

## A Pleasure and a Source: The Publications of the Teatro Clásico de México

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The felicitous combination of artistic integrity and an unflagging sense of mission have permeated Alvaro Custodio's lifelong involvement with the theatre. When the founder of the Teatro Clásico de México (hereafter TCDM) ended his exile in Mexico to return to Spain in 1973, he left behind impressive memories of his discerning adaptations and imaginative staging of plays by Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, León Felipe, García Lorca, Sergio Magaña, and Ana Diosdado, as well as other dramatists.<sup>1</sup>

Margarita Mendoza López recalls, for instance, in *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982*, his creative adaptations and staging.<sup>2</sup> "Alvaro Custodio," she writes, "demostró tener una virtud especial para dar a las obras clásicas una frescura y una vida que hacían olvidar que habían sido escritas en siglos pasados." She describes a production seen some thirty years earlier thus, ". . . recuerdo todavía ahora como si la hubiese visto ayer, la encantadora representación de *La discreta enamorada* de Lope de Vega, a la que dotó de una escenografía que entonces resultó novedosa, en base a trastos que se cambiaban de lugar y a formas que se juntaban y separaban dejando al espacio libre o cerrándolo, según conviniera al movimiento escénico y al cambio de los lugares de la acción (642).

Custodio, a liberal Spanish Republican, reached Mexico in 1944 via France, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. After his arrival in Mexico, he wrote movie scripts, which he rejects, and also was the movie critic for *Excelsior*, one of the principal newspapers in Mexico. However, of prime importance in understanding Custodio's work with the TCDM and his creation of the *Boletín*, is the original impetus that his period as an actor in Lorca's *La Barraca* in the summer of 1932 gave him. Custodio has, basically, carried on in the tradition of Lorca

in bringing classical theatre to the people. Like Lorca he feels he has a mission to accomplish. Custodio's productions in Mexico began with his adaptation of Roja's *La Celestina* in 1953 and his last there was his adaptation of several works by Cervantes into a prize-winning *mojiganga* called *El patio de monipodio* in 1973.

As producer-director, Custodio was in the enviable position of choosing the material that he would stage, as well as where and how he would stage it. Nor were his efforts unrewarded. Critics and audiences praised his daring staging of plays, both modern and classical, in ancient convents, colonial plazas and houses, or against such awesome backdrops as the Castillo de Chapultepec, various Mexican cathedrals, and the Pyramids of Teotihuacán. Mendoza López applauds this creativity in choosing settings. "La creatividad de Alvaro Custodio," she avers, "rompe los estrechos marcos del escenario tradicional" (642). In choosing outdoor, as well as indoor, settings, he was undaunted by difficulties of distance, cold, and occasionally, rain.

Moreover, from 1958 to the time of his departure for Spain, Custodio published a newsletter called the *Boletín del TCDM* and a supplement, *Notas y Comentarios*. In the 1950's when Teatro Español de México (the company's original name) became the TCDM, Custodio describes the bulletin in this way, "Nuestro boletín mensual publicará artículos, ensayos y estudios sobre el arte escénico, y dará cuenta detallada de las actividades de nuestra compañía" (septiembre y octubre 1959, 10). He wrote 90 percent of the *Boletín* himself while the other 10 percent consisted of articles by correspondents in other countries or material taken from various sources, such as an article by Alfonso Reyes, "Los auto sacramentales."

In the *Boletín*, he elucidates on what classical plays, such as he has often chosen to present in Mexico and in Spain, can do for the participants apart from delighting the audiences. "El teatro clásico," he maintains, "es la mejor escuela de capacitación dramática para el autor y el actor mexicanos, como lo es para los españoles. De este género salen los más ilustres intérpretes en todos los países y a él se dedican los directores más destacados" (Abril 1958, 3).

Custodio's vast theatrical knowledge stemming from his early childhood in Spain, where his grandfather owned the Teatro Custodio in Ecija, coupled with his ability to express himself ably, add vitality to these newsletters. The value of the *Boletín* and *Notas y Comentarios* is twofold: as a record, both written and pictorial, of some thirty productions of the TCDM during a twenty-year period, and as a source of Custodio's dramatic strictures and critical perceptions of other productions in Mexico and, later, in other parts of the world. Both publications were directed to the patrons and friends of the TCDM. It should be remembered that since 1950, a period of abundant

theatrical activity in Mexico, there have been few publications devoted to the theatre that have lasted more than a few years. Among the defunct ones are: *Panorama del Teatro en México*, *Boletín Teatral*, and *Teatro, Boletín de Información e Historia*, all dating from the early to mid-fifties. This makes the *Boletín* and *Notas y Comentarios* more valuable historically as a record of part of the theatrical activity of the period. In the 1960's, Custodio started to publish the Ediciones del TCDM, and five books appeared in the series. We propose to describe the contents of the newsletter and the editions.

*Boletín del Teatro Español de México* (from 1960 on *Boletín del TCDM*)

8½" x 11½" with an occasional slight variation. 4 pages or 8 pages. The emblem appearing on each issue is the figure of the Cid in mailed armor with sword aloft riding forth to battle. The *Boletín* began five years after the founding of the TCDM.

Marzo 1958

Plans (they never materialized) for a version of Lorca's *Mariana Pineda* starring Mexican poet, Guadalupe Amor and "Balance de actividades del TCDM en 1957."

Abril 1958

"Palabras de Guadalupe Amor" in which she excuses herself for not taking part in *Mariana Pineda*. Background material on Lope and his *El castigo sin venganza*, the next drama to open. Editorial on "Necesidad de un teatro clásico permanente."

Mayo y Junio 1958

Devoted to the production of *El castigo sin venganza* in the Teatro Triánón: the meaning of the play, the background of the main actors, an outline of Lope's life, and notes on other Lope plays presented by the group. An article on Custodio by Wilberto Cantón reprinted from *Cine Mundial*. "Aclaración necesaria" on the use of a Mexican accent rather than Castilian in *El castigo sin venganza*.

Julio y Agosto 1958

Pictures of *El castigo sin venganza* and many excerpts from critical reviews including discussions of the change of pronunciation.

A summary of five years of the group's activities and notes on the next production, Calderón's *El alcalde de Zalamea*.

Noviembre y Diciembre 1958

Numerous pictures and critical comments on Calderón's *El alcalde de Zalamea* in Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel and in the Hacienda Vista Hermosa in Cuernavaca.

Septiembre y Octubre 1959

"Seis años de actividad al servicio de la cultura y el arte," a description of the founding, objectives, and patrons of the company with a summary of each of the twenty productions up to that date. An explanation of the change of name of the company: "Hemos decidido cambiar nuestra nomenclatura por la de Teatro Clásico de México que expresa más netamente nuestros verdaderos propósitos de representar y difundir sin limitaciones las grandes creaciones dramáticas del pasado..." (10).

15 Agosto 1960

Pictures of various productions of the TCDM. Story on *El mágico prodigioso* and *Coplas por la muerte de maestro don Rodrigo Manrique* in the Teatro Milán and in the Capilla Abierta of the Cathedral of Cuernavaca and notes on a TCDM recording of four scenes from *Las mocedades del Cid* and fragments of the *Romancero del Cid* interpreted by Ignacio López Tarso, Ofelia Guilmain, and Amparo Villegas and, on the other side, *Coplas* with López Tarso and Amparo Villegas. Summary of the "Actualidad teatral en México, D.F."

1 Septiembre 1960

"El destino del teatro, subvención o muerte," comments on the necessity of subsidizing theatre if it is to remain alive. "Actualidad teatral en el extranjero," summaries of what was happening in the theatre in the U.S. and in France. Custodio reviews Beckett's *Fin de partida* directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky and acted by him, Amparo Villegas, and Carlos Ancira, and Gibson's *La maestra milagrosa* with Aurora Bautista.

15 Octubre 1960

Issue largely devoted to an explanation of *La vida es sueño* (the

1673 version) with excerpts from Menéndez y Pelayo and Valbuena Prat, and an explanation by Alfonso Reyes of "Los autos sacramentales." Article by the Director de Monumentos Coloniales, Arq. José Gorbea T. on "La capilla abierta de Tlalmanalco," setting for *La vida es sueño*. Comments on theatre in Mexico, Argentina, and Spain.

#### Diciembre 1960

Notes and pictures of *La vida es sueño* in Tlalmanalco. Reviews by Custodio of Ionesco's *Las sillas* directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky, Carballido's *El relojero de Córdoba*, and the presentation of the Nuevo Teatro de Chile in Mexico. First *Boletín* to carry Vlady's name as the Director Artístico of the newsletter.

#### Enero 1961

Pictures and text on *La vida es sueño* in Taxco, the Fuerte de San Diego in Acapulco, the colonial home of Lic. González Jáuregui in Mexico, and the atrium of the Iglesia de Santo Domingo in Querétaro. "Juicios críticos sobre *La vida es sueño* en México y en el extranjero" (from *The London Times* and *Théâtre* of Paris). Reviews of Ionesco's *La lección* directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Chekov's *El tío Vania* directed by Ignacio Retes and José Solé. Notes on *Las mocedades del Cid* in Querétaro. Imposing engravings including one of Corneille's *Le Cid*. Vlady listed as Director Artístico.

#### Febrero 1961

Announcement of Sergio Magaña's *Moctezuma II* on the Pirámide del Sol in Teotihuacán. Profiles of Magaña and Ignacio López Tarso, who was to play Moctezuma, and notes on "*Moctezuma II* en la historia." A compellingly attractive eighteenth-century engraving of Cortés and Moctezuma reproduced on the front and back pages. Reviews of Anouilh's *Becket* o *El honor de Dios* in the Teatro Xola and Leslie Steven's *Carrousel del amor* in the Teatro Insurgentes. Photographs of *Las mocedades del Cid* in Cuernavaca, Querétaro, and Mexico. Vlady listed as Director Artístico.

#### Julio 1963

Entirely on "Una década de teatro al servicio de la cultura," with pictures in color of productions, a list of the repertory and actors of the TCDM up to that time, a biographical note on Custodio, and "Oasis en el desierto," on the contributions to Mexico of the TCDM by

Joaquin S. MacGregor of the University of Xalapa.

Julio 1964

The production of Custodio's version in prose of *Hamlet* in the ex-convento de San Agustín Acolman. Notes on Shakespeare's "IV Centenario" and reviews of *Hamlet*.

Julio 1965

All on "*La vida es sueño* en Acolman" directed by Ludwik Margules. From January 1966-November 1966, a monthly supplement of the *Boletín del TCDM, Notas y Comentarios*, appeared frequently. However, Number 12 came out in May 1967 and the numbers followed regularly through October 1967. Then the November-December issues were combined and, from that point through 1968, the supplements were bimonthly. Number 26 appeared in 1969, 27 in 1970, 28 in 1971, and 29 in 1972. Numbers 1-19 were single sheets 10" x 15½" divided into four columns, printed on both sides of the sheet, with no photographs. Numbers 20-29 were the same in form as the original *Boletín*.

### *Notas y Comentarios*

Enero 1966, No. 1

Review of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón's *Mudarse por mejorarse* directed by José Luis Ibáñez in the new Teatro Jiménez Rueda, the Teatro Griego Piraikon in Mexico, and "Teatro clásico en Madrid, París y Londres," as Custodio saw these groups.

Febrero 1966, No. 2

"El teatro agoniza..." on difficulties of producing theatre in a modern world. Charles Lucas reviews *Man of La Mancha* in New York. Review of Balanchine ballet of *Don Quijote* in New York.

Marzo 1966, No. 3

"Subvención o muerte del teatro" on financial difficulties of the theatre and advantages of having a subsidized theatre as in Great Britain. "Los festivales en México," the possibility of outdoor theatres in Mexico being used as they are in Spain for artistic Festivales.

Abril 1966, No. 4

Custodio discusses "La temporada en Broadway," and reprints "¿Cómo debe hacerse el teatro clásico?" an article by him in the *Revista de la Universidad de México* (Abril, 1966).

Mayo 1966, No. 5

An article on accomplishments of Piscator entitled "Erwin Piscator ha muerto" and reviews of "Cinco estrenos en la Europa Occidental" by Karl Stein, Don Harrison, and Guido Corelli. *La soledad sonora, loa*, an unedited text by Custodio.

Junio 1966, No. 6

Reproduces a text of Ortega y Gasset, "Dos teatros" from *Ideas sobre la novela*, and Part 1 of "Ser o no ser" on the characteristics of a classical play.

Julio 1966, No. 7

"la censura teatral" on censorship in the movies and theatre in various countries with special reference to the banning of Custodio's adaptation of *La Celestina* in Mexico, and Part 2 of "Ser o no ser."

Agosto 1966, No. 8

Issue almost entirely on "La olimpiada, el turismo y el teatro," financial and working conditions imposed by the Oficina de Espectáculos and the unions in Mexico. "La temporada teatral de Madrid 1965-1966" by José Téllez Moreno.

Septiembre 1966, No. 9

"Teatro subvencionado en México," "La temporada teatral 1965-1966 en París," and an obituary, "Un gran renovador de la escena Gordon Craig."

Octubre 1966, No. 10

"Lope de Vega en Londres" about *La fianza satisfecha* (*A Bond Honoured*), "La temporada teatral 1965-1966 en Londres y Nueva York," "Crónica desde Madrid, Los Festivales en España," and "Ha muerto Seki Sano," an eminent Japanese director in Mexico.

Noviembre 1966, No. 11

Entirely on "Desde Broadway-Nueva Temporada" by Alvaro Custodio.

Mayo 1967, No. 12

Notes on theatre that Custodio saw in Madrid, Paris, and London in "Teatro clásico y teatro moderno."

Junio 1967, No. 13

Editorial about financial matters in the theatre, specifically about the exemption from taxes for classical theatre which the government had just granted, and the fact that the ceiling on ticket prices should be raised in the Distrito Federal. A continuation of Custodio's impressions of English, French, and Spanish theatre.

Julio 1967, No. 14

More impressions of theatre in Europe and the United States, this time "Teatro en Nueva York."

Agosto 1967, No. 15

"La Edad de Oro del teatro en España y en Inglaterra, Comparación de dos estilos," Part I. Lope-Calderón and Shakespeare.

Septiembre 1967, No. 16

"Tres poetas y un dramaturgo, Comparación de dos estilos," Part II.

Octubre 1967, No. 17

"La quinta rueda del carro," excerpts from an article by Ortega y Gasset on *Hamlet* and *La vida es sueño*.

Noviembre-Diciembre 1967, Nos. 18-19

"El teatro en la exposición de Montreal," impressions of *Antony y Cleopatra* in Canada and "Teatro en Broadway, *Rosencrantz y Guildenstern han muerto*."



Enero-Febrero 1968, No. 20

The ban on Custodio's adaptation of *La Celestina* was lifted after eight years. Seven or eight pages contain articles and pictures on the current production of *La Celestina* in the Teatro Reforma, including long excerpts from ten reviews in newspapers and magazines. Also a review of Ionesco's *El rey se muere* in the Teatro Hidalgo directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky.

Marzo-Abril 1968, No. 21

Mostly about Hamlet starring Jorge del Campo with excerpts from the introduction to Custodio's translations in blank verse of the tragedy, and clear pictures of eight interpreters of *Hamlet*. Also, "Estrenos en México y en el extranjero" (*Marat Sade* directed by Juan Ibáñez in Mexico and Seneca's *Edipo* in London).

Mayo-Junio 1968, No. 22

"Los estrenos más importantes de la temporada," reviews of *Discurso sobre el preludio y curso de la prolongada guerra de liberación de Vietnam* by Peter Weiss and directed by Harry Buckwitz in Frankfurt by H. Z. and Brecht's *La tahona (Der Brotladen)* by the Berliner Ensemble by J. C. Custodio's reviews of D. H. Lawrence's trilogy, *La noche del viernes de un minero de carbón (A Collier's Friday Night)*, *La nuera (The Daughter-in-law)* y *La viudez de la señora Holroyd (The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd)* by the English Stage Company and *Adriano VII (Hadrian VII)* directed by Peter Dew in the Mermaid Theatre. Also Act III, Scene iv of Custodio's translation of *Hamlet*. Two reviews of TCDM production of *La Celestina* from *El Norte* of Monterrey and *Variety*.

Julio-Agosto 1968, No. 23

"Recuento de una experiencia teatral," a summary of the fifteen years of activities of the TCDM, including "Prohibición de *La Celestina* en 1960" and "Nota biográfica de Alvaro Custodio." Three reviews from other sources of Custodio's edition of *Hamlet*. Custodio's remarks on Anatoly Efros' production of Chekov's *Tres hermanas* in Moscow.

Septiembre-October 1968, No. 24

Issue on TCDM's *Hamlet* in Chapultepec with pictures of the

costumes and settings, letters and reviews from newspapers and magazines. A particularly attractive layout.

Noviembre-Diciembre 1968, No. 25

"El teatro en Europa y los Estados Unidos," on the current state of the theatre, "El teatro en España," and "El teatro in Nueva York" with special notes on Lee J. Cobb as King Lear.

(No month) 1969, No. 26

The TCDM productions of *Hamlet* in the Teatro Hidalgo and *La verdad sospechosa* in Tlalpan. Review of the productions of the company of the Teatro María Guerrero on its tour of Mexico. A noteworthy obituary of the original star of *La Celestina*, "Amparo Villegas (1885-1969), La carrera de una gran actriz," including a first publication of a poem by Spanish actor Francisco Morano written 1922 about his wife, "Semblanza de Amparo Villegas." She played Melibea in Spain and Celestina in Mexico.

(No month) 1970, No. 27

The TCDM backed Adolfo Marsillach's production of *El Tartufo* in a new translation by Enrique Llovet, and this issue is about the production in Spain and in Mexico, with reviews from *ABC* and *Pueblo*.

(No month) 1972, No. 28

On awards won by TCDM productions of *El Tartufo* and *Olvida los tambores* by Ana Diosdado. Includes reviews in Mexico of the two plays. "¿Existe un auge teatral? El teatro en Nueva York y Londres" by Custodio.

(No month) 1972, No. 29

"Los XX años del TCDM," a summary of past productions and plans for the future including staging Custodio's *mojiganga*, *El Patio de Monipodio*, an adaptation of works by Cervantes. An excellent article, "La Barraca, Santillana del Mar y ... así que pasen 40 años," reminiscences of a return trip to Santillana del Mar and memories of 1932 with Lorca's *La Barraca* there. This article also appeared in *Primer Acto* (Octubre 1972).

Ediciones del TCDM

*La Celestina, Tragicomedia de Calixto y Melibea.*

By Fernando de Rojas. Mexico: Ediciones TCDM, 1966. 133 pages [Adaptation for the stage in three acts by Alvaro Custodio. In an introductory essay, Custodio discusses stage adaptations of the work. The edition contains photographs of TCDM productions of *La Celestina*.]

*La trágica historia de Hamlet, Príncipe de Dinamarca.*

By William Shakespeare. Translated by Alvaro Custodio. Mexico: Ediciones TCDM, 1968. 470 pages. [This bilingual edition contains a valuable preliminary study by him of 106 pages on *Hamlet* in Spanish with noteworthy comments on previous Spanish translations, information on editions of *Hamlet*, and background material on Shakespeare and his period. The notes follow the body of the text and there is an essay at the end of 96 pages called "Principales estudios críticos sobre la tragedia." A short bibliography of books on Shakespeare in Spanish and English.]

*Lope-Calderón y Shakespeare, Comparación de dos estilos dramáticos.*

By Alvaro Custodio. Mexico: Ediciones TCDM, 1969. 81 pages. [The book contains three essays in which Custodio discusses classical theatre. One essay is "La Edad de Oro del teatro en España y en Inglaterra," *Notas y Comentarios*, Number 15 (Agosto 1967) and 16 (Septiembre 1967). The second, "Ser o no ser," *Notas y Comentarios*, Numbers 6 (Junio 1966) and 7 (Julio 1967) is a variation on the same theme, and the third "¿Cómo debe representarse el teatro clásico?" deals with attitudes towards presenting classical texts. Pictures of TCDM productions.]

*Teatro romántico español.*

By Alvaro Arauz. México: Ediciones TCDM, 1970. 147 pages. [Short but incisive essays on the theatre of Larra, Martínez de la Rosa, Duque de Rivas, Antonio García Gutiérrez, Hartzenbusch, and Zorrilla. Original sketches of the dramatists done from paintings by José Bartoli, Elvira Gascón, Alberto Gironella, José Reyes Meza, Antonio Rodríguez Luna, and Vicente Rojo.]

*El Patio de Monipodio, a mojiganga* in two acts.

By Alvaro Custodio. Mexico: Edicions TCDM, 1973. 167 pages. [This adaptation is based on *Rinconete y Cortadillo*, *El celoso extremeño*, and fragments of other works by Cervantes. The edition contains a prologue divided into two sections: Part I on Cervantes and the literature of his time and Part II on the structure and origin of *El Patio de Monipodio*. Also has excerpts from critics' opinions of the *mojiganga* when it opened in Mexico in February 1973, and a biographical sketch of Cervantes. At the end is an outline of Custodio's life and a list of the works written and published by him.]

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## Notes

1. See my articles, "Spanish Classical Theatre in Mexico in the 1950's", *Latin American Theatre Review* 4/2 (Spring, 1971), 29-38, and "Alvaro Custodio and his Continuing Dream: The Teatro Clásico de México in the 1960's, 7/2 (Spring, 1974), 45-57, for background information on Alvaro Custodio. One of Custodio's recent successes in Spain was his staging of Clarín's *La Regenta*. Rafael Lapesa praises this adaptation thus, in a letter dated 2-IX-1983, "¡Qué maravilla fue! Le felicito muy efusivamente por su total acierto en la difícil adaptación. La novela de Clarín es asombrosa, pero condensar sus mil páginas en dos horas y media de acción en escena, sin quitar nada esencial es una hazaña insuperable." p. 5, *Versión escénica de 'La Regenta'*, Oviedo, 1985. After the production of *La Regenta* in Spain, Custodio was invited by the Mexican government to stage it in several cities in Mexico in 1984 as part of the Festivales Cervantinos in Guanajuato.

2. Her chapter on theatre also appeared with the title "Españoles en el teatro mexicano," in *Primer Acto*, No. 201, Noviembre-Diciembre, 1983, 15-22.

## Works Cited

*El exilio español en Mexico, 1939-1982*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982.