celestina* and *Celestina* productions. It was an interview I had long thought about, one I had planned for the pages of this journal--once they had been transcribed and edited. Now it cannot be. I cannot assess what has been lost, but I more than suspect that it is simply a tremendous amount of material--reminiscences, anecdotes, facts, and even documents--that would have greatly enriched the as-yet unwritten history of *Celestina* in the twentieth century.

It would be a disservice to suggest that Alvaro Custodio was in any sense exclusively interested in *Celestina*, but it certainly was one work that appealed greatly to him, and one to which he would return time and again. It was one of those works not originally written for a stage that he dreamed and worked into theatrical guise (I can cite his famed Cervantine synthesis, *El patio de Monopodio*, the entertaining *Corridos y Romances*, and his more recent version of *La regenta* as other examples of his fascination with these kinds of adaptations). Alvaro wrote also a number of original works for the stage, translated others (his *Hamlet* is a superlative example), and directed many dozens of others--with a strong leaning to

the classical theater of Spain (his final work, an adaptation, was Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, recently directed in Paris by José Luis Gómez).

Celestina, adapted by Custodio over a period of years, was selected for one of the inaugural year (1953) presentations of the stage company he founded in exile, the Teatro Español de México (later, in 1963, the name was changed to Teatro Clásico de México). He directed, and his wife, Isabel Richart created the costuming. The Spanish actress, Amparo Villegas, like Custodio, living in Mexico, was the perfect incarnation of Custodio's vision of *Celestina*¹ and Mexico's acclaimed actor, Ignacio López Tarso, was serendipitously cast as Pármeno (both Custodio, as director, and López Tarso, for his performance in this *Celestina*, won awards in 1953).

Even though Custodio kept busy in Mexico (1944-1974), as a theater critic, a frequent contributor to several journals, a speaker, a scriptwriter for films, and as translator, director, producer, and publisher, the theater was his life and directing plays was its very heart. His *Celestina* adaptation was revived often and it played over 300 times until it was scandalously banned in 1960 (a ban that would last almost 8 years). During the ban, only a very few scenes were replayed at a theater gala featuring Amparo Villegas. It was restaged in 1968 at the Teatro Reforma, again with costumes by Isabel Richart, but now with Virginia Manzano as *Celestina*. It was an invited production for the 1968 Olympic Games. And finally, Custodio staged his adaptation in 1978 in Los Angeles in a bi-lingual format, English and Spanish versions playing in alternation.²

I had met Alvaro in 1974 when he was a speaker at the Primer Congreso Internacional sobre *La Celestina* (organized by his friend, Manuel Criado de Val) and was impressed with his vigor and, when he spoke from the podium, with his love for Rojas' inimitable work. He went with Criado de Val to Toledo and there they attempted to interest the municipal authorities in staging a full-length version of *Celestina* (it never

¹ Amparo Villegas had much earlier played Melibea in what must be the first staged adaptation of Rojas' classic in this century (Madrid, 1909).

² More details can be gleaned from entries 978.1 to 978.10 in my '*Celestina*' by Fernando de Rojas: *An Annotated Bibliography of World Interest, 1930-1985* (Madison: HSMS, 1985), pp. 72-73.

took place).³ I later invited him to be a collaborator in early issues of *Celestinesca*, especially after Eleanore M. Dial had contributed a piece to this journal's very first number about his Teatro Clásico de México. It is a very great pleasure to report that he contributed, while alive, three pieces to *Celestinesca*, and a sadness to think that the final one (in this issue) must appear in a number that neither he nor his devoted Isabel will see.

Over the years, hale or ill, Alvaro, perhaps of the many subscribers to this journal, never once failed to write thanking me for what this journal was doing to keep alive the multiple approaches to understanding *Celestina*. I looked for those cards and notes with great anticipation. In the time of our friendship, which developed more after his return to Spain in 1980 and his settling in San Lorenzo de El Escorial (I was twice his guest there, and treasure certain photos I took of him and Isabel on their balcony with the towers of a parish church in the background, and the sierra they so loved even further distant, a hazy blue); Alvaro was to revive plans for a new production of his *Celestina* (events and funding sources conspired against this dream), and to successfully stage his "Eva y Don Juan" (March and May of 1982, with *Celestina* as one of many characters in it) for the Compañía Real Coliseo Carlos III, in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, with which company Custodio had direct and important contacts in and after his 1980 return to Spain).⁴

Later, Custodio would expand on ideas from "Eva y Don Juan,"--mixing characters from diverse works in a dramatic confrontation--in his new *comedia*, "El retorno de *Celestina*, don Juan y Don Quijote" (the introduction, or "introito" to which opens this number of *Celestinesca*). As far as I know, this work has not yet been produced. A gift copy of the "borrador" was sent to me by Alvaro for the archive I am creating: with his death, this copy becomes even an even more special addition to the *archivo*.

³ The idea lives on, however, in efforts by Emilio Martínez de Miguel and Jesús Puente to produce a full-length version sometime soon in Salamanca.

⁴ The final, authorized, script for "Eva y Don Juan" was published in *Canente*, no. 9 (1991): 95-146. The introduction provided there speaks to Custodio's involvement with the great fictional characters in Spanish letters.

Custodio expected that his work and figure would play a larger role in the contemporary theater scene in Spain than either was destined to have. Many of his projects received enthusiastic verbal support but did not win the all-important means to win through to actual production. Earlier heart problems (he had undergone a by-pass in the mid-1980's) returned and weakened him and even though his friends recall his exuberant participation in many a *tertulia*, his directorial energies were limited. In his final hospitalization, he withdrew more and more within himself, perhaps there to savor the many successes he shared with Isabel in earlier years.

In Alvaro M. Custodio's memory, and in that of his beloved Isabel, this small marker of his passing, and of the permanent impact on the iconography of *Celestina* on the twentieth century stage which is part of their legacy, this number of *Celestinesca* is appreciatively and admiringly dedicated.


Joseph Snow

*** CORRECTION ***

In *Celestinesca* 15.2 (Nov. 1991), several acknowledgements were inadvertently omitted from the study by Carol Salus, "Picasso's Version of 'Celestina' and Related Issues." The editor apologizes for the oversight. The omissions are as follows:

Figure 1 was reprinted with permission from the Musée Picasso (Paris/SPADEM);

Figures 2, 3, and 4 were reprinted with permission, and should have been captioned. "Copyright 1991 ARS, N. Y./SPADEM."

Finally, the following acknowledgement should have appeared at the end of the study: "Very special thanks and appreciation to Marilyn Olsen for her translations, suggestions and readings of several drafts of this paper."