

Karl-Ludwig Selig

SOME REMARKS ON GRACIAN'S LITERARY TASTE
AND JUDGMENTS

THE problem of Gracián's literary taste and his judgments of other writers, classical and contemporary, is indeed a very complex and challenging one. In the present study, we shall deal specifically with Gracián's judgments on Alciato and emblem literature, for, as will be pointed out, it constitutes an important and most revealing part and aspect of the more general and total problem of Gracián as a literary critic and aesthetician. Examining the prose fiction of the period, it can be almost categorically stated that few Spanish writers of the golden age were more attracted to emblem literature and in particular to Alciato's *Emblemata*, than Gracián. In the course of this paper, we shall endeavor to gain an understanding of this particular predilection. One should mention first of all, one biographical or extra-literary factor: Gracián's very close and personal association to his patron and Maecenas, Lastanosa, and his literary circle. Lastanosa, eminent antiquarian, expert in the field of numismatics, dilettante in the finest sense of the word, possessed probably one of the richest libraries in Spain of the period and had established in his native Huesca in Aragón a great center of learning and a remarkable academy of savants. The late Professor Ricardo y Garay had analyzed this library and had shown that among the many treasures and *objets d'art*, it contained a great number of important emblem books¹. Gracián in *crisi* ii of Part II of *El Criticón* describes the library of his great patron in the following terms:

¹ Consult especially Ricardo DEL ARCO Y GARAY, «Noticias inéditas acerca de la famosa biblioteca de Don Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa», *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, LXV (1914), 316-342; Idem, *La erudición aragonesa en el siglo XVII en torno a Lastanosa* (Madrid, 1934); Idem, *La erudición española en el siglo XVII y el cronista de Aragón Andrés de Uztarroz* (Madrid, 1950); K. L. SELIG, «Góngora and Numismatics», *Modern Language Notes*, LXVII (1952), 47-50 and «Lastanosa and the Brothers Argensola», *Modern Language Notes*, LXX (1955), 429-431.

K. L. SELIG

A ti me embia un caballero cuyo nombre, ya fama, es Salastano, cuya casa es un teatro de prodigios, cuyo discreto empleo es lograr todas las maravillas, no solo de la naturaleza y arte, pero más las de la fama, no olvidando las de la fortuna.

(*Criticón*, II, 62-63)²

Salastano is of course an anagram of Lastanosa. And in the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, Gracián eulogizes the library as follows:

reconozco y estimaré siempre al copioso y culto museo de nuestro mayor amigo don Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa, benemérito universal de todo lo curioso, selecto, gustoso, en libros, monedas, estatuas, piedras, antigüedades, pinturas, flores, y en una palabra, su casa es un emporio de la más agradable y curiosa variedad³.

(*Agudeza*, 105)

It is not our intention here to deal with a so-called source problem and to try to attribute such and such a passage to Alciato. This would indeed be very dangerous matter. Certainly, there are many direct allusions to Alciato in Gracián's work; many passages in *El Criticón* can be traced to emblems, others I would prefer to classify as reminiscences; as for the *Agudeza*, Alciato's *Emblemata* served as a constant commentary to illustrate the various rhetorical figures, exceeded in number perhaps only by his numerous references to Marcial⁴. This task of identification and attribution has fortunately been done to some extent in the critical editions by Professors Romera-Navarro and Correa Calderón. But when we speak of emblems, we must be aware of the fact that we are dealing with topics and subjects of a very general and universal nature, many of them pertaining to the fields of mythology and natural history, subjects which belong to a common domain. On another occasion, I tried to illustrate this matter with two rather well-known mythological themes or commonplaces: the golden chains of Hercules, and Hercules

² All references to the works of Gracián are to the following editions: *El Criticón*, ed. Miguel ROMERA-NAVARRO (Philadelphia, 1938-40), 3 vols; for his other works: *Obras completas*, ed. E. CORREA CALDERÓN (Madrid: Aguilar, 1944).

³ See also *El discreto*, p. 336.

⁴ For the influence of Marcial, consult Anthony A. GIULIAN, *Marcial and the Epigram in Spain in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1930); S. PARGA PONDAL, «Marcial en la preceptiva de Gracián», *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, X (1930), 219-247.

SOME REMARKS ON GRACIAN'S LITERARY TASTE AND JUDGMENTS

at the crossroads, or «Hercules in bivio»⁵. I very carefully call them commonplaces, and not *topoi*, for it seems to me that the term *topos*, made so popular and given such prominent attention by the research and opus magnum of Professor Ernst Robert Curtius, has become very free in usage and should perhaps be employed in a more restricted sense, and in fact may be in need of a very careful re-definition⁶. Professor Panofsky in his monumental book, *Hercules am Scheidewege*, regrettably paid little attention to Spanish literature. My point of departure for the study of these themes was a passage in Quevedo's *Las zahurdas de Plutón* or *El sueño del infierno*, which the editor, Cejador, traced or attributed to a mythology by Juan de Pineda. *La agricultura cristiana*⁷. The passage in question was a reference to Hercules at the crossroads, which obviously could be found in any number of handbooks or emblem books, such as Alciato, Cartari, Comes, Vitoria, etc., whose authors, as it is well known often freely cite from each other. Gracián himself is quite aware of this problem. In *crisi* iv of Part II of *El Criticón*, the two travellers, Andrenio and Critilo, visit the «Museo del discreto». It is of course the «Museo» of his patron, Lastanosa. («Museo» evidently means «biblioteca»). One should also note that the marginal epithet for this part of the library classifies the content as «Buenas Letras». But let us examine the passage in detail:

Passaron ya, cortejados del Ingenio, por la de la Humanidad. Lograron muchas y fragantes flores, delicias de la Agudeza, que aquí assistía tan aliñada quan hermosa, leyéndolas en latín Erasmo, El Eborense y otros, y escogiéndolas en romance las florestas españolas, las facecias italianas, las recreaciones del Guicciardino, hechos y dichos modernos del Botero, de solo Ruso seiscientas flores, los gustosos Palmirenos, las librerías del Doni, sentencias dichos y hechos de varios,

⁵ See my «Due Temi Mitologici nel Rinascimento Spagnolo», *Convivium*, n. s. V (1956), 553-559. To the extensive bibliography given in this study add: Francis R. JOHNSON, «Two Renaissance Books of Rhetoric: Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* and Rainolde's *A booke called the Foundation of Rhetorike*», *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, VI, 427-444; W. G. CHAPMAN, «Las comedias mitológicas de Calderón», *Revista de literatura*, V, nos. 9-10, 1954, 35-67; Alan S. TRUEBLOOD, «The *Officina* of Ravisius Textor in Lope de Vega's *Dorotea*», *Hispanic Review*, XXVI (1958), 135-141.

⁶ See the important article by Professor Edgar MERTNER, «Topos and Commonplace», *Sirena Anglica*, 178-224.

⁷ *Clásicos castellanos*, Madrid, 1916, p. 96. In the edition by Amedée MAS, we find no annotation to the passage in question.

K. L. SELIG

elogios, teatros, plaças, silvas, oficinas, geroglíficos, empresas, geniales, polianteas y fárragos.

(II, 151-54)⁸

What we have here is a magnificent library or collection of books of anecdotes, apologues, maxims, adages, encyclopedic works, commonplace books, miscellanea. They are all works encompassing a wide variety of matter. But a characteristic of many of these works is to present some universal moral or truth expressed in a short, compressed form usually associated with what we call a laconic or aphoristic style. Their common attributes are among the most salient characteristics of Gracián's style and even his total work. In the analysis of Lastanosa's library, Gracián, in the section devoted to «filósofos morales», mentions Seneca, Epictetus, Lucian and Aesop, but singles out Alciato:

para sacar una quinta essencia general, recogió todas las de Alciato, sin desechar una, y aunque las vió imitadas en algunos, pero eran contraechas y sin la eficaz virtud de la moralidad ingeniosa.

(II, 157-158)

In another passage, Gracián recommends, but with a tone of irony, two other well-known miscellanea, by Pero Mexía and Pérez de Montalbán respectively:

Quiénes han de ser sino un ignorante y otro mayor, uno que ni ha estudiado ni visto libro en su vida, quando mucho una *Silva de varia lición*, y el que más un *Para todos*.

(II, 187)

Still in another passage (II, 64), Gracián mentions Konrad Gessner, recalling Lope de Vega's remark in *La Dorotea*:

Así son muchos, que cuantos hallan en *Estobeo*, la *Poliantea*, y Conrado Gisnerio, y otros librotos de lugares comunes, todo lo echan abajo, venga o venga a propósito.

(ed. Blecua, p. 428)

⁸ Professor ROMERA-NAVARRO very carefully documented this passage and identified the works listed. I believe, however, that the term «polianteas» very probably refers to a particular work, namely the *Pollanthea* by Domenicus NANNUS MIRARELLIUS, a very popular miscellanea of which there were many editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. «Geroglíficos», instead of referring to the work of ALONSO DE LEDESMA, in this context probably refers to the *Hieroglyphica* by Horapollon or its elaboration by Pierio VALERIANO. The term «oficinas» in the same manner must refer to the commonplace book entitled *Officina* by Jean TIXIER (Textor).

But I believe that Gracián's predilection for emblems has to be found on other grounds. It is an aspect of his aesthetic, his literary taste and style. On another occasion I shall try to deal with the larger and total problem of Gracián's literary judgments and criticism; one will have to consider, or perhaps reconsider, such complex problems as the emendations in the enlarged or revised version of the *Agudeza* and all the illustrative texts, his personal relations to Salinas⁹, his loyal attitude toward fellow Aragonese writers, most of them probably members of the literary circle of Lastanosa, his praise of Góngora (but again considering the particular texts cited), his scant attention to Calderón, his almost lack of references to Cervantes, his condemnation of *La Celestina*, and why he selected certain passages from *Guzmán de Alfarache*, e. g. *cuentos* and apologues.

One usually classifies and considers Gracián's style as laconic and aphoristic. Some critics, have even spoken of his style as emblematic¹⁰. Furthermore, one has to bear in mind the strong moral tone that pervades his work and Gracián's love for allegories, abstractions and personifications¹¹. Let us in this respect briefly consider his total work. The treatises, *El Héroe* and *El Discreto*, deal with personifications. In his great allegorical novel, *El Criticón*, we witness two peregrinators in the three ages of man, wandering from allegory to allegory and from abstraction to abstraction. The very chapter headings are mostly abstractions; each *crisi* usually begins with either a parable or a maxim; even for the majority of the marginal epithets, we find abstractions. The *Oráculo manual*, perhaps the quintessence of all his ideas, is a book of maxims, each maxim in a way glossed by maxims, that is, the exegesis is in the form of a series of maxims or adages; and if we should extend our definition just a little, taking into consideration of course that the visual part is missing, the last mentioned work is perhaps one of the finest of all emblem books of the Spanish golden age¹².

As can be judged from the significant passage cited from the «Museo del discreto», Gracián preferred sententious and didactic literature written in a concise or laconic style. The emblem meets

⁹ See M. ROMERA-NAVARRO, *Estudios sobre Gracián* (Austin, 1950), 11-14.

¹⁰ A. G. REICHENBERGER, *Hispanic Review*, XVII (1949), 119-126 in a review of Werner Krauss, *Gracián's Lebenslehre* (Frankfurt, 1947).

¹¹ Consult the important study by Professor José Manuel BLECUA, «El estilo de 'El Criticón' de Gracián», *Archivo de Filología Aragonesa*, I, serie B, Zaragoza, 1945, 7-32 and the introductory essay by Professor Hugo FRIEDRICH to *Criticón, oder Über die allgemeinen Laster des Menschen*, Hamburg, Rowohlt's Klassiker, 1957.

¹² On another occasion, I hope to discuss the lack of emphasis on the «visual» in the composition of the imagery in the work of Gracián. Gracián, also, for example, mentions relatively few painters and pays little attention to the plastic and visual arts. The exception is of course his reference to Hieronimus BOSCH, obviously due to our author's preoccupation with the grotesque. See the remarks by X. DE SALAS, «El Giorgione en Gracián», *Estudios dedicados a Menéndez Pidal*, VI, 547-556.

all these requirements. Usually composed of a motto, pictorial device, and verse, many of which are epigrams, the emblem embodies also other characteristics which Gracián admired. The emblem is enigmatic, erudite, mysterious, recondite; it contains a moral of both individual and universal nature and application, all qualities which Gracián recommended and cherished both stylistically and intellectually. Fortunately, in the case of Gracián, we have among his writings, a technical work, a treatise on rhetoric, a work which expresses his aesthetic and his literary theories. It is the *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*. An examination of the *Agudeza* reveals that the intellectual and stylistic characteristics and qualities mentioned above are vital and key elements and ingredients of *agudeza*. Let us examine the following passages from the *Agudeza*, which should help us to clarify his position; Gracián admires «lo misterioso».

quien dice misterio, dice preñez, verdad escondida y recóndida, y toda noticia que cuesta, es más estimada y gustosa.
(p. 80)

Or the following passage:

sobre todo, cuando la semejanza va realzada con el misterio, y se le da salida con una grave y sentenciosa ponderación, es el triunfo de esta agudeza...
(p. 104)

Gracián expresses himself concerning «lo escondido» or «lo recóndido» as follows:

Cuanto más escondida la razón, y que cuesta más, hace más estimado el concepto, despiértase con el reparo la atención, solicitase la curiosidad, luego lo exquisito de la solución desempeña sazónadamente el misterio¹³.
(p. 83)

Concerning «lo difícil», Gracián makes the following representative statements:

La verdad, cuanto más dificultosa, es más agradable, y el conocimiento que cuesta, es más estimado.
(p. 85)

¹³ Cf. also the following passage: «Cuanto más recóndita la razón del desempeño, es más bien recibida por erudita, y que arguye la gran perspicacia del ingenio (*Agudeza*, 90-91).

SOME REMARKS ON GRACIAN'S LITERARY TASTE AND JUDGMENTS

Siempre es menester que haya reparo en lo que sé propone y que parezca dificultoso, para que la razón salga más y campee¹⁴.

(p. 153)

We have already mentioned Gracián's insistence on and admiration of the sententious and moral quality of a work of art. This explains his numerous references to Seneca and Tacitus; his praise for the apologue as a form and his high esteem of Juan Manuel and the *Conde Lucanor*¹⁵.

The emblem, lending itself to both personal and universal application, but expressed through an agent—motto, picture, epigram—serves as a cloak, a mask, a disguise. Admiration for this quality is clearly reflected in Gracián's extreme preoccupation with the problem of «ser» versus «parecer», «Sein und Schein», reality versus illusion, or appearance.

Créeme decía el enano— que todo passa en imagen, y aun en imaginación, en esta vida; hasta essa casa del saber toda ella es apariencia.

(*Criticón*, II, 200)

sobre todo, el hazer parecer las cosas, que es el arte de las artes.

(*Ibid.*, I, 219)

Válese de la conversión o transposición de las cosas comúnmente, transformando las cosas en otras de lo que parecen, y cuando tercia la malicia crítica, es más agradable.

(*Agudeza*, 128)

¹⁴ Cf. «Las cuestiones singulares suelen juntarse con mucho artificio con las ficciones, para más dificultad, y cuanto más se va enredando la salida y respuesta, entonces es más gustosa y se estima más, por lo que tiene de desempeño» (*Ibid.*, 212). Concerning the «enigmatic»: «La alusión con su enigmático artificio, parece que remeda la locución y la sutileza angélica» (*Ibid.*, p. 235); as for «lo erudito»: «Ni sólo sirve la erudición para el confirmar y probar, sino para el comenzar con sublimidad y aceptación» (*Ibid.*, p. 270). It is in this context («De la docta erudición y de las fuentes de que se saca») that Gracián states: «Los emblemas, jeroglíficos, apólogos, empresas, son la pedrería preciosa al oro del fino discursar».

¹⁵ For the relationship of the apologue and fable to the emblem, see Georges COUTON, *La poétique de La Fontaine* (Paris, 1957).

One should disguise the truth, as for example with an allegory or a parable:

El ordinario modo de disfrazar la verdad para mejor insinuarla sin contraste. es el de las parábolas y alegorías.

(*Ibid.*, 256)

It is in this connection that Gracián reveals his great admiration for Mateo Alemán; he does not mention him as the author of a picaresque novel; he mentions him as a great stylist, and when he cites passages from *Guzmán de Alfarache*, he refers to an interpolated tale or parable, such as twice in the *Agudeza* to the one of «Verdad versus Mentira», Truth versus Illusion.

Bearing in mind what we have said so far, we can perhaps understand Gracián's great esteem for Alciato's *Emblemata*, why he placed it in the position, company, and hierarchy in which we find it, and why he recommends the work as a model worth following. There is another key passage, a statement corroborating the citation from the «Museo del discreto» on which we insisted so much. Considering the stylistic, aesthetic, and intellectual qualities Gracián admires, Alciato's *Emblemata* is classified with works which have a common denominator and quality for the great author whom we commemorate and honor today:

A un mismo blanco de la filosófica verdad, asestaron todos los sabios, aunque por diferentes rumbos de la invención y agudeza. Homero con sus epopeyas, Esopo con sus fábulas, Séneca con sus sentencias, Ovidio con sus metamorfosis, Juvenal con sus sátiras. Pitágoras con sus enigmas, Luciano con sus diálogos, Alciato con sus emblemas, Erasmo con sus refranes, el Bocalino con sus alegorías y el príncipe don Manuel con sus cuentos. La semejanza es el fundamento de toda la invención fingida y la translación de lo mentido a lo verdadero es el alma de esta agudeza; propónese la fábula, emblema, o alegoría, y aplícase por la ajustada conveniencia.

(*Ibid.*, p. 257)