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ELEMENTS OF INTERCULTURALITY IN OVIDIAN EROTIC POETRY

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Abstract

The intention of this article is to discover and clarify Ovid's position in the world of Latin erotic elegy, represented by his youth poem, *Amores*, as well as the poet's attitude towards the feeling of love, as it emerges from the *Heroides* collection. We believe that a description of this early poem can be interpreted as an element of interculturality, of passing through the world of Latin literature.

Keywords: interculturality, poetry, literary value

1. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO LATIN EROTIC ELEGY

The history of the development of the elegy, up to its climax, the Latin erotic elegy, is confused with the history of the development of its main formal element, the elegiac verse. The schismatic birth of the elegiac verse, the pentameter, from the heroic verse, the hexameter, is, both through the consequences it had in the development of the lyrical genre, and through the aesthetic, expressive values it contains, revealing. It corresponds, in the evolution of forms, to the moment of transition from the objective, epic way of representing and expressing the world to the lyrical, didactic one. The elegiac couplet, the accompaniment between a hexameter and a pentameter, clearly marks this moment of passage. The verse of the Latin elegy specializes in expressing the feeling of love, imposes a symmetry, a formal harmony that brings, in terms of content, a fulfillment of meaning.

Both in Latin literature, and especially in Hellenic literature, the elegiac couplet proved capable of taking on various poetic forms, to express a varied range of feelings, some of them even opposite: *querimonia* (mourning) and *sententia compos voti* (wish fulfilled of gods). The Latin elegy did not create its own universe, separated from the other manifestations of literature; on the contrary, in Rome, elegy "never had firm and closed borders, manifesting itself especially as a spiritual attitude and using themes and a metric used in other literary genres. However, she acquired an autonomy that Ovid was clearly aware of..." (Cizek, *Istoria literaturii latine*, p.321).

Quintilian, the one who introduced famous expressions in the framework of critical assessments of Greek and Latin literature, made the following statement: „Elegia Graecos quoque provocamus, cuius mihi tersus atque elegans maxime videtur auctor Tibullus; sunt qui Propertium malunt; Ovidius utroque lascivior, sicut durior Gallus” (*Inst.or.*, 10, 1,93). So, among the Latin elegiacs, Quintilian mentions a poet Gallus, whose work has not survived, characterized by the epithet *durior*, because the feeling of love and sadness appears in Gallus's elegies deep, serious.

2. LATIN EROTIC ELEGY AND INTERCULTURALITY

Within Latin literature, erotic elegy brings new cultural elements, many taken from Greek poets. For, the contact with the Greek civilization will help the Roman civilization to have a number of new elements, which it lacked.

The important representatives of the Latin erotic elegy remain Tibul, Propertiu, Ovidiu. Passion in Tibul, passion in Propertius, pleasure in Ovid, here are the attributes of love that this poetic triumvirate will try to place, if not in place, at least alongside the Horatian and traditional ones: *virtus*, *honor*, *pudor*, in a new kingdom, soon established, that of love. The vicissitudes of love mix with each other, they do not have a beginning, much less an end, the lyrical expression being always present, carefully constructed with the help of epithets that abound in elegies. Especially Propertiu refuses the chronological order of ideas, his verses "excel by emotional dignity, by vigor, by fantasy of maximum intensity" (Cizek, *Istoria literaturii latine*, p.337).

In Tibull's elegies, love rarely offers moments of joy, of smiles, of wish fulfillment. Melancholy replaces erotic play, sentimentality becomes monotonous, because the poet conceives love as a pleasure, his happiness is simple: health, money (not too much) and a girlfriend (Delia, Nemesis). The poet's temperament was peaceful, quiet: his ideal was life in the country where he wanted to live, work, take care of cattle with his beloved. With regard to Tibullian art, we subscribe to the opinion formulated by Eugen Cizek: "Tibull excels through refinement, through the masterful polishing of its art, through the notation and even the notation of the lyrical effluvia and not through the imagistic force, through the substance of fantasy, through the depth of emotions" (*Ibidem*, p.338).

3. OVID AND THE EARLY EROTIC POETRY

A prolific poet, Ovid left posterity one of the richest works from the time of Augustus, the core of which remains the erotic elegy. Ovid's debut in Latin literature is illustrated by elegies with an accentuated erotic theme. The poet had not yet turned twenty years old, he himself tells us in verse 58 of *Tristia*, when he begins to read his love poems in public. *Amores*, Ovid's collection of erotic elegies appeared in 15 BC, but the poet composed a second version of *Amores*, around 2 BC. This second edition is made up of three books, with 15, 19, 15 elegies respectively. Following the line of Catullus, who once declared his disappointment caused by the lack of occupation, *otium*, Ovid confesses his leaning towards poetry, which ensures him a well-deserved glory, because the poet's stated ambition is to defeat time through his verses. "It is precisely to achieve such immortality that he sings in these poems of his love for a certain Corinna. He does it spiritually and with virtuosity, treating, in turn, subjects taken from his predecessors" (Grimal, *Literatura latină*, p.269).

There is, for example, in the Ovidian collection a poem full of sadness caused by the death of a parrot loved very much by its lover, Corinna. We can recognize here the resumption of the theme of a well-known poem by Catullus about Lesbia's sparrow. They are spiritual, erotic games that do not hide a true passion. In fact, Ovid himself suggests that the woman to whom he worships in verse his love, Corinna, is an imaginary character, used only as a pretext. We find P. Grimal's statement regarding the depth of the poet's love interesting, a statement we agree with: „Ovidius confesses that he is ready to love any woman at any time, that he even happens to love two at the same time. By the word love, he understands only the physical act. We are far from Tibullus and Propertius!" (*Ibidem*, p.270).

Ovid's erotic poetry also refers to other themes, to other impulses of the poet unrelated to his passion for Corinna. It is a game of youth, of the word, of trying to fit into the spirit of the era he lives in: in the first elegy, Ovid himself confesses that he would have wanted his poetry to have a programmatic character, to write heroic verses, to he worships the talent of the major species of literary art, but the god of love, Cupid, pushes him towards love poems.

For Ovid, love becomes a key word that unites worlds, civilizations. That's why we wanted to present interculturality through Latin love poetry.

Between 20 and 15 BC, Ovid composed *Heroides*, 15 love letters imagined by the poet as being sent by famous legendary characters to their lovers. To these are added 6 more elegies written by the lovers in response: Paris to Helena, Leander to Hero, Acontios to Cydippe, a total of 21 elegies. It seems that the idea of such a correspondence was "suggested to Ovidius by an elegy from Book IV of Propertius, Arethusa's letter to Lycotas, a transposition into the world of myth of an actually real love, which united two contemporary characters, momentarily separate. The last 6 letters could have been added at the time when Ovid was publishing his second edition of the Loves and was concerned with giving it its final form" (*Ibidem*, p.270).

It is certain that Ovidius was a good connoisseur of mythology, to which he poetically transposes the legends that have, without exception, the erotic theme in common. The speeches of the authors of this correspondence reveal an ingenious rhetor in the person of the poet. Even in *Amores*, "some elegies are converted into true typical oratorical achievements or rhetorical school exercises" (Cizek, *Istoria literaturii latine*, p.347).

Between the years 2 and 1 BC, Ovid wrote two books of an opera in which eroticism becomes a symbol of the worlds. In 1 BC, a third book is added to this work, entitled *Ars amatoria* or *Ars amandi*. Known today all over the world, this Ovidian writing expresses, through the first two lines, the poet's intention to teach the Romanians the art of love, as a symbol of an entire univers.

Ovid transforms love into art, which becomes the key word of all Ovid's writing. Thus, the noun *ars* acquires the following meanings: "skill, talent, art, science, rules, theory, manual, teaching, treatise" and which appears from the first part of the book.

In *Ars amandi*, Ovid uses an ironic tone, the game of love involves gallantry, frivolity, the exaggeration assumed by the poet has the ability to diminish the immoral character of the work.

The teachings that the Sulmonese poet offers, as *praeceptor amoris*, are intended only for those women whose social condition allows them to comply. As Eugen Cizek stated, "Ovid's play does not concern austere matrons, but only worldly and semi-worldly women"(Cizek, *Istoria literaturii latine*, p.346).

It is a world that has nothing in common with the moral reform of Augustus and the emperor's attempt to restore the old Roman traditions.

Ovidiu develops, in his treatise on love, a true methodology, a sure art of conquering hearts, not omitting anything and leaving nothing to chance. The target of the poet's teachings are young people, whom he recommends as safe weapons of this erotic strategy: the game of glances, tender touches, tears, love spells.

By publishing the erotic poems of his literary beginnings, gathered in the volumes *Amores* and *Heroides*, Ovid asserts himself as a profound specialist in matters of the heart. It was a field familiar to the poet, which he exploited with efficiency. Thus, the small poems in elegiac distich dedicated to love, devoid of schematism and coldness, were born. On the contrary, we notice in the contents of the texts particularly suggestive images, full of freshness and color, vivid scenes from the daily life of the Romanian people.

CONCLUSIONS

And these sequences in the life of the Romans transcend time and become common for any society from any era.

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