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24-12-87

Translation work, winter 1987

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KAABA OF BEAUTY

Ibn Khaffaya

KAABA DE LA BELLEZA

Ibn Jafaya

(Texto y traducción del Árabe al Castellano
de Mahmud Sobh)

El Poeta

Ibn Jafaya (1058 - 1139) nació en Alzira ("La Isla" en árabe) al sur de Valencia, en el seno de una familia de ricos terratenientes, circunstancia que le permitió vivir independientemente, sin buscar el favor de los poderosos ni dejarse tentar por sus ofertas, al contrario de lo que debían hacer los poetas para conseguir medios de vida. No es un poeta de corte y prefiere vivir en su retiro provinciano, cantando la naturaleza exuberante de su región natal.

Ibn Jafaya aparece en sus versos como un hombre sensual, amante de la vida, y trata todos los temas en su poesía; pero cuando canta la naturaleza - su gran motivo de inspiración -, su poesía se eleva más y es bajo el aspecto en que es más conocido.

La poesía Andalusí

Las características principales reconocidas en la poesía Andalusí son las siguientes:

- 1) Mezcla del amor y la naturaleza, en una forma similar a como se establece en los poetas románticos posteriores.
- 2) Una sensibilidad, que parece innata, hacia las cosas todas, aún las más pequeñas, con lo cual una serie de aspectos fugaces de la existencia, generalmente inadvertidos, en la poesía del Al-Andalus cobran una importancia extraordinaria.
- 3) La insistencia en la temática amorosa precisamente, con una abundancia sorprendente de poemas de este corte, y la repetición en poemas y poemas de situaciones, estados y sentimientos de igual base amorosa.
- 4) La variedad, pues, esta abundancia - y esta es una de las notas más destacadas - no entraña monotonía, puesto que el poeta Andalusí ofrece siempre algo nuevo, un indudable deseo de perfección, que nos atreveríamos a llamar *voluntad de estilo*.

KAABA OF BEAUTY

Ibn Khaffaya

(Text and translation from Arabic into Spanish
by Mahmud Sobh)

The Poet

Ibn Khaffaya (1058 - 1139) was born in Alzira ("The Island" in Arabic), south of Valencia, into a family of rich landlords; a fact that allowed him to live independently, neither looking for the favor of the powerful nor surrendering to the temptation of their offers, like others poets had to do in order to earn their living.

He was not a court poet and preferred to live in his provincial seclusion, singing the luxuriant nature of the region of his birth.

Ibn Khaffaya appears in his poems as a sensual man, fond of life. He dealt with every topic in his poetry; but whenever he sang about nature - his great source of inspiration- his poetry rose higher, and it is for this aspect that he is best known.

The Andalusí Poetry

The main characteristics recognized in Andalusí poetry are the following:

- 1) The mixing of love and nature, in a way similar to that performed later by romantic poets.
- 2) A sensitiveness, which seems to be inbred, towards all things, even the smallest, so that, many elusive aspects of life, that usually go unnoticed, take on an extreme significance in the poetry of Al-Andalus.
- 3) The insistence precisely on topics of love, with a surprising amount of poems of this type, and the repetition in poems and poems of situations, states, and feelings having a similar base in love.
- 4) Variety; since this abundance -and that is one of the most noticeable aspects- does not mean monotony. The Andalusí poet always offers something new; there is, without a doubt, a longing for perfection, what we might dare to call an endeavor for style.

The Poem

KAABA OF BEAUTY

Ibn Khaffaya

Oh, you dense dangling bush,
Oh garden spreading your perfumes,
God! how beautiful are your green boughs
And how lovely is your glowing flower!
I fell in love with a pair of dim fascinating eyes:
Your eyes, innocent and unaffected.
Eyelids like darts crafted in Babylon
Charmed the spell of those eyes.
Their gaze hurts as they stare at me;
Then, I stare back at them to hurt in revenge.
If anybody ever found a wind vehement in its ardor,
I did find a whirlwind of passions.
Like a tree, my insides shake in her presence
and, wherever I go, my eyes, blooming,
Keep reverently oriented towards her face,
Kaaba of beauty.
My eyes are like Persian High Priests
Adoring the sacred flame on her cheeks

The comment of the translator

I can not help telling the reader that, in my opinion, and as far as subject and developments are concerned, this poem could have been written by Dante, Cavalcanti or one of their Provençal masters. The curious reader will find some examples showing the striking similarities that connect these authors to the poem.

Regarding eyes and darts, see Cavalcanti's "Donna mi prega":

(1)

*"Non gia selvaggie le bieltà son dardo
que tal volere per temere é sperto"*

and Dante's "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore..":

(2)

*"De gli occhi suoi, come ch'ella gli muova,
escono spirti d'amore infiammati,
che fieron gli occhi a qual, che allor gli guaiti,
e passan sì che'l cor ciascun ritrova"*

For flowers and bushes compared to the beloved one, there are Cavalcanti's:

(3)

*"Fresca rosa novella
piacente Primavera,
per prata et per rivera
gaiamente cantando,
vostro fin pregio mando a la verdura"*

and Arnaut Daniel's "Glamour and Indigo":

(4)

*"Ges rams florits
de floretes envoutas
cui fan tremblar auzelhon ab lurs becs
non es plus frescs, per qu'ieu non volh Roam
aver ses lieis ni tot Jherusalem;"*

Bernat de Ventadorn told us about insides shaking, in:

(5)

*"Tant ai mon cor ple de joia,
tot me desnatura.
Flor blancha, vermelh'e groya
me par la frejura,"*

Let's finish this revision with the subject of the "face like the Kaaba". The same Bernat de Ventadorn in "Lo temps vaí e ven e vira" said:

(6)

*"Ai, bon'amors encobida,
cors be faihz, delgatz et plas,
frescha chara colorida,
cui Deus formet ab sos mas!"*

while Petrarca himself, the last heir of this line, wrote:

(7)

*"Quand'io son tutto vòlto in quella parte
ove'l bel viso madonna luce
e m'è rimasa nel pansier la luce
che m'arde e strugge dentro a parte a parte,"*