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Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza by Giovanni Meli

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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 Chiscioti 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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his squire. That the title contains the name of Sanciu Panza is a clue to the greater importance that Meli has placed on this character. Sanciu is indeed the real hero in the poem. Don Chisciotti is characterized as a man who, not even knowing how to fix a salad, pretends he can fix the world. He is a mass of undigested notions that run counter to the Melian recipe for happiness, for, as Meli says in canto III,

li proprii disii limitati
sù la filicità la chiù sicura

[The surest happiness resides . . .
in placing limits on one's own desires]

Don Chisciotti always allows his desires to stray beyond his ability and means to make them come true. Challenged by Sanciu, he tries to straighten out an old, crooked tree, and dies of a ruptured hernia.

Sanciu, on the other hand, is an unskilled though sensible man, with a sound and realistic perception of the world who learns the lessons that experience and suffering can teach him. As Cipolla points out in his introduction, the poem is humoristic in the Pirandellian sense of the term. *Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza* embodies the conflict that raged in the soul of the poet. Meli was "an empiricist with idealistic tendencies, a realist with a penchant for dreaming, a skeptical man who harbored optimistic views, a man who relied on facts, but tended to be governed by principles" (xxix).

A poem of such dimensions and complexity (twelve cantos and a Vision, containing more than 8600 lines) represents a serious and intimidating challenge to any translator. However Cipolla, who has already published a verse translation of Meli's satiric masterpiece *L'origini di lu munnu*, is certainly equal to the task. Translating poetry into poetry is an act of sympathy, Dryden once said. It is clear that in the case of Cipolla it is something

more than that. His translation—into iambic pentameters with final couplets of each octave rhymed—published exactly 200 years after the appearance of the original, follows Meli's text very closely. It is a faithful but not a slavish rendition of the original, and indeed it can stand on its own as poetry. Consider the following octave chosen at random from canto XII in which Meli is describing Sanciu looking over Don Chisciotti's shoulder as the knight was busy writing his socialist recipe for world happiness:

Smiccia, stenni lu coddu, sgargiulia,
ma nun cumprenni cifri, né scrittura;
si smidudda in se stissu e sfirnicia
e tanti stravaganzi si figura;
finalmenti si scopri e poi ci spia:
"Si forsi si diletta d'incisura?
E si mai ddi figuri soi gruttischi
fussiru veri littiri o rabbischi.

[He squinted, craned his neck, peered over him,
but signs and writings he could not make out.

He racked his brains to no avail at all. Many a weird conjecture came to him, but finally, he showed himself and asked: "A fancy have you taken to woodcuts, perhaps? Those ciphers that look so grotesque, are they real letters or some arabesques?"]

Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza is an epic poem which reflects the multifaceted personality of Meli. The Sicilian poet can play many "instruments." The poem contains passages that are satirical, bucolic, lyrical, pastoral, elegiac, realistic and earthy. Cipolla knows how to respond and reproduce all of Meli's shifting moods. If Meli's tone is lyrical, Cipolla changes his strain accordingly:

Già è cuetu lu munnu e in senu stassi
di li'umbri friddi tutta la natura

[The world was still and nature was at rest
within the bosom of most gelid shadows.]

If Meli sings a pastoral strain, Cipolla is quick to seize the change of tone:

Felici etati, in cui la valli alpestri
pasturi accusi saggi producua!"

[O happy age wherein the alpine dale
ever so wise a shepherd did produce!]

Undoubtedly translation implies certain losses, but in this version, the losses are often counterbalanced by the gains. Consider the following couplets:

pirchì di tutti l'imprisa la chiù dura
è jiri unni 'un n'aiuta la natura.

[because the hardest tasks of all consist
in going where our nature won't assist.]

pertantu pozzu oprari a miu piaciri
pirchì la morti sciogghi ogni duviri.

[I can behave, meanwhile, just as I please,
for death from every duty grants release. . . .]

Sta terra 'un sapi daricci autri frutti
chi disgrazii, amarizzi ed anchi rutti.

[This earth another fruit cannot supply
saves woes, misfortunes and a broken
thigh.]

In the final analysis, Cipolla's translation must be regarded as an example of talent, scholarship, and dedication, which will surely spark new interest in Meli's work. His learned introduction and the abundant annotations in which past critical appraisals are reviewed offer a reevaluation of Meli's position in the world of Italian letters, as well as an important introduction of this great Sicilian poet to the English-speaking public. Meli is indeed a poet who needs to be read and studied more, and linguists, folklorists, and anthropologists will find him as rich and rewarding as will literary historians and cultural critics.

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