

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Nevena Panova, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,
Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Department of Classical Philology

for the **dissertation** for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field: 2.1. Philology, PhD programme: “Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia – Roman Literature”, entitled: *Medical Motifs in Augustan Elegiac Poetry*, by **Mina Petrova Petrova**, PhD-candidate (extramural form) at the Department of Classical Philology, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Mina Petrova’s dissertation, developed under the academic supervision of Prof. Anastas Gerdzhirov, Dr. Habil., is an in-depth study, the result of long-term and serious work on the chosen issue. The Abstract, in its Bulgarian and English versions, covers the criteria for a brief presentation of a dissertation and the reported contributions. It lists five of M. Petrova’s publications on the topic – three of them are included in the relevant National Minimum Requirements’ Checklist, as well as seven participations and eight attendances at conferences and seminars in the scientific field, national and international. All the requirements of Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation, and the specific regulations of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, related to the course of the Doctoral studies, the dismissal of the PhD student, the referral of her work to external defence and the appointment of an academic committee have been fulfilled. The work is 288 pages long, 262 being the main text, which includes an Introduction, four chapters and a Conclusion (as a final section, the contributions of the work are described, modestly named “contributory moments”, 11 in number); the Bibliography (pp. 263 – 288) covers a total of 399 units, divided into several sections.

The Introduction (pp. 7 – 39) is rightly included in the number of the main parts, since with the chosen topic, its definition, the study of the state of research on it and the specification of the methodology should be presented and commented on at length. The title itself points to the interdisciplinary nature of the work. The concise title formulation seemingly lacks the field in which medical metaphors are sought and function, the first object of study, namely – “the feeling of love and the passion of love”, but they are announced at the very beginning of the introduction as the “central theme” of the elegy of the indicated period, so the

focus of the work is naturally placed on the relationship between medical vocabulary and metaphors, and their adaptation in the love elegy of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid.

The extent of the introductory section is fully justified, since this very connection is still a new topic for both classical philologists and historians of medicine, and through her approach, Mina Petrova convincingly defends the very legitimacy of the interdisciplinary methodology in developing such issues, for which she must develop and approve her own methodological tools. However, the Introduction does not only contain methodological clarifications and working conceptualizations, but also introduces some elegiac *loci communes*, as well as individual relevant plots, to be exemplified what corpus the study will focus on further.

The analytical sections (II – V), entitled: “The Motif of the Wasting Body”, “Food, Dietetics and Sleep in Elegiac Poetry”, “Love Passion, Appetite and Satiety”, “Gynecological Motifs in Elegiac Poetry: Pregnancy, Abortion and Childbirth”, are carefully and additionally two-fold segmented. As can be seen from here, the study proceeds through several aspects of the problem, developed not simply sequentially, but in constant maintenance of the transition and interconnection between them. Their contents and language are extremely “dense”, and it is impressive with what knowledge, confidence and ease the PhD-candidate moves from the description of medical motifs (with notes on (hypothetical) diagnoses, remedies and practices) to the linguistic and semantic analysis of their formants and to – a key moment in the entire study – their presence in the works of the elegists.

The style of the work is fluent, also academically confident, in places – to some extent metaphorical and poetic itself – I do not point this out as a remark, but as if the best solution in view of the topic.

However, it seems to me that for better orientation of the reader, given the already outlined smooth but constant transition between, conditionally speaking, medical and philological passages, with frequent references and to secondary opinions, individual paragraphs could be separated, and the number of marked proper names or important statements could be increased, as was decided in this type of work, but as if with an emphasis on individual lexical units.

It would also be useful in some places to clarify the references (with the addition of a page / subchapter) to earlier observations, conclusions and thematic analyses.

Of course, all observations on the various aspects of the topic are currently supported by many primary sources in Latin (and to a lesser extent – in ancient Greek), in original and translation. The translation is most often by the author of the work herself, and it is difficult to make even minimal remarks to it. Therefore, I fully and respectfully approve the addition, albeit as the last, of contribution 11, which notes

the proposed for the first time Bulgarian translations of a peculiar corpus of medical sources on the topic. In my opinion, translations of literary sources, especially poetic ones, albeit in prose, should also find a place here. This author's translation is briefly mentioned in note 1, but it could still enter a kind of dialogue with the already existing artistic translations, especially of the Roman elegies. However, to the extent that this would expand the text even further in the interdisciplinary line, I note it just as a possible closer continuation of the development of the problem, because translations determine to a large extent the general reception, as well as the interpretative attempts on a given corpus, especially in the cases of topics with a broad horizon and of interest for specialists from different fields.

While talking about the rich source material drawn on by the PhD-candidate, I would also add the following opinion (again, not a remark). The work would only benefit if the considered (verses from) elegiac works were included in the *Index locorum*, especially since among the specific tasks of the study is the compilation of a "primary" (p. 12; or "central", p. 261) corpus with sources in which recurring "tropes, metaphors, allusions", etc. prove the existence of stable medical motifs in Roman elegy. And this, however, is only a prompt for consideration before preparing the work for publication, which I hope will happen soon.

For this next stage of the development of the research, or rather – of the public presentation of its results, I would also suggest a minimal examination of words and expressions that are on the border between terminology and everyday use, or function as terms only in the field of medicine or philology (including some Latin concepts left untranslated in the Table of contents), and that they be further explained upon first mention, in order to make the text more accessible (and with higher educational potential, on the other hand) for readers who are not as versed in both scientific and linguistic fields as the PhD-candidate.

The inferences from the observations in the single parts of the work are summarized in a significantly shorter than the Introduction Conclusion (VI, pp. 250 – 261), which is to a certain extent stylistically (and as a technical apparatus) light, but again dense, clear and synthesizing what has been achieved after sustained studies on the chosen topic, itself obviously repeatedly specified in scope.

Given the limits of the Dissertation Opinion genre, I will highlight here only a few focal aspects of the substantive analysis, repeating that the author's methodical self-reflection – already commented with some more attention – in search of new models for research of that type, is significant.

As the titles of the main chapters also indicate, the relationship between medical motifs and (their uses in) love elegy mainly concerns problematic love and erotic situations in which the bodily / (psycho)somatic approaches the morbid; it is precisely this that, in turn, can also be expressed in medical language, at a different level of metaphorization, literalization or duality.

In my view, the analytical parts of the work that seek the origin of a given motif (including a strong inter-genre one, and not only among the three elegists of the Augustan era) and do not always prove its medical primacy are particularly valuable. Just one example of a serious question that persists, regardless of its degree of explicitness, not only at this point at the end of the work: “The question arises whether the selection and identical derivation of the constructions pallor- emaciation in medical literature after the era of the elegy are not revised versions of the classical literary motif” (p. 250). Thus, Mina Petrova’s work expands the field of the history of medicine to the artistic discourse on disease and the psychosomatic dimensions of a number of emotional states, because (at least that is how I read the relevant parts of the work) the topic of the ancient “love nosology” is interpreted more philologically than medically (which – as an approach – can actually be traced back to Antiquity itself), even in the last two decades, when there has been a generally greater interest in the issue.

I would also define as important and contributing all the “insertions” for or parallels between the medically described love / passion and the potential of the elegy itself to absorb vocabulary and images from the extra-poetic sphere, as well as to transform them. Such observations are possible mainly based on the Ovidian corpus, the largest among the elegists of the period, although itself – not entirely elegiac in terms of metric. This self-reflexive look at the genre, which allows so many medical motifs within its framework, while also transcending many genre conventions, is valuable not only for studies of Roman literature, but also for general literary theory and criticism. Various possible functionalities of the poetic text are outlined, as well as forms of its internal development, which involve irony, parody, disguise, “careful manipulation” (p. 171) of metaphors, accents, and common linguistic usages, which Ovid, as *poeta doctus*, but also *poeta amans* and *poeta exul*, skilfully masters, although not sufficiently visible for his interpreters up to this point, as indicated in the dissertation. (Here I also admit my own hesitation, at the beginning of reading Mina Petrova’s completed work, whether the boundaries between the self of the poet and the lyrical characters are everywhere precisely set, but I already think that in this regard too, the text, even if implicitly and unconsciously, offers a methodological rethinking.)

It is precisely through the above genre-specific strategies that the elegy reaches plots and situations that are not so typical of its traditional subject matter. Here, I will finally note another interdisciplinary, namely cultural, aspect in Mina Petrova’s analysis. It presents and openly provokes a look into Roman everyday life, at least through the subthemes of food, daily regime, and inevitable role differences (especially along the male-female line), again still incompletely studied as dual and as standing between the medical and the literary (like love and sexuality) in the legacy of Antiquity.

I have known for a long time, and I dare to say – closely, the academic development of Mina Petrova and I am satisfied with the systematic, but also enthusiastic research approach of hers. And the interdisciplinary spirit of the research is undoubtedly influenced by her teaching activities, as far as I know – also successful and dedicated – at the Medical University – Sofia, and I believe studies such as the present one contribute not only to the creation of multi-faceted works, but also to the communication between academic communities.

Everything said so far gives me reason to confidently give a **positive assessment** and to recommend to the Esteemed academic committee to confer to Mina Petrova Petrova the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 2.1. Philology (Literature of the Peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia – Roman literature).



Sofia, 09.06.2025

Assoc. Prof. Nevena Panova