



**"A PROPOS THE PANTOMIME OX, SEXUAL INNUENDO, AND  
FUDDLED PARTRIDGES:  
YET MORE ON PARMENO'S REMARK"**

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Pármeno's seemingly innocuous statement that "El falso boezuelo con su blando cencerrar trae las perdizes a la red" (interpolated into Auto XI of the *TCM*) has been in the last few years the focus of several articles appearing in the pages of *Celestinesca*. Little did Dorothy Severin realize what learned mischief she was to set afoot when in 1980 she sought to clarify the origin of the image employed by Pármeno: the source of Pármeno's remark, she showed, was to be found in a practice used to hunt partridges throughout the Mediterranean before the invention of the blunderbuss. Citing *Celestina comentada* (c. 1550) and Antonio Valli daTodi's *Il canto de gl'angelli* (Rome, 1601), Professor Severin demonstrated that Pármeno's words are not, as some might have believed, "some improbable tale invented to explain a corrupt textual reading" (31), but an allusion to an actual method of hunting and trapping partridges.

Subsequent to Dr. Severin's note, the late Keith Whinnom published a droll sequel in which he identified with characteristic wit and ornithological precision the exact nature of the quarry Pármeno's pantomime ox sought to ensnare. In this note Whinnom displayed not only the vast range of his erudition, but his personal familiarity with the problems and strategies used to hunt partridges: he reminded us that in contemporary England they had recourse to far simpler, more predictable, and probably less tiring, methods than the one described by Pármeno--setting out handfuls of gin-soaked rice which, upon being consumed by the birds, turn the hunt into a snap.

Quite aside from these studies, the subject of Pármeno's remark has provided grist for other scholar's mills, David Hook and Dennis Seniff among them. Yet despite all the commentary, we have failed to move beyond the search for and discovery of analogues. Though scholars have identified and published contemporary references to this venatory ruse, the nuances and sexual innuendo of Pármeno's interpolated words remain obscure. Citing my observations on hunting images as an allegory of

passionate courtship, Seniff (45) comes close to relating the pantomime ox to the imagery of erotic ensnarement which presides over *Celestina* from beginning to end, yet his study falls short of defining both the meaning and role of the image in the work. Hook, on the other hand, identifies the allusion as an expression of Parmeno's unfounded distrust of Melibea that would have been understood by Rojas's readership, but he fails to explore just how that readership might have taken the passage (1985, 42). In short, there is more to say about the pantomime ox and the partridges.

The image of "el falso boezuelo [que] con su blando cencerrar trae las perdizes a la red" is doubtless an extension of Sempronio's admonition preceding the utterance: "No sea ruido hechizo, que nos quieran tomar a manos todos." Similarly, it is also a correlative of the image which follows it in the interpolated passage--the mermaid. As the legends and medieval bestiaries tell us, mermaids were beautiful, preternatural creatures that enchanted lonely sailors with their song while luring them to their doom: "el canto de la serena engaña los simples marineros con su dulzor." For the sixteenth-century reader, both the mermaid and the pantomime ox share the ability to enchant with sound: the one with its tinkling bell deceives the quarry into believing the stalker is yet another benign grazing animal; and the other with her hypnotic song and promises of sexual delights. In his *El Scholástico*, Cristóbal de Villalón, a near contemporary of Rojas, speaks of the entrancing capabilities of music and sound in the hunt as he evokes both a sexually symbolic mythical beast, the unicorn, and the pantomime ox:

Como vemos que muchas aves y fieras bestias con sola música se caçan: como leemos que en Siria y en otras provincias se casa el unicornio con instrumentos de vihuela y órganos: y vienen mansos a se sujetar el caçador, y la perdiz viene a caer en el lazo emborrachada de una çencerra que traza un boheçuelo al pescueço (210).

Turning to Pedro Muñoz Seca's *La venganza de don Mendo*, a seventeenth-century *comedia*, the sexual connotations of Pármeno's comparison of Melibea to the pantomime ox become quite clear. In a passage laced with *double entendre*, puns, and jokes about the virility and erotic prowess of Moncada's donjuanesque father, El Barón (read *varón*), Muñoz Seca's text helps us recover the underlying suggestiveness of Pármeno's words and their sexual referents:

Moncada: Ha de antiguo costumbre,  
mi padre el Barón de Mies,  
de descender de su cumbre  
y cazar aves con lumbré:  
Ya sabéis vos cómo es.  
En la noche más cerrada

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se toma un farol de hierro  
que tenga la luz tapada,  
se coge una vieja espada  
y una esquila o un cencerro,  
a fin de que al avanzar  
el cazador importuno,  
las aves oigan sonar  
la esquila y puedan pensar  
que es un animal vacuno;  
y en medio de la penumbra,  
cuando al cabo se columbra  
que está cerca el verderol  
se alumbra, se le deslumbra  
con la lumbre del farol;  
queda el ave temblorosa,  
cautelosa, recelosa,  
y entonces, sin embargo,  
se le atiza un estacazo,  
se le mata, y a otra cosa.

Mendo: No es torpe, no, la invención;  
mas un cazador de ley  
no debe hacer tal acción,  
pues oyendo el esquilón  
toman las aves por buey  
a vuestro padre el Barón.

Moncada: Es verdad. No había caído ...  
Vuestra advertencia es muy justa  
Y os agradezco el cumplido.  
¡El Barón por buey tenido!...  
No me gusta, no me gusta. (96-98)

Here the stalker and the hunted partridges are closely tied to the ideas of deception, courtship, and seduction; impotency, bastardy, and potency. The innuendo is that El Barón, like the ox, much to the chagrin of his son whose legitimacy is at stake, might actually be a pastoral eunuch devoid of sexual powers.

Pármeno's words, hence, clearly transcend their exclusively venatory context and carried for Rojas' audience ribald overtones lost on modern readers. They serve to buttress Sempronio's initial admonition for caution with Melibea's expressed willingness to tryst with Calisto ("Non sea ruido hechizo"), and they are a further warning to his co-conspirators not to underestimate Melibea's capacity to betray them. Like the partridges (taken as a symbol of obsessive sexual ardor by Medieval and

Renaissance audiences; see Deyermond), the characters of *Celestina* run the risk of being deceived by an innocuous image seemingly devoid of risk. Melibea's apparent willingness, Pármeno warns, may end by turning the distracted hunters into the hunted. His pantomime ox is a metaphor that speaks of the blindness caused by lust and greed, the need to guard against the latters' pitfalls, and the imperative to proceed cautiously. It is, at the same time, one more indication of the complexity of Pármeno, a character whose continuing uncertainty Rojas sought to underscore by adding to his words this transparent allusion not to the snares of the hunt, but to the deadly decoys of love.

According to Pármeno, then, Melibea, like the pantomime ox and the mermaid, is a deceptively benign creature who, through feigned enchantment and false promise, seduces all and then leads them to destruction. Though ultimately Pármeno is wrong about Melibea's culpability, like the partridges he invokes, he and his new-found friends are indeed destined to be trapped, victims of their own passionate greed, Calisto's vanity, and Celestina's treachery. His invocation of the pantomime ox is yet one more ironic foreshadowing of *Celestina's* tragic denouement articulated in Pleberio's clairvoyant peroration cautioning not against individual betrayal, but the hidden snares set by the world:

Cébasnos, mundo falso, con el manjar de tus deleites; al mejor sabor nos descubres el anzuelo: no lo podemos huir, que nos tiene ya cazadas las voluntades... Corremos por los prados de tus viciosos vicios, muy descuidados, a rienda suelta; descúbrenos la celada quando ya no hay lugar de volver... Pues, mundo halaguero, ¿qué remedio das a mi fatigada vejez? ¿Cómo me mandas quedar en tí, conociendo tus falacias, tus lazos, tus cadenas e redes, con que pescas nuestras falsias voluntades? (233, 235)

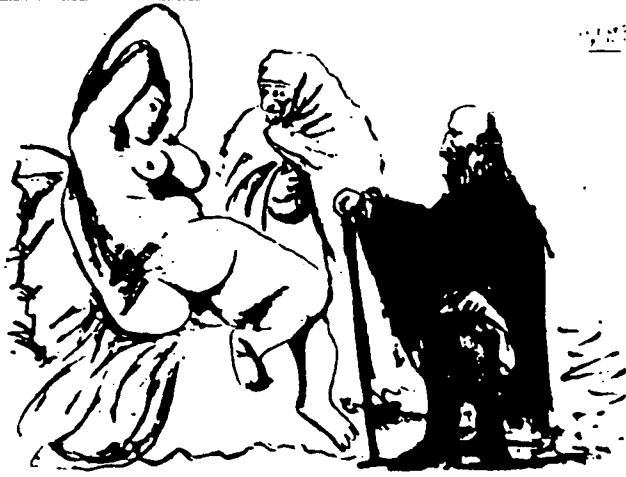
In light of the proliferation of venatory metaphors in Pleberio's summation, as indeed the rest of the work, Rojas' interpolation of the ruse of the pantomime ox is much more than an expression of Pármeno's questioning of Melibea's motives. It is a testimonial to the deliberate thematic cohesiveness of his art, the ineluctable logic of his work, and the intellectual rigor of his imagery.



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Pablo Picasso: serie CELESTINA [década de los '60].

## DELLA TRAGICOMEDIA ATTO PRIMO IX

Calisto. Melibea. Sempronio. Celestina.

Elitia, Crto. Parmeno.

Calisto.



**N** questo uedo Melibea la grandezza de Dio. Melibea. in che cosa Calisto? Cal. per bauer data potentia alla natura, che de cosi fitta bellezza te dotasse, & fare a me indegno de tanta gratia, che uedere te potessi: & in cosi conueniente luogo, chel mio secreto dolore te potessi manifestare senza dubbio, incomparabile. e maggior tal gratia, chel seruigio, sacrificio, deuotioni, & opere pie, che per arruauare a questo luogo, ho a Dio offerto: chi uidi mai in questa uita corpo glorificato: si come e adesso il mio: certo gli gloriosi santi, che se diletano nella uision diuina: non godeno piu, che fo io adesso nel tuo cospetto. Ma o misero me: che solo in questo semo differentie che loro puramente se glorificano senza timore di perdere quello.

Celestina.

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