Approaches to Genre in the Ancient World

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Edited by

Michelle Borg and Graeme Miles

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INTRODUCTION

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This volume arose from a stimulating conference at the University of Sydney in April 2010, called *Genre in the Ancient World.* The papers presented covered a wide spectrum of genres, and produced a lively debate about the inherent complexities surrounding the study of ancient genre. No less than their modern counterparts, ancient genres were contested, hybrid and ambiguous. It has become commonplace in discussions of ancient genre to observe that while in classical Greek literature (in the narrow sense) generic boundaries were untheorised but observed, in Hellenistic literature they were theorised but routinely transgressed. A playful and creative approach to generic expectation characterises much of Greek and Latin literature from then on, if not from its very beginnings, and is certainly in evidence in the texts discussed in this volume.

The popularity of genre theory as an area of study in itself, but also as a tool for understanding a text and society, has increased over the last few decades. There have been seminal works in recent years on ancient genre, such as Batstone and Tissol's *Defining Genre and Gender in Latin Literature* in 2005[1] and Depew and Obbink's *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society* in 2000,[2] as well as Stephen Harrison's studies related to genre.[3] Equally popular has been work on specific genres such

[1] New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
[2] USA: Harvard University Press.
[3] To name a few: *Generic Enrichment in Vergil and Horace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); *Oxford Readings in the Roman Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Texts, Ideas and the Classics: Scholarship, Theory and Classical Literature,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

as biography[4] and the various types of ancient poetry.[5] The focus has often been on the manipulation of generic expectation as a device for achieving specific literary and cultural goals.

Informed by and in response to these recent works, *Approaches to Genre in the Ancient World* seeks to emphasise the ambiguities surrounding the definition of "genre" and to further discussion of its inherent hybridities. This intention can best be demonstrated by widening focal parameters to include the generic "paths less trodden" by modern scholars. This volume addresses these complex issues on two levels: first, the inclusion of papers on a variety of genres and second, by presenting different approaches to the very concept of genre. Unique as a collection of papers, *Approaches to Genre in the Ancient World* ranges from the first century AD to Late Antiquity, and from Rome to Gaza, as well as classical genre in modern literature, thus providing a kaleidoscope of points of view on the history of genre and of specific genres.

As with any collection of this sort, the editors' choices of subject for the volume were in large part made for us by the contributors. Nonetheless, one commonality of the chapters assembled here is that they either address texts which less often figure in discussions of ancient genre, or else address from new perspectives those texts that are more familiar in such discussions. Conversely, there are certainly notable absences: the much discussed problems of genre in Hellenistic literature, for instance, and the ancient novel, a genre apparently untheorised in antiquity, are not discussed. The knowing reader can easily supply a further list of eminent omissions of his or her own. In both of these fields, discussion of genre has been extensive and sophisticated, and in the absence of chapters offering something genuinely new there seemed little point in offering a mere rehearsal of old arguments. No one volume, in any case, was ever going to "do" ancient genre completely, so no attempt was made to pursue an encyclopedic inclusiveness.

The conference's keynote paper was given by John Frow, and thus it appears in this volume first and out of its chronological place. This

[4] Brian McGing, Judith Mossman, *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2006); Bruno Gentili, *History and Biography in Ancient Thought,* (Amsterdam: J.C Gieben, 1988) and Joseph Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography,* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985).

[5] Stephen Harrison, *Generic Enrichment in Vergil and Horace,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); R.O.A.M Lyne, *Collected Papers on Latin Poetry,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Felix Budelmann (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

opening chapter examines the translation of ancient genres (especially epigram and epic) into contemporary poetry in English. Moving from Pound's famous (infamous?) reworking of Propertius, to Australian poet Laurie Duggan's Martial to Logue's Homer, Frow considers some of the ways in which genres, as distinct from texts, might travel between languages.

Imperial Rome constitutes something of a centre of gravity in this volume, and the next five chapters deal with texts written under the Roman Empire. The final two chapters turn to the quite different world of Late Antiquity, though here too thematic continuities emerge. In the first of our Roman chapters Propertius returns, this time in his own right rather than through mediation of Ezra Pound. Jonathan Wallis examines the programmatic elegies at the outset of Propertius' third book: here we find the poet placing new emphasis on elegy as a socially engaged genre as he competes for prominence in a context now shaped by the arrival of Horace's *Odes*, and by Virgil's imminent *Aeneid*.

In chapter three, Judith Goodsell considers Ovid's generic self-consciousness in the *Heroides*, a text which appears to invite its readers, with unusual directness, to consider its generic innovation. Goodsell argues for the importance of lament in the *Heroides*, seeing the poems as reaffirming a likely imaginary but historically important kinship between lament and elegy. Fran Alexis' chapter on Lucan looks at the effects on epic of the choice of a historical civil war as subject, and examines the ways that the poem positions itself relative to earler epic. Pliny the Younger and the use of generic layering in his epistolary death notice of Ummidia Quadratilla (*Epistle,* 7.24) are explored by Michelle Borg. This chapter examines three concerns which are contained within 7.24 and the ways in which they are exemplified. First, the surface text concerns old Quadratilla and utilises biographical devices pre-emptively to defend her grandson, Quadratus, against testamentary threats from would-be captators. The next level down fortifies Quadratus' social and political reputation, which may have seemed at risk from his grandmother's morally objectionable love of pantomimes. Last, Pliny uses Quadratilla and Quadratus' relationship to explore tangentially a broader issue: contemporary *pietas*. Remaining in the Roman world but moving from Latin to Greek literature, Graeme Miles examines the relations of verbal and visual texts, and the interaction of patterns of generic expectation from one upon the other, in Philostratus' *Imagines*. Taking two of these *ekphraseis* as examples, Miles argues that the *Imagines* shows a particular tendency to discuss the nature of visual art through treatments of landscape, and that the movement of viewing is, on occasion at least,

represented through shifts in literary genre. For Late Antiquity, Michael Champion's paper "Performing and Transforming Cultures and Genres in Late-Antique Gaza" contributes to the understanding not only of genre in this period, but also of the profound cultural shifts with which these changing ideas were intertwined. What Champion observes in the writings of Aeneas of Gaza, Zacharias Scholasticus and Procopius is "the transformation of classical discourse into Christian idiom through the transformation of classical genres". Completing the volume is a second late-antique chapter: Sarah Gador-Whyte's analysis of Romanos' *Kontakia* as an example of the crossing of genres. Gador-Whyte addresses the question of the origins of the *Kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist, a Christian author of the sixth century, and sees this form as reflecting influences from both Greek and Syriac tradition, thereby enacting the mingling of cultures in Romanos' congregation.

Genre remains a critical area of study in ancient literature and society. The papers in *Approaches to Genre in the Ancient World* reaffirm the value of examining the "negative space" between the accepted characteristics of ancient genres, their ambiguities and hybridity. Genre is, however, one among many lenses through which to approach ancient literature. It is always to be borne in mind in a volume like this one that we will end up grouping things quite differently if we start from other categories or by emphasising other factors determining the form and reception of a text. If we concentrate, for instance, on the narratological categories of types of narrator or narratee, a very different picture of the relationships between texts emerges.[6] Nonetheless, the ancients clearly did come to their reading with sets of expectations, including generic expectations. These are certainly richer and more fluid than we are ever likely to appreciate, but it is possible even at this remove of time and culture to make out a good deal. If there is one thing which emerges from many of these papers, it is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) warning against too ready a schematism in approaching genre, against too rigid an application or drawing up of categories. More appropriate, and more productive, is a Wittgensteinian sense of *Familienähnlichkeiten*, avoiding the temptation to apply straight lines over a hazy picture.[7]

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[6] On the relative lack of correlation between these narratological factors and genre see I.J.F. de Jong, 'Epilogue,' in *Narrators, Narratees and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*, ed. I.J.F. de Jong, R. Nünlist, A. Bowie (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 545-553.

[7] For a critical approach to the application of this notion to genre theory see D. Fishelov, 'Genre Theory and Family Resemblance – Revisited,' *Poetics* 20 (1991) 123-128.

Like all such collections, this one has the strengths and the failings of the edited volume: it makes no pretence to exhaustive treatment of its subject, nor of developing a consistent argument from beginning to end. The editors have not attempted to impose a particular theoretical position on the papers. It has, however, the advantages of its scholarly genre: a range of viewpoints and material greater than one person could bring to bear.

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSLATING CLASSICAL GENRES

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Like most people with only limited access to the classical languages, I read Latin and Greek poetry for the most part in translation; and my interest in this paper is in the problems posed for and by any translation that tries to be poetry in English in its own right. Pound's Propertius, Logue's Homer, Duggan's Martial often bear the most oblique relation to the texts they translate, yet unlike the majority of English poems written in sludgy translationese they find ways of reinventing something of the generic qualities of their originals.

Of course it's often difficult to make a clear distinction between the translation of texts and the translation of genres, precisely because these two categories don't translate neatly into each other, and yet because they can only with difficulty be separated: you can't translate a text without carrying with it something of the genre or genres in relation to which it was composed, and it's hard to detach a genre from the texts you take to exemplify it. The question for translators is always how to rescue a text from both its strangeness and its deceptive appearance of familiarity, and at the same time how to convey something of the force of genres which may have fallen into disuse or which simply may not work in the present. It's a matter – as with lexical choices – of finding something that will do instead, and that something may be very distant from what it translates.

Let me begin with a poem of Ezra Pound's, first published in his collection *Lustra* in 1913:

> *"Papyrus*
> Spring…….
> Too long…….
> Gongula…….[1]

[1] Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Shorter Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1990), 115.

This is not a "translation," but it's reliant on the Sapphic texts; the name "Gongula," or in one case the second and third syllables of the name, appears in two fragments, 22 and 95 in the Lobel-Page numbering; and the theme of separation from the loved one of course runs through many of the poems. Anne Carson's translation of the oeuvre of Sappho similarly uses square brackets "to give an impression of missing matter" in the papyrus fragments; they indicate "destroyed papyrus or the presence of letters not quite legible somewhere in the line." She doesn't indicate every gap or illegibility in this way, since "this would render the page a blizzard of marks and inhibit reading. Brackets are an aesthetic gesture towards the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it."[2] And she adds that she "emphasize[s] the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it. Brackets are exciting. Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp – brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure."[3]

Pound and Carson are both making poems in (but not out of) a genre that is of relatively recent invention: the Romantic genre of the fragment. Its most important theorist was Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote in the *Athenäumsfragment* 206:

> *"Ein Fragment muß gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel."*
>
> ["A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine"].[4]

It's a porcupine because it is rolled up defensively into a ball: it is at once of the world around it, and not of it because it's withdrawn into itself. Like the porcupine, the fragment is not incomplete; it's torn (*abgesondert*, "sundered"), but has the internal coherence of a miniature or of a tiny animal – "fulfilled in itself," "*in sich selbst vollendet*" (where the preposition "in" can in German have either ablative or accusative force: lying within itself, or bearing inwards upon itself).

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[2] Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (London: Virago, 2002), xi.
[3] Carson, *If Not,* xi.
[4] Friedrich Schlegel, "Athenäums-Fragmente," *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. Wolfdietrich Rasch (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972), 45.

The fragment survives from a past that no longer exists, just as the ruin in the theory of the picturesque works as an index both of the vanished past and of the process of weathering that has brought it into the present. The beauty of the fragment lies in its incompleteness, its sundering, which nevertheless yield something complete, something perhaps more beautiful for being suggestive of a lost whole but which, by that act of suggestion, is itself whole, "*in sich selbst vollendet*". The past is present in it precisely as an absence.

The question: What does it mean to translate a genre? can thus be alternatively put as the question: what does it mean for genres to be *un*translatable?

The answer that Ezra Pound gives to this question in the *Homage to Sextus Propertius* has to do specifically with English classicism: in English grammar schools the teaching of the classics throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century has been put at the service of an imperialist ethos which renders them to all intents and purposes unreadable: Latin poetry forms a constellation of "Rugger and Virgil, Cricket and Horace, *Paradise Lost* and the Boer war."[5] Pound summarises the problem in the contemptuous lines he puts in the mouth of Propertius:

> "Upon the Actian marshes Virgil is Phoebus' chief of police,
> He can tabulate Caesar's great ships.
> He thrills to Ilian arms,
> He shakes the Trojan weapons of Aeneas,
> And casts stores on Lavinian beaches.
> Make way, ye Roman authors,
> clear the streets, O ye Greeks,
> For a much larger Iliad is in the course of construction
> (and to Imperial order)
> Clear the streets, O ye Greeks!"[6]

English translation within this ethos – Pound partly has the Loeb library in mind – has fallen "under the blight of the Miltonic or noise tradition … a stilted dialect … which imitates the idiom of the ancients rather than seeking their meaning."[7] And what Pound calls a "homage" to Sextus Propertius is a major salvage operation effected within this context.

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[5] Peter Davidson, *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry: A Preliminary Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), Preface, np.

[6] Ezra Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius*," Personae: The Shorter Poems*, 223.

[7] Ezra Pound, "Notes on Elizabethan Classicists," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 232.

The elegy as it was developed by Propertius and his contemporaries draws on Hellenistic poetry and on the New Comedy plot of the dissolute young man subjected to the whims of his courtesan mistress and in conflict with the older husband or protector; but its first-person speaker and the mode of ironic consciousness it embodies, together with its subversion of the values of Republican virtue, separate it quite dramatically from its predecessors.[8]

It is this subversion of Republican virtue, and particularly of the values of a warrior caste, that in 1917 is of most interest to Pound in the Roman elegy. He can only make use of the genre, however, by refracting it through a set of strategies which are strange to the point of perversity, and have given rise to persistent misunderstanding. One of them – and one that should warn us that the speaker of this poem is neither Propertius nor Pound, but an indeterminate figure working on a text in a strange language which, unlike Pound, he barely understands – is the deliberate use of the language of "bad" translation, the howlers of schoolboys taking a punt. Some examples:

In section VII:

> "Me happy, night, night full of brightness;
> Oh couch made happy by my long delectations…"[9]
>
> *["O me felicem! O nox mihi candida, et o tu*
> *lectule deliciis facte beate meis!"]*

of which Donald Davie writes that "'Me happy' is an expression that has no home in English except in the schoolchild's painful transliteration in the classroom; similarly, the whole of the second line recalls nothing but the stilted, partly comic and partly touching expressions that arrange themselves across the page of an exercise-book when foreign words are looked up one by one and their dictionary equivalents are written down. 'Delectations' in particular is a word that exists in a dictionary, and nowhere else."[10]

In Section I, the lines:

> "And in the meantime my songs will travel
> And the devirginated young ladies will enjoy them"[11]

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[8] Paul Allen Miller, *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4.
[9] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 215.
[10] Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 87-88.
[11] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 206.

translate

> *"carminis interea nostri redeamus in orbem;*
> *gaudeat in solito tacta puella sono"*

(where "tacta" means "moved," but Pound, or rather the figure of the translator who speaks here, takes it to be the opposite of "intacta").

In section V.2,

> *"Cimbrorumque minas et benefacta Mari*" ["the threats posed by the Cimbrians and Marius' service"] (II.1)

becomes

> "… of Welsh mines and the profit Marus had out of them."[12]

The "homage," then, is not a representation of Sextus Propertius's text: it's a palimpsest, a collage, a cut-up,[13] a text that half-mockingly quotes its original rather than simply shifting it intact from the source language to the target language.

Let me now look at a longer passage from Section XII:

> "And behold me, small fortune left in my house.
> Me, who had no general for a grandfather!
> I shall triumph among young ladies of indeterminate character,
> My talent acclaimed in their banquets,
> I shall be honoured with yesterday's wreaths.
>
> And the god strikes to the marrow."[14]
>
> ["*aspice me, cui parva domi fortuna relictast,*
> *nullus et antiquo Marte triumphus avi,*
> *ut regnem mixtas inter conviva puellas*
> *hoc ego, quo tibi nunc elevor, ingenio.*
> *me iuvet hesternis positum languere corollis,*
> *quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus*."]

"Triumph among young ladies of indeterminate character" translates "mixtas inter … puellas," amongst a crowd of young ladies: but the speaker chooses to read "mixtas" as meaning something like

[12] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 213.
[13] Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 86-7.
[14] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 224.

"promiscuous," evoking the demi-monde which is the poet's social home. "Yesterday's wreaths" "creates the second-hand poet's laurels (with 1917 undertones of military commemoration) in place of the unexceptional banquet garlands which the Latin ['hesternis corollis'] implies."[15] As for the last line, "and the god strikes to the marrow," Davie suggests that "quem tetigit iactu certus ad ossa deus" "could be interpreted as no more than Propertius's conventional defence of debauchery, comic subjection to Eros," and that "a notion of at least the likely tone of the Latin might be derived as well from Herrick as from Baudelaire";[16] whereas Pound turns the "god" from this conventional Eros into a ruthless external judgement of the failure of his ambitions.

These lines are immediately followed by a further egregious mistranslation:

> "Like a trained and performing tortoise,
> I would make verse in your fashion, if she should command it,
> With her husband asking a remission of sentence,
> And even this infamy would not attract numerous readers
> Were there an erudite or violent passion,
> For the nobleness of the populace brooks nothing below its own altitude.
> One must have resonance, resonance and sonority … like a goose."[17]

> ["*tale facis carmen, docta testudine quale*
> *Cynthius inpositis temperat articulis.*
> *non tamen haec ulli venient ingrata legenti,*
> *sive in amore rudis sive peritus erit.*
> *nec minor hic animis aut, si minor, ore canorus*
> *anseris indocto carmine cessit olor*."]

The "trained and performing tortoise" comes, of course, from the tortoise shell standing metonymically for the lyre; Cynthius, Apollo, is understood as the masculine form of Cynthia, and thus her husband; and as Hooley explains, "'inpositis temperat articulis' has him tempering imposed articles, or a 'sentence'; 'haec … ingrata' is rendered 'this infamy'; and homophonic word play alone can account for the change from 'sive in amore rudis sive peritus erit' to 'were there an erudite or violent passion'. Through all this, the English – apart from its distortion of the Latin – never quite makes sense."[18]

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[15] Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor,* 113.
[16] Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 112.
[17] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 224.
[18] Daniel M. Hooley, "Pound's Propertius, Again," *MLN* 100:5 (Dec. 1985), 1040.

And yet the poem, as opposed to the half-meaningless and often comic language of which it is composed, makes very serious sense, and does so by reinventing the Roman elegy as a source of comic irony.

Pound associates his translation of Propertius with what he calls *logopoeia*, a "dance of the intellect among words," which "employs words not only for their direct meaning, but … takes account in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we *expect* to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play";[19] and he finds it, as well as in Propertius, in Laforgue,[20] from whom he learns the use of the cliché, of (visible or invisible) inverted commas placed around words and phrases.

The *Homage* works to catch a tone and a set of "cadences" which range from the openly comic (in section III, for example, Propertius, summoned by his mistress at midnight and full of terror at the journey from Rome to Tivoli, reassures himself that the person of the lover is sacred and no one would dare harm a lover – "Who so indecorous as to shed the pure gore of a suitor?" – , only to finish the elegy imagining the place he will be buried in), to the meditations on death which are all the more powerful for being couched in layers of irony: the famous lament for the beautiful women now caught in hell, for example, which Pound had earlier translated into a phony pre-Raphaelite musicality ("Here let thy clemency, Persephone, hold firm"),[21] but which in section IX of the *Homage* becomes colloquial and focused. Let me quote the first two parts of section IX to give a sense of how the ironically deployed clumsiness of translationese and the deliberate use of clichés works to produce effects of great power:

1

"The twisted rhombs ceased their clamour of accompaniment;
The scorched laurel lay in the fire-dust;
The moon still declined to descend out of heaven,

But the black ominous owl hoot was audible.

And one raft bears our fates
on the veiled lake toward Avernus
Sails spread on cerulean waters, I would shed tears for two;
I shall live, if she continue in life.
If she dies, I shall go with her.

[19] Ezra Pound, "How to Read," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 25.
[20] Pound, "How to Read," 33.
[21] Ezra Pound, "Prayer For His Lady's Life," *Personae: The Shorter Poems*, 37.

Great Zeus, save the woman,
or she will sit before your feet in a veil,
and tell out the long list of her troubles.

2

Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her,
There are enough women in hell,
quite enough beautiful women
Iope, and Tyro, and Pasiphaë, 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,
Beauty is not eternal, no man has perennial fortune,
Slow foot, or swift foot, death delays but for a season."[22]

["*haec tua, Persephone, maneat clementia, nec tu*
Persephonae coniunx, saevior esse velis.
sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum:
pulchra sit in superis, si licet, una locis.
vobiscumst Iope, vobiscum candida Tyro,
vobiscum Europe nec proba Pasiphae,
et quot Troia tulit vetus et quot Achaia formas,
et Thebe et Priami diruta regna senis:
et quaecumque erat in numero Romana puella,
occidit: has omnes ignis avarus habet.
Nec forma aeternum aut cuiquamst fortuna perennis:
Longius aut propius mors sua quemque manet."]

Here again the mistranslations ("the formal girls of Achaia") and Latinisms ("perennial fortune") carry a complexly mediated speech situation in which cliché is not the opposite but precisely the precondition of sincerity. Let me say two more words about this.

Daniel Hooley suggests that lines like "a Trojan and adulterous person came to Menelaus under the rites of hospitium/ And there was a case in Colchis, Jason and that woman in Colchis" imply a speaker "so sated with the habits of mythological allusion that [he] has simply ceased to care" and argues that it is "as if the jaded persona Pound infers from the text were itself translating the poem."[23] Alternatively, Donald Davie takes it that "the irony … is directed at the reader; the diction puts the reader in the position of one who has transliterated into his own pompous and civic English a poem that deserves to be read precisely because it derides and

[22] Pound, "Homage to Sextus Propertius," 218-219.
[23] Hooley, "Pound's Propertius Again," 1035.

denies all pompous and civic pretensions."[24] They're both partly correct: the layering of voices fuses the persona projected by the text of Propertius with an overlaid persona, partly continuous with the first one and partly with the reader, rendering the elegies into clumsy English, and in turn overlaid with a third persona, the ironic and knowing textual representative of Pound, who could speak about war, about sex, about death only through this double set of masks.

In what sense then is this poem a translation?

George Steiner wrote of the *Homage to Sextus Propertius* that it is "a poem [for] which a poem in another language … is the vitalizing, shaping presence; a poem which can be read and responded to independently, but which is not ontologically complete, a previous poem being its occasion, begetter, and in the literal sense, *raison d'être*."[25]

This seems to me both true and false: the *Homage* is "not ontologically complete" in the sense that it could not exist without either the text of Propertius or the form of the love elegy which he refined and which Pound is able to use as an instrument for a set of feelings and cadences that we find also in Mauberley and some of the poems of *Lustra* and *Personae.* Yet in another sense the Homage is quite complete, *in sich vollendet*, like the fragment: it depends not on the text of Propertius but on a figuring of Propertius which is internal to the poem; it's a proper porcupine because it makes its own genre, that of the homage, which is independent of and requires no knowledge of the Latin text; and in so doing it makes possible a drastic and contentious recuperation of the classical tradition in the face of a dead academicism.

My second case study is of the epigrams of Martial. The genre's name is from the Greek *epigramma*, inscription, for example those on votive offerings; but in its developed form it perhaps has much more in common with graffiti than with religious inscriptions. The genre is of course characterised by "closure, pointedness, wit, concision, and satire,"[26] and it

[24] Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, 88. Hooley and Davie's attempt to account for the stylistic work done by mistranslation seems to me much more interesting than Sullivan's attempt to downplay the extent of mistranslation in the poem. J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius: A Study in Creative Translation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 95 ff.

[25] George Steiner, *Poem Into Poem: World Poetry in Modern Verse Translation* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1970), 34.

[26] William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 25. Meleager's anthology of Greek epigrams from c. 100 BC classifies the genre in 4 categories: "erotic, epitaphic, anathematic (dedicatory),

is close to the conversational genres of gossip; it works to situate the speaker in a network of social relationships, particularly those between poet and patron and the poet and his peers, with the epigram working as both a gift and a weapon in the negotiation of these relationships.

I'm going to focus here on the versions of Martial done in 1989 by the Australian poet Laurie Duggan, which use the originals as springboards: taking ideas from them and putting them to often very different uses. This is the dedicatory poem that opens the collection:

1.3

"*Argiletanas mauis habitare tabernas,*
cum tibi, parue liber, scrinia nostra uacent.
Nescis, heu, nescis dominae fastidia Romae:
crede mihi, nimium Martia turba sapit.
Maiores nusquam rhonchi: iuuenesque senesque
et pueri nasum rhinocerotis habent.
Audieris cum grande sophos, dum basia iactas,
ibis ab excusso missus in astra sago.
Sed tu ne totiens domini patiare lituras
neue notet lusus tristis harundo tuos,
aetherias, lasciue, cupis uolitare per auras:
i, fuge; sed poteras tutior esse domi."
["You prefer, little book, to dwell in the shops in the Argiletum, though my book-case has plenty of room for you. You are ignorant, alas! you are ignorant of the fastidiousness of Rome, the mistress of the world; the sons of Mars, believe me, are much too smart. Nowhere are there louder sneers; young men and old, and even boys, have the nose of the rhinoceros. After you have heard a loud "Bravo!" and are throwing kisses, you will go, tossed to the skies, from a shaken blanket. Yet, that you may not so often suffer the erasures of your master, and that his stern pen may not so often censure your jests, you desire, frolicsome little book, to fly through the air of heaven. Go, fly; but you could have been safer at home."]

"Would you rather live among strange volumes
in Lygon Street or Glebe Point Road,
though my home is empty without you?
You are too young, too enthusiastic to bear
the silence of the *Sydney Morning Herald*;
too old, and not clever enough
to please the Bright Young Turks
at *Poetry Australia*.

---

and epideictic (descriptive or narrative)" (ibid., 26), and the genre later comes to include the categories of invective and scoptic (ibid., 27).

Still,
you've run away from your master
who could have played forever
with your parts,
eager instead to push aside the rabble
and rub shoulders with the great.
Go then, with my blessing,
though you may have been safer with me."[27]

This is 1.72, which becomes a savagely concise attack on the Canberra poet Mark O'Connor:

"Nostris uersibus esse te poetam,
Fidentine, putas cupisque credi?
Sic dentata sibi uidetur Aegle
emptis ossibus Indicoque cornu;
sic quae nigrior est cadente moro, 5
cerussata sibi placet Lycoris.
Hac et tu ratione qua poeta es,
caluus cum fueris, eris comatus."

["Do you imagine, Fidentinus, that you are a poet by the aid of my verses, and do you wish to be thought so? Just so does Aegle think she has teeth from having purchased bone or ivory. Just so does Lycoris, who is blacker than the falling mulberry, seem fair in her own eyes, because she is painted with white lead. You too, by the same reasoning by which you are a poet, will have flowing locks when you are grown bald."]

"Borrowing a poet's name O'Connor
you think yourself a poet;
a set of dentures
might call itself a smile."[28]

In a similar vein, 8.20 becomes an attack on a famously dead Australian poet:

"*Cum facias uersus nulla non luce ducenos,*
Vare, nihil recitas. Non sapis, atque sapis."

["Though you write two hundred verses every day, Varus, you recite nothing in public. You are unwise, and yet you are wise."]

[27] Laurie Duggan, *The Epigrams of Martial* (Melbourne: Scripsi, 1989), 5.
[28] Duggan, *The Epigrams*, 9.

In Duggan's version the figure of Varus is split in two between the poet Michael Dransfield, the Jim Morrison of Australian poetry – and I mean that comparison in the unkindest possible way – and a publisher corresponding to a Varus who *does* recite his poems: Dransfield's "wisdom" is no more than a degree of stupidity relatively less than that of his publisher:

"Dransfield who wrote
200 poems each day
was wiser than his editor
who printed them."[29]

There is a similar reversal in 1.37, where a joke about the vessels at either end of the food chain becomes a joke about the vessel in between:

1.37
"*Ventris onus misero, nec te pudet, excipis auro,*
Basse, bibis uitro: carius ergo cacas."
["You empty your bowels into an unfortunate vessel of gold and you are not ashamed of this , Bassus, but you drink out of glass: so it's your shit that costs more."]

"You drink from crystal
and you piss in brass;
it's the vessel between
that lacks class."[30]

11.34 again translates Roman figures who are perhaps generic into gossip about contemporary Australian poets: John Forbes was a notoriously impoverished, drink- and drug-addicted poet, while John and Lyn Tranter live in a "lush terrace" (in Camperdown) because Lyn is a literary agent – a class of people who for Duggan rank with Arts Council bureaucrats:

"*Aedes emit Aper, sed quas nec noctua vellet*
esse suas; adeo nigra vetusque casa est.
Vicinos illi nitidos Maro possidet hortos.
Cenabit belle, non habitabit Aper."

["Aper has bought a house; but such a house, as not even an owl would wish its own; so dark and old is the little dwelling. But near it Maro has his

[29] Duggan, *The Epigrams*, 35.
[30] Duggan, *The Epigrams*, 7.

elegant gardens, and Aper will dine well, though he will not be well lodged."]

"John Forbes rents a decrepit flat
a block from the Tranters' lush terrace,
so he eats and drinks from a well-stocked freezer
and sleeps soundly on a broken mattress."[31]

Finally, with Martial 5.34, an elegy for a slave girl who died after her parents, we shift to a different mode:

"*Hanc tibi, Fronto pater, genetrix Flacilla, puellam*
Oscula commendo deliciasque meas,
Parvola ne nigras horrescat Erotion umbras
Oraque Tartarei prodigiosa canis.
Impletura fuit sextae modo frigora brumae,
Vixisset totidem ni minus illa dies.
Inter tam veteres ludat lasciva patronos
Et nomen blaeso garriat ore meum.
Mollia non rigidus caespes tegat ossa; nec illi,
Terra, gravis fueris: non fuit illa tibi."

["To you, O Fronto my father, and to you, O Flaccilla my mother, I commend this girl recipient of my kisses and my pet, that Little Erotion may not be terrified at the dark shades and at the monstrous mouth of the dog of Tartarus. She was just about to complete the cold of a sixth winter, had she not lived six days less than that. Amidst her old patrons may she sport and play, and with lisping speech babble my name. Let no hard turf cover her tender bones, and press not heavy on her, O earth; she pressed but lightly on you."]

Not, at the time, realising their origin in Martial, I had quoted the final two lines in my book on genre in Ben Jonson's elegy for his first daughter who died at the age of six months:

"*On my first Daughter*:
Here lyes to each her parents ruth,
Mary, the daughter of their youth:
Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due
It makes the father, lesse, to rue.
At sixe moneths end, shee parted hence
With safetie of her innocence;
Whose soule heavens Queene, (whose name shee beares)

[31] Duggan, *The Epigrams*, 46.

In comfort of her mothers teares,
Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-traine:
Where, while that sever'd doth remaine,
This grave partakes the fleshly birth.
Which cover lightly, gentle earth."

Duggan's poem combines 5.34 and 5.37, and keeps the delicacy of the final lines:

"Dew glitter in a haze
of woodsmoke,
scent of parted lavender,
a feather
touching early pages
of the book
she of five summers lies.
Rest lightly upon her
earth and stone;
rest gently as she rests:
a leaf
touching the forest floor."[32]

It's a forcible reminder of the tonal range of which the epigram is capable, in both its Latin and English forms.

My third case study is the much more complex case of Catullus. Pound once lamented his repeated failure to translate him; and English translations generally fail to catch the clarity and the pointedness of the originals.

Here are some twentieth-century translations of the first two lines of *Carmen 1* for comparison:

"*cui dono lepidum nouum libellum*
arida modo pumice expolitum."

George Goold:

"To whom do I give my pretty new book
freshly polished with dry pumice?"[33]

Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish:

"Who's to be offered my brand-new slim volume

[32] Duggan, *The Epigrams*, 24.
[33] G.P. Goold, *Catullus* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

Slickly polished with dry-as-dust pumice-stone?"[34]

Peter Whigham:

"To whom should I present this
little book so carefully polished?"[35]

Peter Green:

"Who's the dedicatee of my new witty
booklet, all fresh-polished with abrasive?"[36]

Frank Copley:

"who'll I dedicate my pretty new book to
all fresh and
shiny and
just off the shelf?"[37]

Each of these has its virtues, and each handles the question of what to do with "lepidum" ("charming, witty, elegant") and with the unfamiliar "pumice" differently: Goold translates the function of the pumice, Whigham and Copley leave the effect of polishing without mentioning pumice, the Raphael and McLeish and Green translations each gets off a pun ("dry-as-dust"; "abrasive"); as for "*lepidum*," the translations are split between "pretty" and "witty," with Whigham choosing to ignore it for the sake of clarity and directness. But I'm going to concentrate here on Copley's translations, published in 1957 into a vernacular American that looks for the effect of living speech – in this case largely by using a style that uses e e cummings as an intermediary.

This is Catullus 53:

"Risi nescio quem modo e corona,
qui, cum mirifice Vatiniana

[34] Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish, *The Poems of Catullus* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979).
[35] *The Poems of Catullus*, trans. Peter Whigham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 49.
[36] *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 45.
[37] Gaius Valerius Catullus, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. Frank O. Copley (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 1.

> meus crimina Calvus explicasset,
> admirans ait haec manusque tollens
> 'di magni, Salaputium disertum!'"
>
> ["I had to laugh at someone in the crowded court who, when with admirable art my Calvus had set forth Vatinius' crimes, with hands uplifted in admiration said: "Dear God, what a fluent little Salaputian!"]

Salaputium can be read as a pun on *salax*, lecherous, with *putium*, a latinisation of *posthion*, Greek "penis."[38] Copley translates into Damon Runyonesque:

> "laugh I thought I'd)
> there was this guy in court, see
> and we'd just heard a marvellous speech
> against Vatinianus; my friend Calvus
> really'd thrown the book at him
> well this guy LOVES it
> gives him a great big hand
> and says
> boyoboy can dat lidl squoit
> make wid duh lengwich"[39]

This is Catullus 85, in two distinct translations:

> "*Odi et amo. quare id faciam fortasse requiris?*
> *nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior*."

Pound:

> "I hate and love Why? you may ask; but
> it beats me, I feel it done to me and ache."[40]

Copley:

> "I hate and I love
> well, why do I you probably ask
> I don't know, but I know it's happening
> and it hurts"[41]

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[38] Davidson, *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry,* 56-7.
[39] Catullus, trans. Copley, 47.
[40] Ezra Pound, *Translations,* 406.
[41] Catullus, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. Copley, 104.

And Catullus 51, itself a translation from Sappho:

"*ille mi par esse deo uidetur,*
ille, si fas est, superare diuos,
qui sedens aduersus identidem te
spectat et audit
dulce ridentem, misero quod omnis
eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te,
Lesbia, aspexi, nihil est super mi
* * * * * * * *
lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus
flamma demanat, sonitu suopte
tintinant aures, gemina teguntur
lumina nocte."

Whigham translates as follows:

"Godlike the man who
sits at her side, who
watches and catches
that laughter
which (softly) tears me
to tatters: nothing is
left of me, each time
I see her,
. . . tongue numbed; arms, legs
melting, on fire; drum
drumming in ears; head-
lights gone black."[42]

Copley:

"he to me wholly godlike seems
he (please god forgive) seems higher than god
who sits across from you and over and over
looks at you and hears you
sweetly laughing, miserably which all
my senses rip from me, for the minute Lesbia
I lay eyes on you nothing is left of me
of …….
but torpid my tongue, thinly down under my skin
flame trickles, with their own sound
roar my ears, twin night
covers my eyes."

[42] *The Poems of Catullus*, trans. Peter Whigham, 110.

This is Catullus 5:

"*vivamus mea Lesbia, atque amemus,*
rumoresque senum seueriorum
omnes unius aestimemus assis!
soles occidere et redire possunt:
nobis cum semel occidit breuis lux,
nox est perpetua una dormienda.
da mi basia mille, deinde centum,
dein mille altera, dein secunda centum,
deinde usque altera mille, deinde centum.
dein, cum milia multa fecerimus,
conturbabimus illa, ne sciamus,
aut ne quis malus inuidere possit,
cum tantum sciat esse basiorum"

which in Copley's translation becomes:

"I said to her, darling, I said
let's LIVE and
let's LOVE and
what do we care what those old
purveyors of joylessness say?
(they can go to hell, all of them)
the Sun dies every night
in the morning he's there again
you and I, now,
when our briefly tiny light flicks out,
it's night for us, one single
everlasting
Night.
give me a kiss, a hundred a thousand kisses,
a fifty eleven seven hundred thousand
kisses, and let's
do it all over again
Darling
how many, how many, you say?
mix them up; it's bad luck
to know how many; wouldn't want people
to count, them, up
somebody might have the Evil Eye
and if he knew he just might
BEWITCH
them."[43]

[43] Catullus, *The Complete Poetry*, trans. Copley, 6.

Copley's translations have the advantage of getting Catullus into a living vernacular; they set up an implicit comparison between imperial Rome and the imperial United States, and document a turn to the private in each case. The disadvantage is the specificity of this language, and the fact that Copley is so directly reliant on a style associated with a particularly idiosyncratic poet. A better model than cummings (if Copley had been writing later than 1957) would perhaps have been Frank O'Hara, whose gossipy first-person poems – particularly what he called his "this and that" genre – construct poetic modes which closely approximate those of Catullus. But that's a topic for another paper.

My final case study is, very briefly, of Homer. No poet has been more translated – there have been at least half a dozen serious versions in English in the last twenty years, and there have been hundreds, good and bad, since Chapman first translated the *Iliad* in the late sixteenth century.[44] Yet there's a real sense in which none of these recent translations, including the excellent ones by Lattimore, Fitzgerald and Fagles, work as English poems. To put it simply: the heroic mode just doesn't work any more. Pope could translate Homer because he consciously identified English imperial power with that of Rome, and because, following Virgil, Roman power is grounded in the heroic world of the *Iliad*. All later poets, however, write in a world from which, as Lukács puts it, the gods have withdrawn and "the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever."[45] After Pope no English poet of consequence has been an apologist of empire, not even Kipling; the world of poetry and the world of power have moved irreparably apart. And this has had consequences for poetic form.

Christopher Logue's drastic solution to this problem has been to rewrite the *Iliad* in the mode in which all long poems of any value in the twentieth century have been written: as paratactic sequences of lyric fragments which don't form a coherent whole. Stan Smith puts the historical issue like this:

> "One of the major achievements of Modernism was to bring the dialogical mode into the ambit of poetry – not by transforming the epic, or by writing novels in verse, but by creating a new form, a semi-narrative sequence composed of disjunctive episodes, working by the accretion of fragmented

[44] For a recent, polemical overview, cf. Edward Luttwak, "Homer Inc," *London Review of Books* 33:4 (February 2012), 3-8.

[45] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 37.