



Glen F. Dille, ed. *La comedia llamada Serafina, An Anonymous Humanistic Comedy of 1521* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), xxvii, 114 pp.

J. T. Snow's review of this same item previously appeared in these pages (see vol. 3, no. 1 [Mayo 1979], 39-41) and dealt principally with the text Dille had prepared. The following remarks are made with a view to forming a complementary or companion piece to that review through rather more extended commentary on contemporary theatrical practice.

As noted in the earlier review, the *Serafina* was bound in 1521 together with the *Comedia Thebaida* and the *Comedia Ypólita*, the latter edited in 1929, the *Thebaida* in 1969, and now the *Serafina*. Dille's edition presents an introduction with interesting, if sometimes undeveloped, insights, the text, a listing of variants from the two sixteenth-century editions, notes and the selected bibliography. *Serafina's* bawdy plot is alluring, the dialogue in it prosaic--while sprinkled with witticisms and aphorisms a la *Celestina*--, and the structures reveal an author steeped in techniques of stage drama.

The story deals with a gallant who has fallen in love with a young married woman, whose husband of six months is impotent. The illicit lovers, who must contend with the bride's vigilant mother-in-law, overcome this obstacle through the intercession of the gallant's valet. This character, disguised as a woman, arranges a meeting for the lovers in the mistress' room and effects a tricky seduction of the aging mother-in-law and also of a female domestic. The desired tryst of the lovers is thus allowed to take place without incident. The mother-in-law, sexually revived by the valet's ardor, accepts her own affair as well as that of her daughter-in-law, even abetting the latter when her son unexpectedly returns by diverting him from any knowledge of the lover's rendezvous. *Serafina* is replete with *double entendres* as it progresses naughtily to conclude with a promised marriage of the servants and the presumed continuation of the lovers' adulterous affair. The recurrent topicality of this plot reflects the recurrence of literary tastes and preferences, a cyclical pattern that shows up also in political history. Since the sixteenth century, the *Serafina* has awaited a social permissiveness in which it might again emerge and be appreciated as a literary vehicle, clever and affecting.

In the introduction, Dille notes that Alonso de Proaza, corrector of *LC*, was thought to have been the author of the three 1521 *Comedias*, but also adds that D. W. McPheeters suggests that *Serafina* is not the work of Proaza but rather more likely is from the pen of Diego Núñez de Quiros de Valencia or, less likely, the pen of Juan de Molina. Dille wisely sidesteps additional speculations on *Serafina's* authorship based on stylistic affinities, since such studies tend only to reveal similarities of thought and expression which happen to be prevalent during a given period. Thus, some of the same phraseology turns up in *LC*; the works of Lucas Fernández, those of Bartolomé de Torres Naharro and others. Further-

more, one may single out stylistic aspects of the *Serafina* shared by works of Juan de Valdés and Antonio de Guevara, both of whom were contemporaries of *Serafina's* author. Dille alludes to a possible reminiscence of the *fraile* from Torres Naharro's *Soldadesca* (1510) in the phrase "el otro fraile" used in *Serafina* (p. 100, note to line 942), which I find a valid conjecture. There are not nearly enough of these connections established in Dille's notes but he--or someone else--might yet pursue them with profit.

In 1508-09, Torres Naharro had composed his own *Comedia Seraphina* which, though different in plot, did presage techniques which appear in the anonymous 1521 *Serafina*. Both authors take up adulterous and quasi-adulterous situations and share similar theatrical devices: lovers' missives (in Torres Naharro's *Calamita* and *Aquilana*); the man disguised as a woman (*Calamita*); the parodying of the master by the servant (*Serafina*, *Ymeneá*); and the bringing of the servant's role to the forefront of the play (cf. Pagano in *Jacinta* and Jusquino in *Calamita*).¹ This last aspect may be seen used, although more restrictively, in Lucas Fernández' *Comedia de Bras Gil y Beringuella*.

Some shared features in these plays, of course, are older than all of them. The ribald humor, the surprise, and certain risqué features, all common in Latin comedies, probably figured in the medieval *juegos de escarnio* which Alfonso X saw fit to condemn. The enjoyment of salacious stories enjoys a continuous tradition into the Renaissance. The husband's early (unexpected) return home to find his wife with a lover is a favorite dramatic situation that still pleases audiences in the works of Cervantes and others writing long after its use in *Serafina*. One observes more than a standard retelling of the old tale in *Serafina* as the dramatist's theatrical sophistication--for example, in the use of stage directions in the dialogue itself and in the artful use of the devices of prefiguration and recapitulation--is able effectively to intensify the onlookers' sensibilities and enjoyment of the scenes being played out before them.

Dille resists the urge to classify the diversified humanistic comedy within the restrictive norms either of the stage drama or of the narrative novel. He determines instead to call the work a "humanistic drama," placing it thus in a unique genre. The editor does well in considering the Spanish humanistic comedy in this way, since it might indeed have been composed primarily to be read to the public by actors without the additional burden of staging it, though staging of humanistic comedies at times was possible. The oral dramatization without stage action of the humanistic plays suggests an analogy with the vogue for radio dramas in

¹ Much of Spanish humanistic comedy that comes after *LC* and before Golden Age baroque drama draws frequently on the highly successful theater of Bartolomé de Torres Naharro, but Dille seems to neglect this point. The theatrical devices and subject matter developed by Torres Naharro set the pattern for plays like the *Serafina*, and in fact, for the Spanish stage in general during the next hundred years.

the 1930s and the 1940s. Those radio dramas, like the humanistic comedies, were conceived for audio rather than visual impact and could be extended to several episodes and presented on separate days. What appear to be difficulties of stage presentation, i.e., extensive length, repetitions, and slow pace of some of these humanistic comedies, mentioned by Dille, are easily overcome by concentrating not on the limits of a physical stage setting, but on the expansive, limitless stage of the listeners' intellect and imagination. Both the humanistic drama and the radio drama are valid variations of a histrionic art form not limited to the "boards."

Although Dille considers the *Serafina's* sexual scenes to be explicit and therefore difficult to stage, and for that matter even to analyze literarily, I find *Serafina* more concerned with implicit sex. The sex act in scene four, for example, is without any recourse to vulgarity, and unlike modern stage performances of "Oh Calcutta!" or "Equus", in which the attempted or simulated sexual intercourse takes place on the stage itself in view of the audience, the scenes in *Serafina* are suggested through frequent recourse to euphemistic language. We do need more studies and editions of humanistic comedies which explore the means and methods of their "presentation."

Gratifying, intensified interest in the Spanish Renaissance period is providing both students and scholars with more meaningful texts of the literature of the times, thus expanding the horizons of our knowledge of the past centuries. Glen F. Dille's edition of the *Serafina* provides some glimpses of the literary taste of the era and particularly on the personalized history of social behavior.

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Pármeno le cuenta a Sempronio lo de su
noche con Areúsa. Acto VIII.
Búrgos, ¿1499?