

MATIJA PETAR KATANČIĆ'S LATIN POEMS

In the history of Croat Literature written in the Latin language, latinists belonging to the Slavonian cultural circle — Emerik Pavić, Josip Jakošić, Franjo Sebastijanović, Josip Pavišević, Matija Petar Katančić, play their part and their place in the continuity of its creativeness.¹ M. P. Katančić (1750—1825) stands out in particular as one of the most learned men in Croatia, a competent Latin stylist, reformer of metrics, author of the first Croat aesthetics, translator, lexicographer and — perhaps only incidentally — a poet.

In the collection of poetry in Latin and the vernacular — *Fructus auctumnales in iugis Parnassi Pannonii maximam partem lecti*², (Zagrabiae 1791), — Katančić divides his Latin poems — 39 all together — into: *Lirica, Elegiaca et heroica*, and *Epigrammata*. If the poem *Monitum* is added at the end of the Croat part of the collection (p. 322), as well as six Latin poems preserved in the manuscript, which were published by T. Matić in the critical edition *Stari pisci Hrvatski*, (p. 324 sqq), 46 Katančić's Latin poems have been preserved, written in Sapphic, Alcaic or Asclepiadic-gliconeic and in various verses (hexametre, iambic, Asclepiadic and Anacreontic). The poems have been written in the classical style, both in metrics and diction, upon the model of Horatius and aeolic Greek Lyricists (Alcaeus, Sappho).³

¹ Veljko Gortan, *Hrvatski latinisti iz Slavonije*. P. o. iz knjige Simpozij „Doprinos Slavonije hrvatskoj književnosti”. Vinkovci — Zagreb, 1968.

² *Stari pisci hrvatski*, XXVI (Zagreb, 1940), p. 257—322.

³ Katančić was engaged with the theory of vesification, too. In the collection of poems *Fructus auctumnales*, as an introduction into the Croat part of the collection, he published an article on the subject — *Brevis in prosodiam Illyricae linguae animadversio* (ed. cit., p. 294—295). Taking as a model Greek, Latin and some Hungarian theoreticians, he considered — and without justification — that in our language too the verses should be formed according to classical model on the basis of the quantity of syllables. „In metro Illyrico, quod nos absque omni exemplo struere ausi sumus — Katančić says — naturam linguae potissimum spectabamus, Graecorum scilicet, et qui universa ab his mutuati sunt, Latinorum consuetudine usi”. This article is translated by P. J. Safarik (Razmeri ilirski, prevod iz Katančića, u Zagrebu god. 1791. Letopis Matice srpske, 1831, 1, 47—49).

Katančić's *cursus studiorum* is well known to us owing to the autobiographical poem *Stirps Katanich*,⁴ printed in the first volume of his work *Istri adcolarum geographia vetus...*⁵, Budim, 1826. In that longest of his poems created in the Horatius-like and fluent Sappho-type verse, the poet invokes the goddess Clio to give to his guitar the sounds and to number his ancestors, while, concerning himself and his name, he writes the following:

Fonte sum sacro Mathias vocatus
Sed Petrum divi bene nuncupavit
ordo Francisci, vitio Katančić
nomine tento.

The monasterial *Diarium* in the town of Osijek mentions that Katančić in some solemn occasions recited in Latin. It is particularly stressed that he recited, in the year of 1774, on Saint Catherine's Day, a poem written by himself entitled *Sub refectioe meridiana a fr. Petro Katanicsich in laudem s. Catharinae 280 carmina heroica eleganti stylo per eundem facta pari facilitate dicta sunt*⁶ This first poem of his is not preserved and it has probably been written in hexametre („carmina heroica"). It is also known that later (1777), „in honorem s. Josephi sexaginta disticha dixit."⁷

After completing theological studies in Osijek, Katančić is off to study in Buda-town, where, besides classical literature and antiquities, he was particularly interested with aesthetics taught by professor Djuro Szerdahely, who edited at the time several rather well-known books from the field. However, Szerdahely did not only write Latin poetry, especially the one for special occasions. The collection of these poems was edited under the title of *Silva Parnassi Pannonii*. This collection, unfortunately, was not available to us, so that our intention to establish eventually more direct poetic influence of Szerdahely could not be definitely accomplished.

Katančić rather frequently and gladly mentions Szerdahely, saying that this professor induced him to literary activity. To Szerdahely — *suo in aethetica olim moderatori* — Katančić dedicated a collection of his Latin and Croat poems entitled *Fructus auctumnales*, while in the dedication of his work *Specimen philologiae et geographiae Pannoniorum*, beside

⁴ Cf. Croat prose translation by I. Medved, Prvi dio Katančićeve autobiografije. Nastavni vjesnik XXXI (1928), p. 43—49.

⁵ p. XXIII—XXX; cf. Stari pisci hrv., XXVI, p. 337.

⁶ Starine XXXV, p. 65, ed. Bösendorfer (Zagreb, 1916).

⁷ Stari pisci hrvatski XXVI, p. LXII.

Josip Jakošić and Josip Pavišević who induced him in his youthful days „ad antiquitatem patriae investigandum”, he points out to his teacher of aesthetics Szerdahely „aeternae venerationis ergo”⁸

In the poem *Ad lectorem*, published in front of *Fructus auctumnales*, Katančić expressly utters that in this collection those poems have been grouped which he created at the end of the sixth lustrum of his life, which meant the time of his studies at the Buda University. That dating of poems is particularly valid for *Lyrice* and for *Eelegiaca et heroica*, in which Szerdahely's influence was undoubtedly the strongest.⁹

Other Latin and Croat Katančić's poems, as far as their time of origin could be ascertained at all — were of a later date, in the period when the poet was professor in the towns of Osijek and Zagreb. Katančić wrote poetry even earlier — as indicated in the poem *Ad lectorem* — but these poems were crude and weak:

Melos sed omne duriusculum, rude,
et obstrepens his auribus . . .

It was only Szerdahely who taught him how one should play with the lyre:

Sed almus ille Mercurii Cultor rudes
ubi ductare coepit ardenti manus
plectrum atque pollicem adplicare chordulis
et aures mulcere sonitu novo . . .

This thought is pointed out by Katančić in the poem *Ad Silvam Parnassi Pannonii* too, by which he greeted the collection of Latin poems written by his professor of aesthetics and edited in 1788 under the same title. Our poet is at the same time playing with the double meaning of the Latin word *silva* — forest and a collection of (different) poems, just as the same thing was done by the Roman lyricist Statius¹⁰ from the first century A. D. This is exactly the reason why this really shortest and perfectly Sapphic verse written by Katančić is cited here in its integrity:

⁸ Cf. Djuro Szerdahely, *Ars poetica generalis ad aestheticam conformata*, Budae 1783.

⁹ Stari pisci hrv., XXVI, p. LXIII.

¹⁰ *Hrvatski latinisti* (Croatici scriptores qui latine scripserunt). Knj. II. Priredili — Digeserunt: Veljko Gortan i Vladimir Vratović. — Pet stoljeća hrvatske knjiženosti, 3. — Maticе hrv. — Zora, Zagreb, 1970; p. 724—725.

Silva Parnassi, tenerae phalanges
 quam colunt divûm, nemorosa, salve!
Silva, sacrata redimita Lauru,
 dives Apollo

Quam tenet, casta medius caterva
 Naiadum, suavi modulante plectro,
Silva, *Cultoris* peramoena docti
 consita cura!

Ipsè dulcentis citharae sonoras
 prendere arguto calamo docebat
 chordulas nostros digitos sub umbra.
Silvula, vestra.

Te canent nostrae viridem Camoenae;
 Liberi fructu celebrata vives.
 Cresce sublimis, ferienda numquam,
Silva, securi!

Among other Katančić's poems we single out here the one always actual entitled *Mater*,¹¹ in which a mother laments over the birth and nine months of bearing and caring for her son, thinking of him as parents' help and happiness until her very last hour. But the son is grabbed away from his mother's breast and driven to his death, while she, sighingly sends her anathema:

10 Heu me! Quid genui? Quid mea per novem
 Confovere sinu viscera Cynthias?
 Te vitam senio, gnate, putaveram
 Adfectae generici et fore gaudium
 Aetati, solitum patribus, ultimae

15 Tu matri miserae tolleris e sinu
 Et mortem acceleras, cum raperis lari. —
 Ah, qui primus erat, qui dedit ensibus,
 Qui telis aciem, primus et impio
 In fratres odio saeviit, is deûm

20 Correptus valido fulmine concidat
 Et mersus Stygio vortice Tantali
 Poena saevitiae perpete fluctuet. —

¹¹ *Mater* filium ad bellum, quod cum Borusso erat, profectum deplorat.

Poeta ab Jove post diuturnam siccitatem petit pluviam is the title of a poem in the Alcaic verse, by which a Croat and Latinist poet invokes Jupiter not to hesitate in order to donate rain to the people:

His parce ludis, maxime Jupiter,
Et, si tibi cura est generis tui,
Audi preces natum et salubrem
Da populo pluviam petenti.

The Latin poems chosen from Katančić's work for this occasion illustrate not only their predominantly for the occasion contents, but the metric and versificatory structure of their diversified verse in the Latin language. In other words, Katančić's Latin as well as a considerable number of Croat poems in the *Fructus auctumnales*, judging from their metric form and diction, are the fruit of studying of classical poets, hellenistic aeolic lyricists and Horatius, with some sparks of genuine poetic inspiration. The deities from the romanticized Greek Olymp are only the chosen accessories adopted with the Latin language expression; it is for the greater part only the outward attire under which Katančić treats our domestic themes.

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