

GAMES IN JULIUS CAESAR SCALIGER'S *POETICS*¹

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Resumen:

El primero de los *Poetices Libri Septem* de Escalígero dedica una extensión notable -18 de los 57 capítulos de que consta el libro- a los Juegos atléticos antiguos, que el autor califica de “fábulas sin palabras”. Hace remontar su origen a celebraciones ocasionales de los pastores, a las que después se añadió la competición. Se apuntan las posibles razones de su inclusión en la Poética.

Palabras clave: Renacimiento, *Poética*, Juegos, J.C. Escalígero.

Abstract

The first book of Scaliger's *Poetices Libri Septem* devotes 18 of its 57 chapters to ancient athletic games, which are described by the author as “fables without words”. According to Scaliger, their origin would lie in occasional celebrations held by shepherds that later attached a competitive feature. The potential reasons for including games in *Poetics* are discussed.

Key words: Renaissance, *Poetics*, Games, J. C. Scaliger.

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Julius Caesar Scaliger identified multiple subjects and motives to be addressed in the seven books of his extensive work. Those subjects and motives originated in both poetic treatises and related writings, and documents and notes on these treatises. However, it is very difficult to find anything as unexpected and surprising as the chapters on ancient games included in book one. Almost one third — 18 out of 57 chapters in book I *Historicus*— of the book is devoted to games. This is the second longest book in the *Poetics* after book three².

Despite its singularity, it does not seem that experts in poetics have considered them as a whole. Any superficial consideration could attempt to attribute it to a mere extension and academicism effort of the humanist, as it is the case in other places of his work. The author starts the section as he usually does, with a general introductory chapter (chapter 22, *Ludi*). Then, from chapter 23 to chapter 27, different chapters address the most famous Greek games (Pythian, Olympic, Nemean and Isthmic ones). Finally, very brief chapter 27 is devoted to the least important games. Chapter 28 continues symmetrically, including some generalities about Roman games, and games are described separately from chapter 29 to chapter 39: Megalenses, Apollinarian, Liberalia, Circuses, Ceriales, Taurian, Capitoline, Funeral, Votive, Scenic, Plebeian, Secular and Juvenalia games. Despite the different number of Greek and Roman games, chapters for both game groups are similar in length. The type of analysis applied is also similar. The two general chapters are very extensive, in particular the first one. It works as the opening and justifies its location in the treatise as being subject to an external or apparent logic. The relationship with the subject treated in previous chapters, namely dramatic genres, uses the fable as a linking item: paraphrasing well-known Simonides' saying³ on painting and poetry, Scaliger says that *ludi* (games) are *fabulae tacitae* (fables without words) and fables are games with words, *ludi loquentes*. *Ludi* mainly involve the

² See the German edition and translation of Deitz, L.- Vogt-Spira, G., *Ivlii Caesaris Scaligeri, viri clarissimi, Poetices Libri Septem. Sieben Bücher über die Dichtkuns*. Unter Mitwirkung von M. Fuhrmann herausgegeben von... 5 vols. Stuttgart, Germany, Bad Cannstat, 1994-2003. In this paper it is used in quotations and references. The corresponding volume, page and edition line are written in square brackets, following the book number and chapter in *Poetics*; translations are by the author of this paper.

³ Cf. Miguel Mora, C. de: "Os limites de uma comparação: *ut pictura poesis*" *Ágora. Estudos Clássicos em Debate* 6 (2004) 7-26, mainly 16 *et seq.*

apparatus, the staging. Fables are a constituent part of games; therefore, it is a must to address them as a subject, even if the author does not do it as briefly as he stated⁴. This original definition of games, which is detailed below, led to a basic classification of games into two genres, namely simple and competitive ones; and to a division into five types: race, fight, jump, throw and boxing. Proceeding as usual, the author organizes such manifestations on the basis of movement in a systematic and rational way. This is consistent with his definition of *tacitae fabulae*. He also establishes a historical order, moving from the oldest and simplest to the most complex and newest. He also followed this method when he presented the entire catalog of poetic forms and genres in book I⁵. Besides, he refers to athletes clothing and the objects they used, describes games and explains related terminology. When he mentions *quinquertiones*, i.e. the *péntathlon* winners, he links the original value of the term *ars* to Greek words *Ares*, *arete*, *enárētos*⁶. This led to a definition of physical excellence and its constituent elements, namely *magnitudo*, *robur*, *celeritas*. This definition is an explicit reference to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1,5,1 *et seq.*, mainly 1361b 21 *et seq.* At this point, the Greek theoretician includes this conception of excellence as one of the constituent parts of happiness. This concept is examined in the framework of the deliberative eloquence and in accordance with "widely accepted opinions". For the author, the physical excellence is related to health, beauty, strength, bearing and ability to compete. The latest concept is based on bearing (*mégethos*), strength and speed, which are exact equivalents to the three elements mentioned by Scaliger –*magnitudo*, *robur*, *celeritas*. A late note on different *privatae exercitationes* at public gymnasia specifically refers to Galen's *De sanitate tuenda* and Aristotle's biology (*De incessu animalium*). Related to the context surrounding the previous reference to Aristotle, it is unavoidable to recall Scaliger as a doctor, who

⁴ 1, 22 [1, 306, 12-15] *Sane ludi sunt tacitae fabulae, fabulae vero ludi loquentes. Omnino ludorum pars fabula est, quare ipsi quoque actores ludiones dicti. De ludis igitur quam brevissime fieri poterit dicendum est.*

⁵ 1, 3 [1, 90, 19 *et seq.*]

⁶ 1, 22 [1, 314, 3-11] *Cum igitur praeter quinque certamina supradicta esset caestus, esset pancratium, tamen quinque tantum illis constabat pentathlon, quod qui vicisset a Latinis sunt quinquertiones appellati, quoniam vox haec ars prima sua origine robur ac fortitudinem designavit. Graeca enim omnia: Ares, arete, enaretos. Sic virtus a viribus apud maiores nostros pro fortitudine tantum accipiebatur. Aristoteles in primo Rhetoricorum ita disponit.*

might have used his numerous readings for interests of a rather eventual nature, such as to introduce this section of the games in his *Poetics*. Actually, some sources identified for different parts and chapters of the treatise were also confirmed as having been used elsewhere in this work on different matters. It is understandable in the case of certain sources, such as both ancient and contemporary compilation, encyclopedic and antiquarian works, since they offered the author more or less adequate and varied material to be used in different cases. The same applies to grammar and lexis compilations⁷. It was the case of chapters about Greek games, which were mainly based on annotations to Pindar and other works, such as Pausanias' *Descriptio*, Festus' *Epitome*, and Pollux's *Onomasticon*⁸. The cornucopia *Geniales dies* by Alexandro d'Alexandro, a Neapolitan jurist contemporary to our author, has been identified as a substantial and almost exclusive source for the Roman Games. Scaliger used this scholar's work in different occasions, but he quotes him only once in book III⁹. Indeed, d'Alexandro is a link which obeys the external logic of Scaliger's work. The latter uses d'Alexandro's texts as the main source for chapter 21, which focused on the theater and was the one preceding the chapters on games. The theater is a material place where the main dramatic genres, previously treated by Scaliger, are performed. The last part must be devoted to apparatus-related aspects. It is then when the chapters on games are introduced.

From the Renaissance point of view, Antiquity ruins and vestiges, such as circus, theaters, amphitheaters, baths and other public buildings, should represent spaces that might be brought back to life by recovering the culture and way of life of former generations. Scaliger is very explicit at the beginning of chapter 21: "Our ancestors always assumed that acting was more important than talking. That is why works and deeds prevailed over thought-related genres. For this reason, when strength and speed shows took place, the name 'theater' was assigned to the place where they

⁷ Sánchez Marín, J.A. and Muñoz Martín, M^a N. (2007), "La poética de Escalígero: introducción al autor y su obra" *Ágora. Estudios Clásicos em Debate* "Júlio César Escalígero" 9.1: 97-144, mainly 136 *et seq.*

⁸ Deitz, L. (1994), "Julius Caesar Scaliger's *Poetices Libri Septem* (1561) and his Sources", *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 14: 91-101.

⁹ 3,126 [3, 230,4-5]: [...] *Festiviores sane multi: Dies geniales Alexandri, Gellii Noctes Atticae, Marci Tullii Tusculanae* [...].

were performed, this term coming from 'seeing', even more strongly than the term 'auditorium' coming from 'hearing'¹⁰.

For a man of the Renaissance, bringing material vestiges back to life is crucial to properly understand the ancient civilization and culture, including poetic activity. Games do honor or show famous myths and legends among Greek and Roman people, and they are the origin of those festivities. This is why many of them are named after deities and heroes whose stories are fictions. According to Scaliger, this is why they are closely related to fables. Furthermore fictions based on games play an important role in poetry, since they celebrate not only the gods' honor, but also the glory of victorious athletes. From Homer to Martial, Virgil and Horace in between, poets have given their voice to these celebrations, which in turn made the cities and places where they were held nobler. Two isolated references are included in *Ars Poetica* by Horace, the singer of Secular Games. The first one expressly states that these events are a poetic subject: verses 83 *et seq.*: "The Muse assigned the lyre to praise the Gods and the sons of Gods, the victorious boxer and the winning horse ...¹¹". The second one stresses the effort of developing technical abilities, since they are necessary for anyone with natural abilities to be victorious: verses 412-415: "Much has the athlete, who pressing in the race pants for the promised goal, suffered and done since childhood; borne heat, and cold's extremes, and wine and women scorned; the piper, who the Pythian Games plays, learnt from a hard master [...]¹²". Both ideas are very convenient to Scaliger's approach.

Scaliger's treatment of games seldom shows the brutality of some of these events, i.e. he makes reference to the savagery of fighting and *pankration*, to gladiators' fighting in Funeral Games; to the cruelty of some emperors, etc. Not only has an antiquarian and historic interest prevailed in

¹⁰ 1, 21 [1, 282, 7-12] *Maiores nostri facere quam dicere praeclarius semper existimarunt. Quare operum gestarumque rerum exercitationes praelatae generibus meditationum. Idcirco roboris atque celeritatis cum ederent spectacula, locum in quo ea fierent theatrum potius a spectando quam acroterion ab audiendo nominarunt.*

¹¹ *Hor. ars 83 et seq.: Musa dedit fidibus divos puerosque deorum / et pugilem victorem et equom certamine primum ...referre.*

¹² *Hor. ars 412-415: Qui studet optatam cursu contingere metam, / multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit, / abstinuit venere et vino; qui Pythia certat / tibicen, didicit prius extimuitque magistrum.*

his analysis and descriptions, but specially a civic and praiseful spirit towards community events.

Furthermore, going back to the concept of physical excellence mentioned before, as it is exercised in competitions and using Aristotle as a witness, it constitutes a part of human happiness that is linked to the body. Health and health preservation have a rather permanent presence in these chapters. Apart from being a renowned physician under Agen bishop, where he was settled in since 1525, Scaliger was also Hippocrates' translator and commentator, and Galen's annotator and commentator¹³.

Not in vain, Hippocrates and, more importantly, Galen are included between the most quoted authors in the six books of *De arte gymnastica* treatise published by Girolamo Mercuriale in 1569. He was also a physician and a humanist, apart from an antique dealer working under cardinal Alessandro Farnese, and the author of many books on medicine. His works enthusiastically recovered and disseminated the culture of physical exercise in Antiquity, advocating for the medical nature of gymnastics. The works by these antiquarian humanists recovered Antiquity at the same time as the works published by humanist philologists, including Scaliger, whose most immediate aim was the critical and detailed research of older texts. However, the objective was not only to bring textual or material fossils back to life for merely futile learning reasons. The recovery of the ancient world is an attempt to reach a more specific objective focused on renewal to serve the interests of society at that time. Apart from bringing Latin poetry back to life, Scaliger also proposes a model of civilization; i.e. civic ideals which, together with poetry, contribute to a more harmonic and ordered life for people. It is clearly expressed at the beginning of book III of *Poetics*, where Scaliger proposes the complete architecture of the treatise and its ultimate sense:

Well, in book I, we have shown poetic practice together with its origin and purpose, why we imitate. Obviously, because we try to make human life more harmonious (compositior)...¹⁴

¹³ Sánchez Marín, J.A. and Muñoz Martín, M^a N (2007): 104 *et seq.*

¹⁴ 3, 1 [2, 60, 9-11]: [...] *Atque in primo quidem libro poetices usum ostendimus atque eius originem simul et finem, quare imitemur: ut scilicet humana vita compositior fiat [...]*.

This harmony, which is strongly linked to poetic *numerus*, will lead human beings to a spiritual status and action, which is the ultimate and true aim of poetry, and is known as *beatitudo*.

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