

Ovid's *Ars. Am.* I 135-162)

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Περίληψη: Η ανακοίνωση εξετάζει ένα απόσπασμα από το διασκεδαστικό πνευματικό παιχνίδι του Οβιδίου *Ars amatoria* /'Η τέχνη του έρωτα'/ όπου ο ποιητής, με γλωσσική αλλά και κοινωνική δεξιοτεχνία, περιγράφει πώς ένας άντρας κατά την διάρκεια των αγώνων στο Circus Maximus της Ρώμης, εκμεταλλευόμενος το στενό χώρο, μπορεί να κατακτήσει μια κοπέλα που κάθεται δίπλα του. Αν και η περιγραφή είναι κομψή, λεπτή, έχει πολύ χιούμορ και δεν προσβάλλει ατομικό ή κοινωνικό αίσθημα, εικάζεται ότι κάποιο ποίημα (*carmen*) του είδους θα υπήρξε ο άμεσος λόγος για την εξορία του από την οποία ποτέ δεν του επιτρέπη να επιστρέψει στη Ρώμη. Προστίθενται μια αγγλική και μια ελληνική μετάφραση του αποσπάσματος, η δεύτερη από τον ποιητή Κ. Τρικογλίδη.

Although some would think that the respective part of Ovid's 'Love Poems', *Amores* III, 2, is superior to *Ars amatoria* ('The Art of Love') I 135-162 (which would be a simple repetition according to Hollis 1977: 58 e.g.), I prefer to discuss the latter for two reasons: the whole of the *Ars amatoria*, from which the suggested passage comes, providing a subtle irony quite frequently, is a kind of *parody* (cf. e.g. Trikoγλίδης, p. 105), and because the reason for Ovid's exile, a major event in the poet's life, may be due partially to this work and not to the *Amores*.<sup>1</sup>

Ovid, the *tenerorum lusor amorum*, 'a player of gentle love poems', never returned from his exile and died at the shore of the Black Sea in Tomis (now Constanța in Rumania) in 17 or 18 A.D. which means that he outlived emperor Augustus without receiving ever a remission from him. The reasons for the exile, that were never given explicitly, may be summarized in three words: *carmen et error*. The *carmen* was a poem, very probably the *Ars amatoria*, and the *error* was a misinterpretation, a misunderstanding or an indiscretion, certainly not a crime but some involvement in a scandal afflicting the imperial family, most probably Iulia, the granddaughter of the emperor, and Augustus himself (Hollis 1977: XIV). To be precise, Ovid's case was a relegation, not an exile, since he kept both his property and his Roman citizenship (Hollis ib. p. XIII).

The *Ars amatoria* or *Ars amandi* was written around the turn of the eras, perhaps in 1 B.C. It is divided into three parts: the first consists of advice where and how a lover may find a mistress to his taste, and as to how she is to be won. The second gives a number of precepts for the retaining of her affections, and the third is

<sup>1</sup> For a distancing from Hollis' position in evaluating the two works, cf. Dimundo (2003: 83).

devoted to women; they, too, receive advice how to capture and to retain a lover's affections.

As mentioned, the work is interpreted as a parody. It makes fun of the traditions of didactic verse in which a learned teacher explains the principles of a difficult subject.<sup>2</sup> Earlier Latin poets, following the conventions of their Greek models<sup>3</sup>, had treated such subjects as *philosophy* (cf. Lucretius) or *agriculture* (cf. Vergil). Ovid's frequent use of examples presents a sharp and amusing contrast between the serious intent of the genre and the frivolous pursuits of erotic amusement. Moreover, it has long been suggested that there was a precise analogy between the *ars amatoria* and the *ars oratoria* or 'The Art of Rhetoric' (cf. Dimundo 2003: 14). The poet however, sensitive to possible criticism of the frivolity, takes pains to point out that his advice was not intended to encourage adultery (cf. *Ars* I 31-34) which, to be sure, would have been a very serious case in the eyes of a conservative type of emperor Augustus was.<sup>4</sup> Although a subtle irony is pervasive in the poet's work the demand for positive values called by Ovid *cultus* is also present (Kraus 1972: 385), indeed, any attempt at reducing the high standards when evaluating Ovid would be an unjust simplification.<sup>5</sup>

The present paper cannot have the aim to evaluate the real nature of Ovid's assumed opposition and the emperor's real motives in banishing the poet, yet a recent discussion pointed out that the older explanations may not always be correct. Traditionally, Ovid was thought to have been playfully irreverent, but essentially apolitical, and so the innocent victim of a vindictive emperor. Recent views tend to regard Ovid as consciously mocking, if not subverting, the Augustean ideology: "his treatment of the marriage law is so provocative that it is difficult to see how he could

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2 An introduction to either *humour* with its social, psychological and even biological components, or to the highly complex phenomenon of *irony* would be time-consuming. I refer to a recent discussion (Tátrai 2011) which gives through linguistic, rhetorical and philosophical underpinnings, a survey which begins with antique examples, and provides also a considerable bibliography for further reading. T. discusses e.g. such authors as Aristotle and Cicero. For humour in Ovid, I refer to Luck (1994, col. 764) who discusses possible Alexandrian roots in Ovid's poem, and for irony, to Kraus (1942, col. 1931).

3 The original of this genre was Hesiod's *Works and Days*. On the didactic tradition, cf. Hollis 1977: XVII-XIX.

4 Throughout his rule (31 B.C. – 14 A.D.), Augustus tried to reform Roman morals by legislation; above all the *lex Iulia de Adulteriis Coercendis* of 18 B.C. made adultery a criminal offence with several penalties rather than a private injury as before (Hollis 1977: XV).

5 For a detailed analysis of *carmen et error*, cf. Luisi – Berrino 2008 (e.g. pp. 24 ff., 110 ff.).

have expected the emperor to believe that he was writing only for courtesans, or to regard the whole thing as a joke.”<sup>6</sup>

The passage (I 135-162) I suggest to discuss deals with the first steps in establishing a relationship between a man and a woman. Although Ovid expresses himself very clearly, we are not offended by a licentiousness, indeed, we never meet a lack of restraint in his work, and perhaps Augustus himself was not offended with what is extant today, even if it is sure that he did not like this type of poetry. As it has been remarked, that the topic is not love as a kind of passion but its doctrine as a social phenomenon (Kraus 1972: 385). Ovid writes in an amusing and subtle way; there is nothing of a lewdness. For humour, I would underline that the conqueror in the passage is supposed to back, without second thought, the lady’s favourite horse, and he must, Ovid suggests, flick away the speck of dust from the lap of the lady; or, if there happens to be nothing of the kind, well, then, he must flick off that nothing. The English translation is incapable to render the irony which lies in the *imperativus perfectus* “sedeto” (line 139), a type of imperative used in the juristic language (here, the poet is mocking at the didactic genre in our opinion), and opposed *imperativus imperfectus* (“iunge” in the following line – both rendered unhappily as ‘sit’ by Mozley – Goold in the LCL edition).<sup>7</sup> Following “the girl is touched through the rules of the place”, similarly, is but a faint approximation of the original where it is about *law* (“lege [...] loci”, l. 142). In one case, however, with regard to lines 155-156, one readily admits that the respective passage of the *Amores* is superior. Cf. the following two superb distichs: “Sed nimium demissa iacent tibi pallia terra. | collige – vel digitis en ego tollo meis! | invida vestis eras, quae tam bona crura tegebas; quoque magis spectes – invida vestis eras!” (*Amores* III, II, 25-28).<sup>8</sup>

It is in this way the passage reads. We are in the Circus Maximus, the Great Circus, where our hero watches a girl sitting nearby whereas the girl watches the horse-race. Ovid’s precepts are the following:

Nec te nobilium fugiat certamen equorum;<sup>9</sup> 135  
 Multa capax populi commoda Circus habet.  
 Nil opus est digitis, per quos arcana loquaris,  
 Nec tibi per nutus accipienda nota est:

6 Watson 2002: 155-156. Watson discusses, among others, the didactic tradition, the role of humour, and also the question if the *Ars* of Ovid had a serious moral purpose (pp. 146 ff.).

7 See the insightful remarks in Dimundo’s analysis (2003: 85). With regard to the LCL edition, see. *infra*.

8 ‘But your cloak is let fall too far, and is trailing on the ground. Gather it up – or look, with my own fingers I’ll get it up. Envious wrap you were, to cover such pretty limbs! And the more one looks – ah, envious wrap you were!’ (text and English rendering cited from *Ovid Heroides and Amores with an English Translation* by Grant Showerman, Revised by G.P. Goold, LCL © 1996, pp. 450-451); cf. also Dimundo on the passage (2003: 88).

9 The Latin text here offered has been checked according to the Loeb Classical Texts edition (J.H. Mozley 1969, and J.H. Mozley – G.P. Goold 1975).

Proximus a domina, nullo prohibente, sedeto, Iunge tuum lateri qua potes usque latus;	140
Et bene, quod cogit, si nolis <sup>10</sup> , linea iungi, Quod tibi tangenda est lege puella loci.	
Hic tibi quaeratur socii sermonis origo, Et moveant primos publica verba sonos.	
Cuius equi veniant, facito, studiose, requiras:	145
Nec mora, quisquis erit, cui favet illa, fave.	
At cum pompa frequens caelestibus <sup>11</sup> ibit eburnis <sup>12</sup> , Tu Veneri dominae plaude favente manu;	
Utque fit, in gremium pulvis si forte puellae Deciderit, digitis excutiendus erit:	150
Etsi nullus erit pulvis, tamen excute nullum: Quaelibet officio causa sit apta tuo.	
Pallia si terra nimium demissa iacebunt, Collige, et immunda sedulus effer humo;	
Protinus, officii pretium, patiente puella	155
Contingent oculis crura videnda tuis.	
Respice praeterea, post vos quicumque sedebit, Ne premat opposito mollia terga genu.	
Parva leves capiunt animos: fuit utile multis Pulvinum facili composuisse manu.	160
Profuit et tenui ventos movisse tabella, Et cava sub tenerum scamna dedisse pedem.	

English translation:<sup>13</sup>

10 Mozley (LCL 1969): nolit; Mozley – Goold (LCL 1975): nolis.

11 Mozley (LCL 1969): certantibus; Mozley – Goold (LCL 1975): caelestibus.

12 Mozley (LCL 1969): ephebis; Mozley – Goold (LCL 1975): eburnis. Hollis, too, agrees with this reading: “Without doubt, ‘caelestibus ... eburnis’ is the right reading [...] on the ground of sense (1977: 60).

13 A Modern Greek prose translation by K. Trikoglidis also exists, the only one in Greek, as far as I know. T.’s rendering follows the Latin prototype, at times, with some translational freedom. The Greek text, according to the Iridanos edition, added here for the convenience of the conference audience, is the following:

“Μὴ ξεχνᾶς καὶ τὸ εὐρύχωρο Ἀμφιθέατρο, ὅπου οἱ ἵπποδρομίες τραβοῦν τόσον κόσμον. Ἐδῶ δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ κάνεις νοήματα γιὰ ν’ ἀποκαλύψεις τὰ μυστικὰ σου αἰσθήματα, νὰ κατοπτεύεις τὰ κουνήματα τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐκείνης ποὺ ἀγαπᾶς, γιὰ νὰ δεῖς σ’ αὐτὰ μιὰν ἀπάντηση. Πήγαινε καὶ κάθησε ὅσο μπορεῖς πιὸ κοντὰ τῆς, πλάι τῆς, ἂν εἶναι δυνατό. Ἀκόμα κι ἂν τὴ σφίξεις λίγο, ἐκείνη δὲ θὰ μπορεῖ νὰ σοῦ κάνει παρατήρηση. Ὁ στενὸς ὁ χῶρος σὲ δικαιολογεῖ. Προσπάθησε ὕστερα ν’ ἀνοίξεις κουβέντα μαζί τῆς. Θὰ

**Ovid, The Art of Love, Book I Part V: At the Races, or the Circus<sup>14</sup>**

“Don’t forget the races, those noble stallions: 135  
the spacious Circus holds many opportunities.  
No need here for fingers to give secret messages,  
nor a nod of the head to tell you she accepts:  
You can sit by the lady: nothing’s forbidden,  
press your thigh to hers, as you can do, all the time: 140  
and it’s good the rows force you close, even if she be unwilling,  
since the girl is touched through the rules of the place.  
Now find your reason for friendly conversation,  
and first of all engage in casual talk.  
Make earnest enquiry whose those horses are: 145  
and rush to back her favourite, whatever it is.  
When the crowded procession of ivory gods goes by,  
you clap fervently for Lady Venus:  
if by chance a speck of dust falls in the girl’s lap,  
as it may, let it be flicked away by your fingers: 150

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βρεῖς ἀμέσως θέμα ἀπὸ τὸ θέαμα. Ρώτησε μὲ χάρη καὶ μ’ ἔξυπνάδα ποιανοῦ εἶναι αὐτὰ τὰ ἄλογα, κι ἂν βλέπεις πῶς τῆς ἀρέσουν, παίνεψέ τα καὶ πὲς πῶς καὶ σὺ τὰ προτιμᾶς ἀπ’ ὅλα τ’ ἄλλα. Ἄν κατὰ τύχη, ὅπως συχνὰ συμβαίνει, πέσει λίγη σκόνη στὸ στήθος τῆς ἀπάνω, τίναξέ τῆς τὴν ἑλαφρὰ μὲ τὸ χέρι, κι ἂν δὲν ἔχει τίποτε, τίναξε κεῖνο τὸ τίποτε: δείξου περιποιητικός. Ἄν ὁ μανδύας τῆς σέρνεται στὴ γῆ, ἀνάσυρέ τον καὶ μάζεψέ τον γιὰ νὰ μὴ λερωθεῖ. Γι’ αὐτὸ θὰ ἀνταμειφθεῖς ἀμέσως ἀφοῦ, πρὶν ἀκόμα αὐτὴ προφτάσει νὰ πάρει τὴν ἀναπνοή τῆς, θὰ φανερωθοῦν στα μάτια σου οἱ γάμπες τῆς. Ἔχε τὰ μάτια σου ἀνοιχτά, μὴ κανεῖς ἀπ’ αὐτοὺς ποὺ κάθονται ἀπὸ πίσω, τὴν ἐνοχλεῖ μὲ τὰ γόνατά του. Οἱ μικρὲς περιποιήσεις ἔχουν μεγάλη ἐπίδραση στὴν τρυφερὴ καρδιά τῆς γυναίκας. Πόσοι δὲν εὐχαριστήθηκαν ποὺ ἔκαναν σὲ μιὰ γυναίκα τὸ χέρι τους προσκεφάλι ἢ τὴν ἔκαναν, κουνώντας ἑλαφρὰ μιὰ βεντάλια, νὰ αἰσθανθεῖ γλυκιὰ κι εὐχάριστη δροσιὰ ἢ τῆς ἔβαλαν ἓνα σκαμνάκι κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ποδαράκια τῆς!” (Trikoglidis, p. 10).

14 English rendering retrieved from an online source which may be reproduced, stored, and transmitted freely for non-commercial purpose. Translated by A.S. Kline, (©2001), and checked by this writer with (Mozley, LCL 1969, p. 23), and Mozley – Goold (LCL 1975, p. 23), and with a few alterations by the present author. For the Mozley – Goold translation, cf. also Gibson (2009: 92). For the English translations of Ovid in general, cf. Martin (2009).

The “Circus” is the *Circus Maximus*, an important place of social events, built by Tarquinius Priscus (probably 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.), and extended twice, first by Iulius Caesar and for the second time by Emperor Traianus.

and if there's nothing, flick away the nothing:  
 let anything be a reason for you to show your attentiveness.  
 If her skirt is trailing too near the ground,  
 lift it, and raise it carefully from the dusty earth:  
 Straightaway, the prize for service, if she allows it, 155  
 is that your eyes catch a glimpse of her legs.  
 Don't forget to look at who's sitting behind you,  
 that he doesn't press her sweet back with his knee.  
 Small things please light minds: it's very helpful  
 to puff up her cushion with a dextrous touch. 160  
 And it's good to raise a breeze with a light fan,  
 and set a hollow stool beneath her tender feet.

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 And the Circus brings assistance to new love,"  
 etc.

So the poem runs through its three books, amusing its audience. We understand that for a conservative emperor this was not necessarily a delightful reading. But the *Ars* has enjoyed abiding popularity in Ovid's life-time and after. For many modern readers the *Ars amatoria* is the poet's masterpiece, certainly a brilliant medley of social and personal satire, the vignettes of Roman life and manners, and full of charming mythological digressions – a work that became a contributory cause of the poet's banishment, and a work that remained popular during the Middle ages, indeed until this very day.

Ovid's studied artlessness of the comparisons he draws from animals and from pursuits such as hunting, farming or sailing, all this with a *considerable degree of humour*, his cool flippancy and irresistible wit give a worthy picture of the reckless society Augustus was at pains to change. Ovid became the poet of the wandering scholars, the troubadours, the minnesingers. When the concept of romantic love in its new chivalrous or "courtly" guise was developed in France it was his influence that dominated the book in which the new philosophy was expounded, the *Roman de la Rose*.

Humanity in his writing, gaiety, sympathy, exuberance, pictorial and sensuous quality – it is these things that have recommended Ovid, down the ages, to poets of courtly love, to G. Chaucer, to W. Shakespeare, to J.W. v. Goethe, and even to the eccentric but linguistically and classically well trained genius, the American Ezra Pound.

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15 No publication date. The typographical features of the book as well as its arranging on the homepage of the Iridanos Publications (without a date either) suggest that 1980 might be a *terminus ante quem*.