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Omaggio a Sesto Properzio by Ezra Pound

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phasis on the notion of "human" when arguing with the physicalists), but disagreements are also what go into the making of a book that deserves to be read and discussed.

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Omaggio a Sesto Propertio

By Ezra Pound

Ed. and trans. by Massimo Bacigalupo
Genoa: Edizioni S. Marco dei Giustiniani, 1984

Massimo Bacigalupo, author of *The Formèd Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound* (*L'ultimo Pound*, winner of the Viareggio Prize for nonfiction in 1982), has turned his attention to Pound's earlier work. His edition of *Homage to Sextus Propertius* contains the English text and first Italian translation, an historical and critical introduction, an annotated selection of letters and criticism (1916-1979), explanatory notes, and a list of textual variants (not easily come by elsewhere).

The introduction focuses on the linguistic relations between Pound's text and the Propertian original, tactfully characterized as an "ambiguous fidelity." Bacigalupo helpfully places the poem within the context of Pound's career. Composed in 1917-18, it is a transitional work that combines the Imagist and Vorticist virtues (image as "radiant node"; "planes of relation") of *Lustra* (1916) while announcing the more variable dramatic tone, narrative juxtaposition, and visionary historical spaciousness of the *Urcantos* and *The Cantos*, already under way. But if Pound "presses the organ pedal" in

Homage, he knows how to back off his rhetoric "with a grimace," a tribute to his "vigilance" or aesthetic tact. In this sense Pound loses his sense of proportion—and worse—from time to time in *The Cantos*.

Bacigalupo succeeds admirably in conveying the contrary moods, voices, and qualities that critics have found in *Homage*: its "technical expertise" (Blackmur), "sensuousness" (Fraser), and "wit" (Dekker); "an ideal of civilized intelligence" (Perkins); its deliberate "translatorese" (Davie) of a "scolaretto" (Bacigalupo); its "polyvalence," "contrasting styles," the "reduction of elegaic and mythological elements in Latin culture to commonplace, joke, cliché," the "elegant brio" that unifies the tone of the sequence (D'Agostino)—one could reconstruct High Modernist poetics on the basis of this "per-version" (Ruthven) of Propertius. Chiefly Bacigalupo aims for directness and clarity, sometimes achieving his end with an almost word-for-word translation:

I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my
funeral
Seeing that long standing increases all
things
regardless of quality.

(23-25)

Avrò di sicuro un boom a funerali fatti,
Visto che l'antichità accresce tutto
indipendentemente dalla qualità.

Bacigalupo does not overplay his hand: "Out-weariers of Apollo" (10) becomes simply "Gli estenuatori di Apollo." In its ninetyish way Pound's "veiled flood of Acheron" impresses with its dark foreboding, the linguistic equivalent of Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*. Bacigalupo's "flutti velati" serves well, even if it cannot catch the archaism of "flood." Elsewhere he translates "flood" by "La piena" in "The flood shall move toward the fountain/Ere

love know moderations" (337-38)—a different kind of flood.

Homage illustrates Pound's *logopoeia*: "a play in the shading of the words themselves." Logopoeia "employs words not only for their direct meaning," wrote Pound, "but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we *expect* to find with the word." One of Ruthven's examples occurs in the line "And expound the distentions of Empire" where the "distentions are distentions because the empire is already too big." Finding the logopoetic equivalent in Italian for many phrases proved Bacigalupo's hardest task. His "le distese" for "distentions" works the effect in Italian. For *unsuitable* in "Helen's conduct is 'unsuitable' " (276), however, he gives "'sconveniente.'" Since "suitor" has already appeared (155) and Pound places "unsuitable" in quotation marks (to catch—and play with—the tone of snobbish disdain), the logopoeia emerges in the recovery of the ever-admiring suitors—which does not come through "'sconveniente.'" (At the same time, as J. P. Sullivan has remarked, "certain sorts of irrational pun can only bring out such *logopoeia* if we have the adventitious aid of a [Latin] text before us to see the play on words.")

Pound mixes words derived from Latin (and Greek) with words of Anglo-Saxon origin, creating powerful sonic and satiric effects:

Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her,
There are enough women in hell, quite
 enough beautiful women
Iope, and Tyro, and Pasiphae, and the
 formal girls of Achaia,
And out of Troad, and from the Campania,
Death has his tooth in the lot
 Avernus lusts for the lot of them
 (407-13)

The Italian lacks or seems to lack the equivalent medley of diversely derived sounds ("Vi sono abbastanza donne

all'inferno" and "La morte mette dente su tutte"). Lines in which Pound plays off the original Latin and uses English words derived mainly from Latin will lose some of their oddness when turned into Italian:

And my ventricles do not palpitate to
 Caesarial ore rotundos

Poi i miei ventricoli non palpitano all'ore rotundo cesareo (266)

The word "acquire" in "The Parthians shall get used to our statuary/and acquire a Roman religion" works off "get used to," the colloquial expression. (285-86) As David Perkins comments, the logopoetic effect is

felt not only in the individual phrases ("get used to" suggests the boredom of imperial statuary; "acquire" is delicate irony . . . by euphemism, since the "acquisition" will come not by conquest but by being conquered) but in the "play" between the phrases: moving from the native and colloquial "get used" to the Latinate "acquire," the shading of the diction wittily reflects the process of conquest and acculturation. (*History of Modern Poetry*, 1:471)

Bacigalupo does his best with "I Parti faranno l'abitudine alla nostra statuaria, e si procureranno una religione latina."

Sometimes a word of the original drops from sight. "We have kept our erasers in order" (12) quietly declares an article of "aesthetic" ideology and High Modernist faith. Erasers—Propertius wrote *pumice*, from *pumex* = pumice stone—stand for refinement *ad unguem*. Like all poetic "things," they are "in order" in the poem. We do not quite "see" them in "Per parte nostra sappiamo cancellare." Elsewhere Bacigalupo defends his choice on the basis of emphasizing the *noi* as opposed to the "Out-weariers of Apollo" (see Bacigalupo, "Per parte nostra sappiamo cancellare": al lavoro su due

poemetti di Pound," *Il verri*, no. 12 [Sept. 1986], 71-72). But if Bacigalupo's "straziato" cannot convey the shock of "scarified," he captures the pathos and dignity of the passage:

You will follow the bare scarified breast
 Nor will you be weary of calling my name,
 nor too weary
 To place the last kiss on my lips
 When the Syrian onyx is broken.
 Seguirai il petto nudo straziato
 E non ti stancherai di chiamare il mio nome,
 non sarai troppo stanca
 Per porre l'ultimo bacio sulle mie labbra
 Quando l'onice sira si spezza.

"Scarify" (to scar, to cut, to criticize severely) derives from the Greek *scariphasthai*, to scratch an outline, to sketch; it is related to *scribe*—another example of logopoeia.

We should add that *Omaggio a Sesto Properzio* is another elegantly produced volume from the publishing house of Edizioni S. Marco dei Giustiniani (vico Fieno 13, Genoa).

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Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza

By Giovanni Meli
 Trans. into English verse
 with intro. and notes by
 Gaetano Cipolla
 Illus. by Giuseppe Vesco
 Ottawa: Canadian Society
 for Italian Studies, 1986

The title of Giovanni Meli's most ambitious poem should not mislead readers into thinking that it deals with the further adventures of Don Quijote and

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