

Jacob Bidermann,
Cenodoxus
(edited by Stefan Tilg)

Jacob Bidermann (1578–1639) was born in Ehingen near Ulm, Germany. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1594 and spent most of his life as a teacher in various Jesuit colleges of Southern Germany. In 1626 he was appointed censor at Rome where he stayed for the remainder of his life. Bidermann was one of the most notable writers of the Jesuits and their foremost dramatic poet in the German speaking countries.

Bidermann wrote *Cenodoxus* in 1601/2 when teaching at the Jesuit college of Augsburg. The play was staged by himself first at Augsburg 1602 and a second time at Munich 1609. *Cenodoxus* was not written for a particular historical occasion but in the context of the regular performances of plays by the pupils of local Jesuit colleges. It is the best known example of Jesuit theatre in the German speaking countries where Latin school drama rose to its most enduring and most pervasive cultural significance. *Cenodoxus* is simply one of the finest plays of world literature: it is ‘dramatically effective, metaphysically profound, psychologically acute’ (Dyer 1975, 23); at the same time it is full of concise allusions and punning witticisms, all cast in a masterful and elegant Latin. Jesuit drama was by no means a uniform phenomenon and no single play can claim to represent it. Rather, *Cenodoxus* should be seen as an outstanding example of the possibilities that creative individuals were able to realize in the institutional framework that was the theatre of the Society of Jesus.

Cenodoxus is written in the relaxed iambic trimeter frequently found in Jesuit drama. It allows more resolutions than the trimeter of Greek and Roman tragedy, but is closer to this strict variant of dramatic verse than the iambic senarius found, for instance, in Roman comedy. Indeed, in most passages of *Cenodoxus* – as in our example – we read pure iambic trimeters.

Jesuit plays usually had an entirely performative character and were not meant to be published in print. Manuscripts circulated among assorted Jesuit colleges where they were adapted for re-performances. However, since Bidermann's plays were soon recognized as brilliant pieces of literature, a number of them including *Cenodoxus* were printed posthumously in 1666 in the edition *Ludi Theatrales Sacri* (Munich 1666; [repr. Tübingen 1967], vol. 1, 78–159). My text follows this first edition. A critical text is available in R. Tarot (ed.), *Jakob Bidermann: Cenodoxus* (Tübingen 1963). The Latin text of Tarot's edition plus a good introduction and a translation in English blank verse are provided by D. G. Dyer and C. Longrigg (eds.), *Jacob Bidermann: Cenodoxus* (Edinburgh 1975).

***Cenodoxus* act 4, scene 1**

AESCULAPIUS: I Dama, nuncia venire, quos herus

Vocaverat. DAMA: Vocati adeste. CENODOXUS: Accedite.

AESCULAPIUS: Dolemus aliquid accidisse tristius

Cenodoxe; quod nostrâ tamen operâ citò

Curabitur; spondemus. CENODOXUS: Ille caelitum 5

Quod Imperator jusserit, certum est sequi.

PHILAUTIA: Piè. CENODOXUS: Mori perinde viveréque placet,

Ut videro placere Numini. MACHAON: Nihil

Erit periculi. PHILAUTIA: Pericula spernere

Te finge. CENODOXUS: Nullum esse autumo periculum 10

Quod ad beata me, & cupita littora

Ejicit: ubi his carere tandem incommodis

Malisque possiem. PHILAUTIA: Quid his caelestius

Potè dicier verbis? PODALYRIUS: Carere nesciunt

Haec saecula Cenodoxo: ut ille urbem hactenus 15

Servavit, ita decet hodie ut redhostiant.

[...]

AESCULAPIUS: Bono animo es: reveniemus commodum

Cenodoxe; & ut spero, meliusculè tuae

Se res habebunt. CENODOXUS: Numini quod libuerit,

Sperare libet. PODALYRIUS: Animus mihi egregiè dolet, 20

Sperare me neque posse, neque promittere

Tanto viro salutem. MACHAON: Habet, quod perditus

Orbis suam infelicitatem defleat,

Qui tanta lumina nec diu, nec multa habet.

AESCULAPIUS: Indignitas haec orbis est: nescit suam 25

Opulentiam. Servare, colere oportuit

Tales viros: quos negligit, coelum asserit.

AESCULAPIUS: Go, Dama, and announce that the people that your master

Has called are coming. DAMA: You're called, so come along. CENODOXUS: Approach.

AESCULAPIUS: We're grieved that something rather harsh has afflicted you,

Cenodoxus – which thanks to our effort, however, will quickly

Be cured. We guarantee you that. CENODOXUS: What that Emperor 5

Of the inhabitants of heaven commands, must come to pass.

PHILAUTIA: Pious! CENODOXUS: Dying and living please me equally,

Once I've seen it pleases God. MACHAON: There won't be

Any danger. PHILAUTIA: Pretend that you spurn

Dangers. CENODOXUS: I don't deem that any danger 10

Which strands me at those blessed and desired

Shores; where I can finally desist from these troubles

And ills. PHILAUTIA: What can be said more heavenly than

These words? PODALYRIUS: This age is ignorant to

Lacking a Cenodoxus: as he has preserved the city so far, 15

So it's appropriate that we requite him today.

[...]

AESCULAPIUS: Be of good courage! We'll come back in time,

Cenodoxus, and, as I hope, your health will be

A little better then. CENODOXUS: What God wishes,

Is my wish to hope. PODALYRIUS: I'm very much distressed 20

That I can neither hope nor promise health for

Such a great man. MACHAON: There's every reason for the

Abandoned world to weep over its misfortune:

Such luminaries as these are not its for long, nor are there many of them.

AESCULAPIUS: This is the world's unworthiness; it does not know 25

Its riches. It ought to preserve and cherish

Men like this: those that it neglects are claimed by heaven.

Commentary

Cenodoxus adapts the legend of St Bruno, the founder of the order of the Carthusians, who was said to have witnessed a miraculous event in 1082: when a famed and seemingly virtuous learned man was dying at Paris, he suddenly sat up in his death-bed and cried out: 'By God's just judgement I stand accused'. This incident

convinced Bruno of the vanity of worldly fame and he retreated with six companions into the wilderness. In *Cenodoxus*, however, the focus is not on Bruno but on the Parisian doctor whose name lends the play its title and contains an unmistakable allusion to the vice that is denounced in it: ‘Ceno-doxus’ (from Greek κενόδοξος) translates to ‘Vain-glorious’. Much of the psychological effect of the play is due to its uncompromising analysis of spiritual pride, self-love, and (unconscious) hypocrisy. It is often said that Bidermann precisely attacked the Neo-Stoic attitude which was spread by Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), especially in his *De Constantia* (1584), and which was adopted by many scholars of the time. The selected passage illustrates Cenodoxus’ vice and has been interpreted as an outright parody of Lipsius’ teachings: Cenodoxus fools the world and himself while lying on his death-bed and receiving his doctors. The names of the three doctors – Aesculapius, Machaon, and Podalyrius – are taken from renowned doctors of Greek myth: Asclepius (Latinized Aesculapius), the god of healing, as well as his two sons, Machaon and Podalirius (Podalyrius is a variant spelling). They are already referred to in Homer’s *Iliad* (e.g. 4. 200–19; 11. 518; 11. 836). Dama is a servant to Cenodoxus. His name was in antiquity borne by slaves (cf. e.g. Horace, *Satires* 1. 6.38). Phil-autia (from Greek φιλαυτία) is the allegorical figure of Self-love.

Line 7: *PHILAUTIA*: The intervention of allegorical figures is a fairly regular characteristic of religious drama. It is especially important in Jesuit theatre as the latter often stages the decision of an individual between the (allegorical) forces of good and evil.

Line 8: *Numini*: in Neo-Latin texts, especially when a Christian context is given, *numen* almost always refers to the Christian God. It is then usually capitalized.

Line 11: *littora*: variant spelling for *litora*; the spelling with *-tt-* is widespread in Neo-Latin.

Line 13: *possiem*: Old Latin first personal singular subjunctive of *posse*; instead of *possim*; the form in *-iem* often occurs in Roman comedy. The language of Jesuit drama is generally characterized by a mix of forms from Roman tragedy *and* comedy.

Line 14: *dicier*: Old Latin 1. pers. sg. passive of *dicere*; instead of *dici*; the form in *-ier* is frequent in Roman comedy (cf. in line 13). However, there it almost exclusively occurs at the end of a line.

