

## COMEDIA POLISCENA

## I. INTRODUCTORY AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES, TEXT, AND TRANSLATION

Joseph R. Jones  
University of Kentucky

Two studies, more than all others, have trained twentieth-century readers of Fernando de Rojas' Celestina to appreciate its beauty and to understand its hybrid form: Menéndez y Pelayo's Orígenes de la novela and Lida de Malkiel's La originalidad artística de La Celestina. Menéndez y Pelayo's essay (which forms chapter X of Orígenes) stood virtually unchallenged until mid-century, by which time changing critical objectives had made its opinions irrelevant. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel's work on Celestina, culminating in La originalidad artística, has been the starting point or target of Celestina-criticism since the 50's, though sooner or later the unpredictable evolution of literary taste will dethrone it as it has deposed Orígenes. But there is at least one area in which the joint contributions of Menéndez y Pelayo and Lida de Malkiel seem likely to withstand the vagaries of critical fashion, namely, their work on the debt of Celestina to previous authors and obsolete forms, among these, the fifteenth-century humanistic imitations of Roman comedy.

Readers of Celestinesca are doubtless familiar with the pages in both Orígenes<sup>1</sup> and La originalidad artística which explore possible connections between humanistic comedy and Celestina. They will also recall that both M. P. and L. de M. consider the Comedia Poliscena, attributed to Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo (1369-1444), to be the humanistic comedy most like the Spanish masterpiece in plot and other significant aspects. According to M. P., "Si en la comedia humanística hay algún prototipo innegable de la fábula de Rojas, éste es sin duda alguna" (Orígenes III: 327). As for the go-between Tharatántara, with her laments for lost youth, reputation for witchcraft, and skill at manipulating the two lovers, "parece abuela de Celestina" (III: 327-8). Lida de Malkiel believes that Poliscena is "la comedia humanística más cercana a Celestina" (Originalidad 379) and that there are verbal and situational resemblances between the Latin play and acts V, VI, and XI of the Spanish work, as well as character traits (the insecurity of the passionate hero) and actions (the predominance of the go-between over other servants) adapted by the authors of Celestina to their purposes.

## CELESTINESCA

The cautious tone of M. P.'s comparisons ("Si hay algún prototipo..." "parece abuela de Celestina"), and Lida de Malkiel's scrupulous references to inconsistencies in the secondary sources (e.g., p. 37, n. 6) are due to the fact that neither critic had been able to examine a complete text of the Latin play. They knew it from plot summaries and from excerpts--found in a seventeenth-century erotic anthology called Practica Artis Amandi. Since Lida de Malkiel had more accurate summaries at her disposal, her book contains reliable descriptions of the action and characters of Poliscena. Unfortunately, it is difficult to locate her references, scattered among dozens of pages and notes, because the name of the play does not appear in the index to La originalidad artística.<sup>2</sup> In any case, generations of Spanish and foreign university students and investigators have known the Comedia Poliscena only through the following summary, found in Orígenes (III: 327):

Un joven, llamado Graco, encuentra a la joven Poliscena que volvía con su madre Calfurnia de oír un sermón en la iglesia de los frailes menores. Enamoróse súbitamente de la doncella, y ésta de él. Graco se vale de la mediación de su esclavo Gurgulio (nombre tomado de una comedia de Plauto) y Poliscena acude a su esclava Tharatántara, hábil en todo género de tercerías. El parásito, después de haber tentado inútilmente a la madre con promesas y ofrecimientos, va una mañana a ver a Poliscena, mientras Calfurnia está en la iglesia, y con bellas palabras, y pintando muy al vivo los tormentos de su amador, induce a la joven a concederle una entrevista. Graco se vale de la ocasión sin ningún escrúpulo: sobreviene la madre, enfurecida, y amenaza con citarle a juicio; pero el padre de Graco, Macario, pone remedio a todo permitiendo que su hijo se case con Poliscena.

This summary, if it represents the contents of the German original, is remarkable for its inaccuracy and misleading descriptions. As readers of the text will be able to see for themselves, Gracchus's servants, Gurgulio and Tharatantara, are neither Roman-style slaves nor Terentian parasites; Poliscena does not approach Tharatantara as go-between; Gurgulio does not visit Poliscena. (The translation should perhaps have said la parásito, i.e., Tharatantara.) The summary is wrong on virtually every point of importance to the central action. As if this misinformation were not enough, Menéndez y Pelayo's coincidental discovery of the Practica Artis Amandi provided him with altered excerpts, to which is added a soliloquy by Tharatantara on the evils of old age and lost pleasures that does indeed make the go-between sound like Celestina's grandmother. The reason for such similarity,

## CELESTINESCA

however, is surely the influence of Celestina on the reviser of the Poliscena and not vice versa.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The bibliographical history of the Comedia Poliscena is of some interest, for it proves that the playlet is the most often printed of all the humanistic comedies. It was apparently popular in Eastern Europe, since the most of the editions come from German presses. Standard bibliographies, such as the British Library catalogues, Mansell, etc., show the following:

The first known edition is one of two works (the other being the plays of Terence) printed at the splendid Premonstratensian monastery in Schussenreid (about 45 km. southwest of Ulm) in 1478, with no title and the name Leonardus Bruni Arentinus [sic] in the colophon. This edition appears under the name Aretinus with the curious title of Calphurnia et Gurgulia comedia [sic] in F. A. Ebert's Allgemeines bibliographisches Lexicon (Leipzig, 1821) and subsequently in other important bibliographies, such as L. Hain's Repertorium Bibliographicum, Pellechet's catalogue, etc. The incorrect title is all the stranger when one considers that Hain also lists the second edition of Leipzig 1500, which begins "Comedia Poliscene." The famous Leipzig printer Melchior Lotter, whose press issued the second and several other editions, apparently gave the play the title now in use. The "Classical" title Comoedia Gracchi et Poliscenae and variants of it are the invention of nineteenth-century bibliographers. There are at least nine early sixteenth-century editions, all but one (Krakow 1509) printed in Leipzig (1500, 1503, 1507, 1510, 1511, 1514, 1515, 1517). Menéndez y Pelayo lists a Vienna 1516 ed. which I have not been able to verify (Orígenes III: 329 n.) After a lapse of eighty-three years, the comedy reappeared, considerably altered, in a collection of works about love edited by the apparently pseudonymous Hilarius Drudo: Oberursel 1600 and 1606, Frankfort 1625, and Amsterdam 1651. (Oberursel is a large town about 10 km. west of Frankfort.)

### THE TEXT

Though Menéndez y Pelayo suggested as early as 1900 (Orígenes III: 318) that Poliscena was likely to prove an important model or source for one of Spain's great books, no one had yet made the text available when Lida de Malkiel was writing sixty years later. It was my colleague and fellow admirer of Celestina, John Lihani, who first suggested to me a simple edition of the Comedia Poliscena for our classes at the University of Kentucky, and I dedicate what follows to him and to the young hispanists who have kept our interest in the great Spanish work alive.

## CELESTINESCA

This text of the Comedia Poliscena began as an edition for my students of early Spanish fiction, a few of whom knew enough Latin to be able to follow the original with the aid of a rough English translation. I originally transcribed a film of the 1503 text (kindly supplied by Professor Lihani), but as I found some of the abbreviations difficult to read, I consulted a film of the 1510 ed. Though it is based on a virtually identical text, there are minor variations, some of which are improvements. I also found that the meaning of a passage frequently depended on punctuation, which in the early texts is arbitrary and often misleading; hence my transcription became perforce an "edition," in the sense that it is an effort to interpret the text to get at what must have been its original meaning, while correcting or at least pointing out dubious passages. After I had prepared a working-draft based on the 1503 ed., I obtained a film of the only printed text available to Rojas, the ed. of 1478, which has numerous minor variants and (as had been noted by those who had studied it previously) lacks act-divisions, names of characters at the beginning of each scene, and the ending. To add the last straw, the seventeenth-century abridgement studied by M. P. not only presents the usual minor changes in text but adds a long speech by the lena and a short one by the hero. Hence the present text is a composite. It is not a "scientific" edition but is intended to be a student's text of an important specimen of humanistic comedy, used as background reading for Celestina and other works influenced by the Renaissance playlets. The translation might be enough in itself, except for the usual disadvantages of all translations, especially for first-hand literary research; but there is no modern edition of the play, and I hope that this one will be useful to anyone interested in humanistic drama. Non-specialists would doubtless find, as I have, that the text is difficult to read, even without the hindrance of abbreviations, erratic spelling and punctuation, and occasional errors. It must have puzzled the earliest editors, too, since the variants are often obviously an effort to clarify obscure phrases; and the postillae in the fifteenth-century text show that not even at the apogee of Humanism was it possible to read it as one reads a book in his own language.

The playlet is written in a pseudo-Terentian language which flaunts the unusual, antiquated, and rare forms found in Latin comedies, (ella for illa, older forms of facio like faxo, and so on). It seems to me that the author employs many words in unusual or antiquated senses. The comedia, in fact, gives the impression of a piece written to test the knowledge of its readers with deliberately quaint and difficult language. Yet it is not one of those "forgeries" written in ancient style. (Leonardo Bruni himself composed a speech in the style of the Augustan historians which passed as authentic.) There are plenty of allusions to contemporary life (e.g., ecclesias, Ihesus, Sancti

## CELESTINESCA

Francisci, etc.), to political and military problems, and to at least one contemporary scholar, Gasparino Barzzizius. In fact, the amusingly inappropriate mention of Barzzizius, along with the intentional difficulty of the pseudo-Terentian vocabulary, the obvious indifference to real dramatic development, the shortness, fragmented plot, abrupt ending, and so on, all suggest that the playlet is a scholarly joke, for the amusement of other humanists, intended for reading. If one views the comedia as a witty take-off on Terence, the looseness of the text will not seem a defect. In fact, one may find even the unprepared ending quite funny as a poke at the conventions of Latin plays. Subsequent readers of Poliscena may have studied the work as a serious revival of Latin drama. The effort by an early editor to improve the ending, divide the play into acts, and provide the reader with names of personages in each scene suggests--as well as do the numerous editions--that it was accepted as the work of an authoritative dramatist. Hence the attribution to Leonardo Bruni, the famous historian. There is, however, no convincing evidence that Bruni wrote it. The style does not, of course, match that of Bruni's famous history of Florence; but since it is an effort to sound as Terentian as possible, it naturally would not.

The language of the playlet, considering its brevity, is very repetitious. The reason is that the author writes with a copy of Terence at his elbow, exaggerating obvious traits of Terence's style, repeating words, phrases, and tags of conversational Latin which abound in Terence's plays: e.g., exclamations (heus, hem, hercle, perii, vah, age, hahaha, pol, papae, hui, eho), contractions (sodes, cedo, ain, sis, vin, scin), adverbs (sedulo, ocius, sane, recte, oppido, actutum), and tags (si sapis, obscecro, amabo). One may object that since the author is not concerned with meter, he may have chosen common idiomatic Latin expressions such as those listed without necessarily imitating Terence. Nevertheless, the frequency of such words in so short a text, taken with the verbatim clusters of words from the Roman playwright make it clear that the entire vocabulary is intended to sound essentially Terentian.<sup>3</sup>

[To be continued. Ed.]



## CELESTINESCA

### NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Orígenes de la novela III (2nd ed., 1962): 317 ff. Wilhelm Creizenach's history of modern drama (1893; 2nd ed. 1903) appears to have drawn M. P.'s attention to Humanistic comedy, for Creizenach says flatly that Celestina is a closet drama like the early Renaissance Latin comedies. M. P. cites this opinion (Orígenes III: 318, n. 2,) but considers it exaggerated. Nevertheless, he elsewhere says that Celestina, "a pesar de su originalidad potente, es una comedia humanística" (III: 240).

<sup>2</sup>The following index to references to Poliscena in La originalidad artística de La Celestina (2nd ed. Buenos Aires, 1970), aspires to be complete:

- 17, n. 7: comparison of go-betweens' activities in works which resemble Cel.;
- 37, n. 6: no modern ed. of Poliscena; discrepancy among published plot summaries and between summaries and version in 1652 anthology, Practica Artis Amandi; Bradner's view that anthology contains a partial revision by Bruni; traces of Pol. in Cel. prove that work was known in Spain;
- 40: plot of Pol. derived from Roman comedy; slow development of simple plot a novelty; picture of daily life;
- 41: Macarius a variation of traditional Roman comedy father-figure;
- 41-2: passionate heroine most remarkable innovation;
- 43, n. 7: doubtful attribution to Bruni;
- 44, n. 9: prologue with moral justification due to common cultural heritage, not imitation;
- 53, n. 16: act divisions in Roman plays date from 16th century; Pol. not originally divided into acts;
- 67, Pol. probably not performed because of subject matter;
- 75: unidentified reference to prologue of Pol. ("dilata maravillosamente");
- 90: example from Pol. of "acotación enunciativa";

## CELESTINESCA

- 97: ex. of "acotación descriptiva", probably source of Cel. V, 195;
- 100: ex. of "acotación implícita";
- 116: novelty of "diálogo conversacional" in Hum. com.;
- 117: Terentian influence on rapid dialogue of Pol. and other Hum. comedies;
- 130, n. 12: ex. of monologue which describes a person;
- 144, n. 10: asides as thoughts expressed aloud; asides overheard;
- 156: representation of place and movement in dialogue;
- 185: sense of time revealed in lover's impatience;
- 186: action transpires over several days;
- 201: accidental meeting of lovers in a church in Pol.;
- 205, n. 5: cont'd., Pol. and other works locate meeting of lovers in a church;
- 278: Macarius's two laments ex. of geminación;
- 309: sympathetic presentation of immorality, in spite of conventional disapproval;
- 379: Gracchus, the hero of Pol., a combination of Pamphilus and Terentian heroes; description of Gracchus's actions; "notable" similarities between Pol. and Cel. V, VI, XI, and between character and conduct of Gracchus and Calisto; "En este sentido, la Poliscena es la comedia humanística más cercana a La Celestina...";
- 455: psychology of heroine sketchy, though Pol. "es una de las comedias más comparables con La Celestina por su argumento";
- 456: heroine's conventional protest against social restrictions;
- 569-71: one of two humanistic comedies which make the go-between rather than servants the principal actor in manipulating the love intrigue; summary of Tharatantara's actions; verbal and situational similarities with acts V, VI, and XI of Cel.; n. 36 points out "curiosas variantes" in Thar.'s monologue found in the Practica Artis Amandi;

## CELESTINESCA

influence of Pol. on Poliodorus and indirectly on Cel.;

627: actions of Gurgulio; Pol. one of two humanistic comedies which show servants in collusion.

<sup>3</sup>Examples of borrowings and echoes: Line numbers refer to ed. of Wilhelm Wagner, Cambridge, 1883. The examples are listed in order of appearance in the text.

- 1-- falleratis...verbis: Cf. Phormio 500 phaleratis dictis
- 2-- perliberali facie atque etate integra: Cf. Andria 72, Eunuchus 472, quam liberali facie, quam aetate integra!
- 3-- preter spem evenerit: And. 436 p. s. evenit; H.T. 664; Phor. 246, 251
- 4-- sub cuius imperio est, mater improbissima: Hauton Timaroumenos 233, mater quous sub inperiost mala
- 5-- Quam dii deaque omnes emori faxint: Cf. Eun 302, Hecyra 102, 134 di deaque faxint
- 6-- ubi res in vado fuerit: And. 845, omnis res est iam in vado in ore omni sim populo: Adelphoe 93, in orest omni populo
- 7-- etas succi plena; adolescens succi plenus: Eun. 318 corpus ... suci plenum
- 8-- novum ... aucipium: Eun. 247 hoc novomst aucupium
- 9-- ne te verbis protelem: Phor. 213, ne te ... suis ... dictis protelet
- 10-- Tum habet, dis gratias, unde pecuniam eroget: Adel. 121-1, (dis gratia) est unde haec fiant
- 11-- Cedo igitur atque idipsum uno verbo expedi: Phor. 197, cedo ... obsecro, atque id ... verbo expedi
- 12-- virgo expers artis meretricie: H.T. 226 artis ignaram meretriciae
- 13-- nisi astu id fiat ... nos iurgiis pessundabit: And. 208, quae si non astu providentur, me aut erum pessum dabunt.
- 14-- iactat sese habere gnatum unicum omni virtute peditum: And. 98 qui gnatum haberem tali ingenio praeditum; Cf. 11. 88-97.



CELESTINESCA

- 15-- Istuc ... tibi munus fenoratus dices: Phor. 493, faeneratum istuc beneficium pulchre tibi dices.
- 16-- in me ... fabam cudere oporteret: Eun. 381 in me cudetur faba
- 17-- Credo id oportere evenire quod vulgo dici solet: sumum ius sepe summam esse imprudentiam: H.T. 795-6, verum illud ... dicunt: 'ius summum saepe summast malitia.'
- 18-- vidua, colo et acu victum queritans: And. 75 [Andria] lana ac tela victum quaeritans
- 19-- precario aut vi: Eun. 319, vel vi vel clam vel precario
- 20-- Nihil circuitione utar: And. 202, nil circum itione usus es
- 21-- laterem lavas: Phor. 186, laterem lavem
- 22-- Inquit flagitiosum facinus, etc.: Cf. Phor. 111-116 et ss.
- 23-- ex Tusculano meo in propinquo percipio dolia ....: Eun. 971, ex meo propinquo rure hoc capio commodi
- 24-- Poliscenam amare cepit perditus: H.T. 97, filiam ille amare coepit perditus; Phor. 82, hanc amare coepit perditus
- 25-- Oculos pavit simplex: Phor. 85, oculos pascere
- 26-- ita manibus pedibusque pessundabo ut sacius sit: And. 161, quem ego credo manibus pedibusque obnixe omnia facturam
- 27-- Ah, quo ore me in eius conservabo gracia?... Quo vultu me in domum recipiam ...?: H.T. 700, quo ore appellabo patrem? Phor. 917, quo redibo ore ad eam...?
- 28-- Vix sum apud me: And. 937; H.T. 921, non sum apud me
- 29-- Proh deum clemenciam! Date illapsum obsecro eloquentie facultatem: Cf. And. 232-3
- 30-- Ne plus sursum deorsum cursitando defatiget miseram: Eun. 278, ne sursum deorsum cursites
- 31-- Missa isteç fac: Eun. 90

## CELESTINESCA

- 32-- Conveniunt mores: And. 696
- 33-- Dionysia: H.T. 162
- 34-- Abde Pessulum hostio: Eun. 603, pessulum ostio obdo
- 35-- nescis quam sagax sit spectator formarum: Eun. 566, quom ipso me noris quam elegans formarum spectator siem
- 36-- res ipsa indicat: Eun. 658, 705
- 37-- Num ista ex animo et veredicis: Eun. 175, utinam istuc verbum ex animo ac vere diceres
- 38-- Non sum adeo inhumano ac rudi ingenio ut nesciam...: Eun. 880, non adeo inhumano ingenio sum ... ut quid amor valeat nesciam
- 39-- Quid verbis opus est?: And. 99
- 40-- non indiges monitore: H.T. 171, nil opus fuit monitore
- 41-- in via istuc fatue et ss.: Cf. Phor. 818
- 42-- Cave ne me in gaudium conicias frustra: H.T. 291-2, obsecro, ne me in laetitiam frustra conicias
- 43-- nondum velim ego istac ex re perpetuam ac firmam ... affinitatem?: Hec. 636, adfinitatem hanc sane perpetua movo; Hec. 723, manere adfinitatem inter nos hanc volo
- 44-- O Iupiter, o Iuno, o Lucina: Adel. 486, Iuno Lucina, fer opem.

