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 Parmeno'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 gli'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 Whinnon 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 Parmeno'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
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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 Villalon, 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 cazan: como leemos que en Siria y en otras provincias se casa el unicorno con instrumentos de vihuela y órganos: y vienen mansos a se sujetar el cazador, y la perdiz viene a caer en el lazo emborrachada de una cencerra que traza un boheçuelo al pescuego (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 lumbre: Ya sabéis 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 esquilon
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 Melibeá's expressed willingness to tryst with Calisto ("Non
sea ruido hechizo"), and they are a further warning to his co-conspirators
not to underestimate Melibeá'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, Parmeno 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 Parmeno, 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 Parmeno, 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 Parmeno 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; descubresnos la celada quando ya no hay lugar de volver... Pues, mundo halagüero, ¿qué remedio das a mi fatigada vejez? ¿Cómo me mandas quedar en ti, 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 Parmeno'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.


Della Tragicomedia Atto Primo


Calisto.

N questo uede Melibea la grandezza de Dio. Melibea. in che cosa Calisto: Cal. per hauer data potenza alla natura, che de cosi sua bellezza te dotasse, & fare a me uadegno de tanta gratia, che uedere te potesse. E in cosi comparmente luogo, chel mio secrete dolore te potessi manifestare senza dubbio, incomparabile & maggior tal gratia, chel servigio, sacrificio, devotioni, & opere pia, che per arrivare a questo luogo, ho a Dio offerto che uidi mai in questa uita cor po glorificato, e come e adesso il mio devo glori si santi, che se uoltrano nella uision diuina, non godono più, che fo io adesso nel tuo confpetto. Ma o misero me: che solo in questo slemo differente che loro puramente se glorificano senza timore di perdere quella.

Celestina.

Venecia 1535