

26TH LATIN SUMMER SCHOOL

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Eastern Avenue Building, University of Sydney

LEVEL 4 i

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ANGELO POLIZIANO
Montepulciano 1454 - Florence 1494



[1024 × 813](#)

Fresco from the Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinità, Florence (1479-84) shows Poliziano with Lorenzo de' Medici's sons Giuliano, Piero and Giovanni, followed, it is thought, by Luigi Pulci and Matteo Franco.

Qui tumidi nodos laxat Aristotelis
 Smyrnaeique docet iocunda poemata vatis: 195
 Iam populat Graias Dardana flamma rates.
 Fulminei posthaec aperit Demosthenis artem,
 Aequiparat nostri quem Ciceronis opus.
 Hic Verinus adest, hic sacri templa Lucardi,⁵
 Qui regit Aoniis pectora nota choris. 200
 Carolus hic patrias certat superare Camenas
 Et Marsupinam tollere ad astra domum.⁶
 Carolus ille, inquam, Musarum dulcis alumnus,
 Quo nullus toto est gratior orbe mihi,
 Nec minor egregia surgit virtute Ioannes 205
 Baptista, Etrusci gloria certa soli⁷
 Et quos longa mora est tenui comprehendere versu,
 Excipiunt socii Dorica verba mei.
 Nec secus hinc reliquum teritur mihi temporis et me
 Bibliotheca tenet, Vespasiane, tua,⁸ 210
 Cui tantum Graiae debent Latiaeque Camenae,
 Smyrnaeo quantum Dorica terra seni.
 Namque deus veluti Cressis, Epidaurius herbis
 Extintum patri reddidit Androgeon,
 Sic tu, quos rapuit nobis cariota vetustas, 215
 Restituis Latio, Vespasiane, viros;
 Per te Lethaeos iam spernit Graecia fluctus,

Pol. to Hellenistic poetry, epigrams in the Greek Anthology, which inspired him to write his own Greek epigrams.

⁵ Ugolino Verino (1438-1516) wrote the *Carlias*, and epic poem on Charlemagne and collections of love poems and occasional poems.

⁶ Carlo Marsuppini (1449-ca.1500). His father translated *The Battle of the Frogs and Mice* and preceded Poliziano in an attempt to translate the *Iliad*.

⁷ Giovan Battista Buoninsegni (1453-post 1512) statesman and scholar; a close friend of Poliziano and Lorenzo, and a member of Ficino's circle.

⁸ Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421-98). Vespasiano tracked down, collected and copied manuscripts for very important clients. His book shop was a sort of club where the great humanists of the day gathered to discuss texts. He wrote the interesting *Lives of Illustrious Men of the Fifteenth Century*.

Nec metuit Stygium Romula lingua deum.
 Felix, cui liceat revocare in lumina vitae
 Mortua priscorum tot monumenta virum, 220
 Felix, cui liceat sanctorum nomina vatam
 Perdita flammatis eripuisse rogis.
 Hunc prope consisto, donec Cythereius ignis
 Advocat exorta lucida signa face:
 Sic ego labentis produco tempora lucis 225
 Inter Hyanthei munera grata chori.

2. How to kill a girl

Elegy for Albiera degli Albizzi (1473)⁹

Attoniti Albieram spectant iuvenesque senesque,¹⁰ 85
 Ferreus est quem non forma pudorve movet.
 Mentibus Albieram laetis plausuque secundo,
 Albieram nutu lumine voce probant.
 Vertit in hanc torvos Rhamnusia¹¹ luminis orbes,
 Exiguoque movet murmura parva sono. 90
 Tum miserae letale favens, oculisque nitorem
 Adiicit et solito celsius ora levat.

⁹ Albiera degli Albizzi died aged 15 on the eve of her wedding 14 July 1473. She was engaged to Sigismondo della Stufa (1454-1525), closely associated with Lorenzo de' Medici, a wealthy merchant. Before entering Lorenzo's household as tutor, Pol. had been secretary of another member of the family, Agnolo della Stufa. Poliziano wrote other poems for Albiera as did other poets.

¹⁰ She took part in a pageant in honour of the visit of Eleanor of Aragon, daughter of the King of Naples, in June. This was in the piazza in front of the church of S. Maria Novella.

¹¹ I.e. Nemesis connected with Envy

Tantaque perturbans extemplo gaudia, tristem
 Qua pereat virgo, quaerit acerba, viam.
 Hic Febrim aethereas carpentem prospicit auras, 95
 Exserere Icarius dum parat ora Canis.
 Illam Erebo Noctunque satam comitantur euntem
 Luctusque et tenebris Mors adoperta caput,
 Et Gemitus gravis, et Gemitu commixta Querela,
 Singultusque frequens, Anxietasque ferox, 100
 Et Tremor, et Macies, pavidoque Insania vultu,
 Semper et ardenti pectore anhela Sitis,
 Horridus atque Rigor, trepidaeque Insomnia mentis,
 Inconstansque Rubor, terrificusque Pavor;
 Marmaricique trahunt dominae iuga curva leones, 105
 Ignea queis rabido murmure corda fremunt.
 Vertice Diva feras ardenti attollit echidnas,
 Quae saniem Stygio semper ab ore vomunt:
 Sanguinei flagrant oculi, cava tempora frigent;
 Colla madens sudor, pectora pallor obit: 110
 Atque animi interpretis liventi lingua veneno
 Manat, et atra quatit fervidus ora vapor,
 Spiritus unde gravis taetrum devolvit odorem;
 Letifera strident guttura plena face,
 Sputa cadunt rictu croceo contracta colore, 115
 Perpetuo naris laxa fluore madet:
 Nulla quies nullique premunt membra arida somni,
 Faucibus in salsis tussis acerba sonat,
 Risus abest, rari squallent rubigine dentes,
 Sordida lundato prominet ungue manus: 120
 Dexteram fumiferam praefulgens lampada quassat,
 Sithoniasque gerit frigida laeva nives.
 Olli templa olim posuit Romana propago,
 Abstulit saevas nec tamen inde manus:

Sacra illam Actiaco tenuere Palatia Phoebō,¹² 125

 Quique olim vicus nomine Longus erat;

Area quin etiam dirae templa ardua Febris

 Ostendit, Marii quae monumenta tenet.

Hoc ubi crudelis vidit Rhamnusia monstrum,

 Exacuit saevo lurida corda sono: 130

'Aspicias hanc,' inquit, 'virgo sata Nocte, puellam,

 Cuius et hinc radiis ora serena micant;

Quae gaudet, fati sortisque ignara futurae;

 Quam digito atque oculis densa caterva notat?

Hanc nive tu gelida, rapidis hanc infice flammis: 135

 Sic opus est vires sentiat illa tuas.'

Dixerat, et pariter gressumque avertit et ora:

 Non oculos poterat iam tolerare truces.

Continuo ardentis stimulis citat illa leones,

 Saepius et ducto versat in orbe facem. 140

...

 Ne geme, cum dulce est vivere, dulce mori est.' 160

Sic ait; aestiferamque excussit lampada, et acres

 Virginis iniecit dura sub ossa faces.

Tum letale gelu invergens guttasque veneni,

 Inserta heu venis, effugit inde, nece.

3. Parvenus

1 In quendam (Bartholomaeum Scalam¹³) 1486?

¹² Temples to Febris on the Palatine, Quirinal and Esquiline.

¹³ Bartolomeo Scala (1428–1497). Son of a miller who trained in the law and eventually became Chancellor of Florence. A self-made man who rose under the Medici. Wrote an unfinished *History of Florence*. Had humanist aspirations but Pol. later criticized him for getting the gender of the Greek word for mosquito wrong. Pol. admired his daughter, Alessandra, who acted in a Greek tragedy and composed Greek poetry (the only one to

contra latrones atque servilem manum

hoc, hoc tribuno militum?'

20

Translation

Whatever discord obtains, through fate, between lamb

And wolf, it's so with you and me,

You whose sides are scarred by the Spanish lash, whose legs

Are calloused by iron fetters.

Though you may strut around, so proud of your money,

Fortune can't alter your breeding.

As you measure the length of the Via Sacra

In a toga that's three yards wide,

Don't you see the unrestrained indignation,

On the faces of passers-by?

'This fellow, scourged by the triumvir's whip until

That officer was wearied,

Sets plough to a thousand Falernian acres,

His mules scour the Appian Way,

And ignoring Otho's ruling the great man sits,

Right there in the knights' front row!

What's the point of sending out so many sharp-prowed,

So many heavyweight, warships,

Against the pirates and servile hordes, if this,

This, ends up a soldiers' tribune?'

4. On the stage

Prologus in Plauti comoediam *Menaechmos*¹⁶

Heus heus, tacete, sultis, vos, ego ut loquar.
Nam nostra conducta est huc lingua, vestri oculi;
Vos spectare decet, nos loqui et fabulam agere.
Alioqui, capite ipsi hunc ornatum scaenicum,
Atque exporgite lumbos: tum nos sessum ibimus, 5
Spectabimusque nos taciti, aut ridebimus,
Vel si frigebit actio dormitabimus.

Comoediam *Menaechmos* acturi sumus,
Lepidam et iocosam et elegantem ut nihil supra,
Sed mendosam alicubi tamen culpa temporum. 10
Inerunt in ea nonnulla ne nobis quidem
Satis intellecta, sed haec erunt pauca admodum;
Quae si minus placebunt auribus expuite,
Aut devorate ceu soletis catapotia.¹⁷

Romanus est hic sermo, Romani sales; 15
Nihil invenustum aut ineptum et graeculum,
Quale solent nugari molitores caeteri:
Quorum nec ullis versibus comoediae¹⁸
Nec argumento constant perplexabili,
Nec quicquam habent comoediae praeter titulos, 20
Nec ipsae secum congruunt, nec adest fides
Rebus agundis ac nec personis indoles,
Tantumque si quid furtivum est in eis placet —
Quippe alienis insidiantur laboribus.

¹⁶ Plautus' *Menaechmi* was rediscovered in 1425. Pol. probably wrote this prologue for a student performance in Latin on 12 May 1488, but he was not present.

¹⁷ 'pills': a Greek medical term

¹⁸ criticism of contemporaries who wrote comedies in prose

Velim equidem nostra ne placeat quibus haec placent. 25

Facient profecto maiora operae pretia nunc
Longe adulescentes isti, siquidem insueverint
Puro sermoni Romae urbis vernaculo,
[Cuius habetur Plautus hic noster pater,]
Quam si magistris freti trivialibus 30
Linguas tenellas polluant stribiligine;
Siquidem ita traditum est a laudatis viris:¹⁹
Latine vellent etiam si Musae loqui,
Nullis usuras nisi Plautinis vocibus.

Quod si qui clamitent nos facere histrionicam,²⁰ 35
Atque id reprehendant, minime diffitebimur,
Dum nos sciant disciplinam antiquam sequi.
Etenim formandos comoedo veteres dabant
Pueros ingenuos, actionem ut discerent.
Sed qui nos damnant, histriones sunt maxumi, 40
Nam Curios simulant, vivunt Bacchanalia.²¹
Hi sunt praecipue quidam clamosi, leves,
Cucullati, lignipedes, cincti funibus,
Superciliosum incurvicervicum pecus.²²
Qui quod ab aliis habitu et cultu dissentiunt, 45
Tristesque vultu vendunt sanctimonias,
Censuram sibi quandam et tyrannidem occupant,
Pavidamque plebem territant minaciis.

Sed iam valete, spectatores, et gregi

¹⁹ Quintilian 10.1.99 *Licet Varro Musas, Aeli Stilonis sententia, Plautino dicat sermone locuturas fuisse si Latine loqui vellent,*

²⁰ A defence of ancient comedy against ignorant friars.

²¹ Juv. 2.3 *Quotiens aliquid de moribus audent,/ qui Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt.*

²² See Pacuvius fr. 408 *repandirostrum incurvicervicum pecus* “an upturned-snouted and roundcrooknecked herd”

Favete nostro; vobis quod vortat bene.

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5. Taking sides

Ad Franciscum Salviatum²³

Quam peto si dederis, dulcis Salviate, salutem,

O quam convenient nomina tanta tibi!

Parva peto, dare magna soles; da parva petenti:

Parva tamen nescis si dare, magna dato.

Parva tibi, sed magna mihi sunt ista. Rogamus

5

De nobis Xisto haec dicere verba velis:

"Est iuvenis; te, Xiste, colit veneratur amatque;

Spes sibi tu prima es, primaque cura sibi.

Nec malus est vates, nec pessima carmina condit,

Sed nullo hic vates est tamen aere gravis."

10

Hoc satis est; divo mandamus caetera Xisto.

Sat bene perspiciet quid tua verba petant.

In Salviatum

'Quid tam, furca, doles, laqueus cum gestiat?' 'Heu, heu

Salviatum eripuit celsa fenestra meum.'

In eundem

Salvius mitrae sceleratus honore superbit,²⁴

Et quemquam coelo credimus esse deum?

Scilicet hoc scelera, hoc artes meruere nefandae?

At laqueo en pendet. Estis, io, superi.

²³ Francesco Salviati (1443-78), "an archbishop who was ready to found his career on murder". (Lauro Martines) A relative and protégé of Pope Sixtus IV, he had close links to the Pazzi family too and was a key figure in the 'Pazzi Conspiracy' against the Medici of 1478. See <http://ultimatehistoryproject.com/the-pazzi-conspiracy.html> On the afternoon of the failed plot Salviati (aged 36) was hanged from a window of the Palazzo Vecchio. Pol. says he sank his teeth into the fellow-conspirator he was hanged with.

²⁴ Pope Sixtus IV, to whom he was related, appointed him archbishop of Pisa but Lorenzo prevented him from taking it up, a reason why he allied with the Pazzi.