

**Classical Lyricism in Italian and North American  
20<sup>th</sup>-Century Poetry**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis defines ‘classical lyricism’ as any mode of appropriation of Greek and Latin monodic lyric whereby a poet may develop a wider discourse on poetry. Assuming classical lyricism as an internal category of enquiry, my thesis investigates the presence of Sappho and Catullus as lyric archetypes in Italian and North American poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The analysis concentrates on translations and appropriations of Sappho and Catullus in four case studies: Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912) and Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) in Italy; Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Anne Carson (b. 1950) in North America. I first trace the poetic reception of Sappho and Catullus in the oeuvres of the four authors separately. I define and evaluate the role of the respective appropriations within each author’s work and poetics. I then contextualise the four case studies within the Italian and North American literary histories. Finally, through the new outlook afforded by the comparative angle of this thesis, I uncover some of the hidden threads connecting the different types of classical lyricism transnationally.

The thesis shows that the course of classical lyricism takes two opposite aesthetic directions in Italy and in North America. Moreover, despite the two aesthetic trajectories diverging, I demonstrate that the four poets’ appropriations of Sappho and Catullus share certain topical characteristics. Three out of four types of classical lyricism are defined by a preference for Sappho’s and Catullus’ lyrics which deal with

marriage rituals and defloration, patterns of death and rebirth, and solar myths. They stand out as the epiphenomena of the poets' interest in the anthropological foundations of the lyric, which is grounded in a philosophical function associated with poetry as a quest for knowledge. I therefore ultimately propose that 'classical lyricism' may be considered as an independent historical and interpretative category of the classical legacy.

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### Long Abstract

Defining classical lyricism as a poetic mode of engagement with Greek and Latin monodic lyric whereby an author may develop a wider discourse on poetry, my doctoral thesis interrogates the state of Sappho's and Catullus' poetic legacy in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian and North American literature. In the early stages of the project, a systematic overarching analysis of poetic translations and appropriations of the classics in the two contexts highlighted a Sapphic / Catullan strand common to both literary traditions. Assuming classical lyricism as an internal category of enquiry, my study interrogates this poetic *fil rouge*.

Italy's and North America's disparate histories in terms of linguistic and geographical connections with Greek-Latin antiquity have allowed me to study the evolutions of classical lyricism from separate points of view, affording a more thorough picture than the exclusively national. The North American example serves as a foil to the Italian situation. It provides an original comparison, placing the Italian tradition within an international context, and thus filling a serious gap in scholarship. The scholarship on the legacy and reception of Sappho and Catullus in Italy is very scarce. Adriana Chemello's 2012 monograph, *Saffo tra poesia e leggenda: fortuna di un personaggio nei secoli XVII e XIX*, is the first study to address this topic. There is no comprehensive study of the legacy and reception of ancient lyric in the Italian 20<sup>th</sup> century, either on Sappho or on Catullus. The only available studies are parts of wider

monographs on the single Italian poets. On the other hand, there are several studies on the Anglo-American reception of Sappho and Catullus. Sappho's and Catullus' legacy has been studied from different perspectives by both Classicists and English scholars. Yet this is the first time that the Italian and the North American traditions are compared in an extensive study on the poetic reception of ancient monodic lyric in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is also the first time the four 20<sup>th</sup>-century authors on which this thesis focuses are studied in comparison to each other.

This thesis traces, studies and evaluates the textual presence of Sappho and Catullus in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian and American poetry. I here consider Sappho and Catullus as the earliest authors of the Greek and Latin lyric traditions, as well as their archetypal role in the history of Western lyric poetry. In particular, I concentrate on translations and appropriations of Sappho's and Catullus' work in four case studies across the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912) and Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) in Italy; Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Anne Carson (b. 1950) in North America. My choice of these four poets was informed by the following criteria: each author consistently engages with Sappho and Catullus, has a solid linguistic command of ancient Greek and Latin, and places the theory and practice of translation and the classical legacy at the core of a wider discourse on literature. Giovanni Pascoli and Ezra Pound were selected as two of the earliest 20<sup>th</sup>-century exponents of a new form of classical lyricism in the respective literatures. Salvatore Quasimodo is one of the last Italian poets to make ancient lyric a central matter to his poetics. Anne Carson stands out as one of the most telling examples of the liveliness of classical lyricism in contemporary North American literature. The thesis shows that Sappho's and Catullus' works are central to four leading poetics of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary tradition. Across a hundred-year span and two national literatures, Sappho and

Catullus emerge as two of the main interlocutors in the meta-poetic discourse on language and poetry.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, one for each case study, with an introduction and a concluding chapter. In the discussion, I first trace the poetic reception of Sappho and Catullus in the oeuvres of the four authors separately. I define and evaluate the role of the respective appropriations within each poet's oeuvre in relation to their poetics. I then contextualise the four case studies within the Italian and North American literary histories. Finally, through the new outlook afforded by the comparative angle of this thesis, I uncover some of the hidden threads connecting the different types of classical lyricism transnationally. Below I include an outline of each chapter:

1. **Giovanni Pascoli and Classical Lyricism: the Eternal Blooming of a Poet's Mind**
  - a) Pascoli and classical tradition: the poetics of 'Il fanciullino': the 'primitive', folklore and the 'ancients'. Latin and Greek as dead languages: 'Dov'è la lingua che nasce viva, non morta o morente?' The past and memory as the only possible realms of the poetic.
  - b) Pascoli and translation: translation as the re-enactment of a lost past.
  - c) The Sapphic and Catullan translations in the MS 'Studi di Traduzione | dal Greco', Folio 8<sup>r-v</sup>, 'Solon' (1895) and *Traduzioni e riduzioni* (1913).
  - d) Pascoli's classical lyricism: recurring tropes of defloration through phytomorphic representations founded on Sapphic and Catullan poetry. Sublimated eroticism and the myth of Sappho and Phaon as solar myth of poetic and linguistic origins. The ritualistic aspect of ancient lyric in relation to wedding rituals and popular seasonal festivities. Mythical and popular patterns of death and rebirth. Eros and poetry as Sapphic

blooming. Pascoli's classical lyricism is monologic, inward looking and develops on the vertical line of the past.

## 2. **Salvatore Quasimodo and Classical Lyricism: the Solitude of Absence**

a) Quasimodo and classical tradition: Latin and Greek as living languages.

Quasimodo's self-fashioning as an ancient bard from Magna Grecia and

initiator of a new literary humanism. Consonance between ancient and

contemporary poets. b) Quasimodo and translation: translation as a renovation

of a lyric absolute, which finds its earliest origins in ancient Greek monodic

lyric. c) *Lirici greci* (1940) as an hermetic reflection on solitude and absence.

The influence of Luciano Anceschi's Hermeticism. The collaboration of

Salvatore Quasimodo and Luciano Anceschi for the translation of *Lirici greci*.

The critical reception of the anthology between the 1960s and the end of the

century and its subsequent canonization in Italy. The Catullan translations in

Italian *endecasillabi*. d) Quasimodo's classical lyricism: ancient monodic lyric

as the expression of a metaphysical lyric absolute and the highest poetic

expression of the 'heart of man'. Sappho's and Catullus' lyrics as poetic

archetypes of poetry as the song of the lonely self, themes of desire as longing,

abstraction and poetic revelation of a distant truth.

## 3. **Ezra Pound and Classical Lyricism: Sappho and Catullus Playing in a**

**Choral Performance** a) Pound and classical tradition: the presence of the past

/ simultaneity: 'all ages are contemporaneous'. Primacy of the present, over

the past dimension. b) Pound and translation: translation of the classics as

interpretation, revivification and recreation: 'My job was to bring a dead man

to life'. Poetry and translation as enlightenment. c) The three poetic phases of the dyadic pair Sappho / Catullus in Pound's short poetry, the *Cantos* and the unfinished opera *Collis o Heliconii* (1932-34). Sappho and Catullus as poetic masks. The coexistence of different lyric masks forming a choral ensemble in the short poetry and the *Cantos*. Dissemination of monodic lyric into dialogic genres (*The Cantos* and *Collis o Heliconii*). d) Pound's classical lyricism: Eros / desire as the vital force of literature. Ancient Greek and medieval lyric as origins of the contemporary poetic traditions. Recurring tropes of defloration, coition, eroticism represented through Sapphic and Catullan imagery; representations of the alternation of light and darkness through the ancient Greek myth of Sappho and Phaon; mythical patterns of death and rebirth. The ritualistic and folkloric aspect of the lyric. The meta-poetic staging of the monodic self through masks and dramatic settings. Pound's classical lyricism develops on the horizontal plane of simultaneity, it looks outward and it is dialogic in character.

4. **Anne Carson and Classical Lyricism: Floating amid Song Lyrics, Lecture Notes and Scraps of Meat** a) Carson and classical tradition: 'There are no dead languages': simultaneous existence of present and past authors in contemporary literature, the poetics of the fragment as material and linguistic debris. b) Carson and translation: translation as unveiling of a manifold 'floating' being as well as creative act of enlightenment: 'translating as a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for the light switch'. c) The Sapphic translations in *If Not Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2003), the Catullan and Sapphic appropriation in *Men in the Off Hours* (2000) and *Nox*

(2010), the multimedia performances ‘Bracko’ (2007) and ‘Nox’ (2010). The lyric fragment as building block of dialogic performances: opera librettos, meta-poetic staging of the lyric and the lyric in performance. d) Carson’s classical lyricism: Sappho’s pattern of triangulation as the founding element of Carson’s poetics; Sappho’s as paradigm of the ‘unknowing’ and ‘eros’; Catullus’ poetry as paradigm of ‘thanatos’ and mourning. The ritualistic aspect of the lyric: wedding and mourning rituals; the performative, dialogic aspect of ancient lyric. Carson’s classical lyricism follows in Pound’s footsteps and it is meta-poetically aware of itself.

My research methodology combines historical and textual analysis, comparative criticism as well as archival research. Thanks to the Isaiah Berlin Scholarship, between February and April 2011 I was able to study the autographs of Pascoli and the unpublished correspondence of Quasimodo. I researched the collections of the Archive of Casa Pascoli (Barga), Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence, Biblioteca Comunale dell’Archiginnasio in Bologna, Archivio del Novecento at La Sapienza University in Rome and Fondo per la Tradizione Manoscritta of Pavia University. This was a very fruitful time during which I found a wealth of material relevant to the project. This includes two unpublished manuscripts by Giovanni Pascoli, MS ‘Studi di Traduzione | dal Greco’ and Folio 8<sup>r-v</sup>. The autographs contain thirty-nine unpublished fragments of translations of Sappho and several poetic rewritings of Sappho’s epithalamia. The translations and the rewritings redefine the role of Sappho within the Italian poet’s oeuvre and are the subject of my article ‘Pascoli and Sappho: Two Unpublished Manuscripts’, currently being reviewed for publication. In the paper I transcribe, describe, date and introduce the autographs. In Chapter 1 of this thesis for the first time I situate this new Sapphic material within

Pascoli's oeuvre, comparing it with the Catullan strand. My study of the unpublished correspondence between Salvatore Quasimodo and the philosopher-critic Luciano Anceschi bore substantial evidence of the critic's contribution to the drafting of the translations and the compilation of *Lirici greci*. It provided a new outlook on the anthology, redefining the work as a collaborative project between an hermetic poet and an hermetic critic. I discuss this topic in Chapter 2 of the thesis.

While starting from similar premises, it appears that the course of classical lyricism takes two opposite directions in Italy and in North America. Pascoli's and Pound's innovative aesthetics of appropriation developed a peculiar rhetoric of subjectivity in their individual approach the lyric of Sappho and Catullus. These two kinds of classical lyricism prompted divergent critical responses and shaped later poets' disposition towards ancient lyric.

Pascoli's lyricism proceeds inward and on the vertical line of the past, paving the way for the later experiments of Quasimodo's 'poesia pura' and Hermeticism. Pascoli's starkly subjective appropriations sustain the later asbolutisation of the lyric as poetic genre expressing the individual poet's self. Pound's classical lyricism looks outward and develops on the horizontal plane of simultaneity, providing an open base for later experimentations, such as those by Carson. Pound's habit of disseminating the lyric fragments of Sappho and Catullus into the dialogic forms of the epic of the *Cantos* or the opera *Collis O Heliconii* performs a meta-poetic staging of lyric subjectivity. His multiple poetic masks divest the lyric of individualistic traits, creating a 'depersonalised' choral performance, in which later poets are free to intervene.

Despite the two aesthetic trajectories diverging, from the comparison it emerges that the four poets' classical lyricism(s) share certain topical characteristics.

These are stylistic and topical features—a group of tropes and metaphors repeatedly exploited under different shapes in the appropriations by all four poets. They stand out as the epiphenomena of the poets’ similar interest in the anthropological foundations of the lyric, which is grounded in a philosophical function associated with poetry as a quest for knowledge. The archetypal notion of the lyric genre as an expression of the self plays a part in all instances and so does the traditional pattern of *eros* and *thanatos*. Yet the four poets also directly emphasize the performative aspect of lyric poetry by underlining its ancient roots in popular ritual and folklore. The interest in the ritualistic mark of the lyric form emerges from the poets’ frequent preference to translate poems specifically dealing with marriage rituals and defloration, myths of death and rebirth at dawn, and rites of spring. These patterns are mirrored in the poets’ conception of translation as illumination, and bridging function between the past and the present. I finally argue that these shared transnational characteristics add a specificity to my loose instrumental definition of classical lyricism as ‘any mode of appropriation of Greek and Latin monodic lyric’, ultimately proposing that ‘classical lyricism’ may in fact be considered as an independent historical and interpretative category of the classical legacy.

This project isolates and expounds an aspect of 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature that has been neglected by the critical tradition. Investigating issues of classical tradition, reception and literary history, my study on classical lyricism elucidates dynamics of literary appropriation and canon formation. It questions the extant notions of Italian and North American literary histories and addresses the question of the role of the classical legacy in 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetry.

The findings of my thesis open the way to further studies in the field, both in relation to the single authors here studied and to classical lyricism as a literary trend.

Classical lyricism may in the future be considered in relation to other authors, diverse national literatures and different time frames. At the same time, the study of the socio-historical background of the textual fortune of classical lyricism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is still uncharted territory. Exploring such relationships as the connection of classical lyricism with Fascism, literary scholarship, and publishing could highlight new aspects of Sappho's and Catullus' reception, uncover specific dynamics of literary transmission, and clarify issues of authorial and national identity in the literary history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Tu sei come una terra  
che nessuno ha mai detto.  
Tu non attendi nulla  
se non la parola  
che sgorgnerà dal fondo  
come un frutto tra i rami.  
C'è un vento che ti giunge.  
Cose secche e rimorte  
t'ingombrano e vanno nel vento.  
Membra e parole antiche.  
Tu tremi nell'estate.*

*(Cesare Pavese)*

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## **Introduction**

This thesis defines ‘classical lyricism’ as any mode of appropriation of Greek and Latin monodic lyric whereby a poet may develop a wider discourse on poetry. Delimiting the category of classical lyricism to Sappho and Catullus, I will investigate the presence of the two ancient poets in Italian and North American poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the preliminary stages of my research, a systematic scrutiny of poetic appropriations of the classics in the two literatures highlighted a common Sapphic / Catullan strand. Assuming classical lyricism as an internal category of enquiry, the following study interrogates this poetic *fil rouge*.

My analysis concentrates on translations and appropriations of Sappho’s and Catullus’ poetry in four case studies across the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Giovanni Pascoli (1855-1912) and Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) in Italy; Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Anne Carson (b. 1950) in North America. My choice of these four poets was informed by the following criteria: each poet consistently engages with Sappho and Catullus by means of translation, poetic appropriations or both, has a solid linguistic grasp of ancient Greek and Latin, and their poetics is closely intertwined with the classical legacy. Giovanni Pascoli and Ezra Pound were selected as two of the earliest 20<sup>th</sup>-century interpreters of classical lyricism in their respective literatures. Salvatore Quasimodo is one of the last Italian poets to shape his poetics on the legacy of ancient lyric. Anne Carson’s work reveals the liveliness of classical lyricism in North American contemporary poetry. The central role played by classical lyricism in the poets’ own poetics, the key role of the single authors in literary histories and the methodological need to respect a chronological time frame helped me narrow the

selection to the four case studies over a pool of valid examples, including Gabriele d'Annunzio, Pier Paolo Pasolini, H.D. and Louis Zukofsky.

As the discussion unfolds, I will trace the presence of Sappho and Catullus in the oeuvres of the four authors separately. I will define and evaluate the role of the respective appropriations within the poets' works, exploring how classical lyricism is connected with issues of authorial identity. I will then contextualise the four case studies within the Italian and North American literary histories. Finally, through the new outlook afforded by the comparative angle of this thesis, I will uncover some of the hidden threads connecting the different types of classical lyricism here evaluated.

This is the first time Pascoli, Quasimodo, Pound and Carson are studied in relation to each other. While I do not intend to embark on a discussion of ancient lyric itself, the working category of classical lyricism and the comparative perspective provide a fresh viewpoint on the four authors' work and will shed new light on each poet's oeuvre. Since all four poets develop highly sophisticated meta-poetic discourses, the analysis of classical lyricism will also treat theoretical aspects of the texts, constituting an independent critical framework. While proceeding from similar premises, it will in fact appear that the course of classical lyricism takes two opposite directions in Italy and in North America.

Despite the two aesthetic trajectories diverging, from the comparison it will emerge that the four poets' classical lyricism(s) share certain topical characteristics. These appear to be the epiphenomena of the poets' similar interest in the anthropological foundations of the lyric. I will finally argue that these shared characteristics add a specificity to my loose instrumental definition of classical lyricism as 'any mode of appropriation of Greek and Latin monodic lyric', ultimately

proposing that ‘classical lyricism’ may be considered as an independent historical and interpretative category of the classical legacy.

### **The Words of Classical Lyricism**

Sappho was a 7<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. lyric poet from Mytilene on the Greek island of Lesbos. The first female poet of the Western tradition, inventor of the Sapphic stanza, she wrote a large body of lyrics. Of her nine books of poetry attested by the tradition, less than two hundred fragments survive today.<sup>1</sup> This limited corpus, however, gathers some of the earliest examples of epithalamia and monodic lyric, that is, verse sung by one poet at private gatherings to the sound of the lyre.<sup>2</sup> We know that Sappho was married, had two brothers and a daughter. For a large part of her life she lived and taught in a *tiasus*, where girls of the Lesbian elite received their education and prepared for marriage. Sappho would sing her lyrics before the girls, with whom she would also perform rituals in honour of Aphrodite and, as customary, entertain homosexual relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Catullus was a 1<sup>st</sup>-century B.C. Latin lyric poet from Rome, member of the poetic circle of the *neoterói*, as Cicero defined the group of poetic innovators.<sup>4</sup> Following Sappho’s legacy (carmen 51 is a translation of fr. 31 Voigt), his poetic *liber* gathers 116 poems of various lengths. Catullus brought experimental poetry to

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Lobel, Σαπφοῦς Μέλῃ. *The Fragments of the Lyrical Poems of Sappho* (Oxford: OUP, 1925), pp. xiii-xxv. Salvatore Nicosia, *Tradizione testuale diretta e indiretta dei poeti di Lesbo* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. by Moses Hadas and James Willis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Fränkel, pp. 170-188; Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 209-313; G.O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry: a Commentary on Selected Larger Pieces* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 139-150. On the thiasus in Aeolic Greece: Bruno Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica* (Bari: Laterza, 1984), pp. 101-139.

<sup>4</sup> *Ad Atticum*, VII, 2.1, in M. Tullius Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, ed. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1987), I: *Libri I-VIII*, p. 243. See also R.O.A.M. Lyne, ‘The Neoteric Poets’, in *Catullus*, ed. by Julia Haig Gaisser (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 109-140.

Rome. He introduced the novelty of short personal lyrics and a plethora of metres moulded on the Greek tradition: hendecasyllables, elegies, epithalamia and epigrams.<sup>5</sup>

The poetic fortunes of Sappho and Catullus are closely intertwined.<sup>6</sup> By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sappho's and Catullus' corpuses came to symbolise the first two hubs of Western lyric subjectivity. As Yopie Prin puts it, 'Placed at the origin of lyric poetry—or what Eric Gans has called "*naissance du moi lyrique*"—Sappho seems to give birth to the lyric 'I': the conception of a singular self that also speaks as generalized lyric subject.'<sup>7</sup> Given Sappho's chronological precedence to Catullus, my discussion at times will linger more on the reception of the Lesbian poet.

If the term 'classical' in 'classical lyricism' recalls the ancient quality of the poetry of Sappho and Catullus as classics (namely, works belonging to ancient Greek and Latin literature), with the term 'lyricism' I stress the particular aspect of their reception that connects ancient monodic lyric to modern and contemporary lyric poetry and conceives the two on an evolutionary line. While tracing the main characteristics of the presence of Sappho and Catullus in the four case studies, my thesis also explores how the 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetic reception of Sappho and Catullus is entangled with meta-poetic discourses. Whenever I employ the term 'lyric' to describe Sappho's and Catullus' poetry, I refer to the entirety of the ancient poets' extant corpus. The term 'monodic' is employed in relation to ancient and modern

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<sup>5</sup> *Catullus*, ed. by Gaisser, *passim*; Kenneth Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1999); T.P. Wiseman, *Catullus and His World: a Reappraisal* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Salvatore Costanza, *Risonanze dell'ode di Saffo Fainetai moi kēnos da Pindaro a Catullo e Orazio* (Messina: D'Anna, 1950). Dolores O'Higgins, 'Sappho's Splintered Tongue: Silence in Sappho 31 and Catullus 51', in *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, ed. by Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 68-78. Ellen Greene, 'Catullus and Sappho', in *A Companion to Catullus*, ed. by Marilyn Skinner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 131-150.

<sup>7</sup> Yopie Prin, 'Sappho's Afterlife in Translation', in *Re-Reading Sappho*, ed. by Greene, pp. 36-67. Cfr. E.A. Havelock, *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1939), pp. 161-184; Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution*, pp. 85-101; Julia Haig Gaisser, 'Introduction', in *Catullus*, ed. by Gaisser, pp. 1-26; Michael Silk, 'Lyric and Lyrics: Perspectives, Ancient and Modern', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric*, ed. by Felix Budelmann (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 373-385.

poets alike to describe poetry spoken by one voice. I will at times refer to Sappho's and Catullus' poetry as 'monologic'. That is, poetry spoken by a single voice, in opposition to 'dialogic' modes, such as the choral and the dramatic, which are characterised by multiple voices.

The history of the classical legacy goes hand in hand with the history of translation. Together with the aesthetic of the lyric and authorial identity, another focal point of this thesis is to trace the evolution of classical lyricism in relation to the four poets' diverse approaches to the classical tradition and translation. Lorna Hardwick remarks:

The relationship between the ancient (source) language and the target language is shaped by the translator in terms of his or her purpose in writing. It is also shaped by the way in which the target reader or audience is perceived and by the writer's judgment about how the impact of the Greek and Latin lines can effectively be communicated to those living in and through another language and another culture. There is also, of course, the role of the translator's interpretation of the wider meaning of the source text, both in its own time and for later readers. This aspect raises big questions about how the translator / writer views the relationship between ancient and modern, not just in terms of language but also in terms of values and ideas.<sup>8</sup>

I will therefore clarify the authors' own definitions of translation and appropriation as they emerge from their works. All authors, except Pascoli, attribute a creative aspect to translation as the process leading from 'source language' to 'target language'. For this reason, in certain specific instances of this study the terms 'translation' and 'appropriation' denote overlapping characteristics.

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<sup>8</sup> Lorna Hardwick, *Translating Words, Translating Cultures* (London: Duckworth, 2004), p. 10.

## When Myth Meets History: The Legacy of Sappho and Catullus

Although almost six centuries separate them, Sappho and Catullus have stood out through the ages as the two founders of modern lyric poetry. Their poetic reception has formed on their recognized archetypal qualities. Romanticism and 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship planted the seed of the modern idealised picture of the two poets.<sup>9</sup> While subverting it, both Pascoli and Pound are heirs of this culture. The former retained it from his teacher Giosue Carducci, the latter from his literary models, W.S. Landor and A.C. Swinburne.<sup>10</sup>

On Sappho, the eminent 19<sup>th</sup>-century classicist Domenico Comparetti remarked: ‘Saffo non è soltanto il nome di una poetessa: è un personaggio poetico dei moderni, ed inevitabilmente nell’animo dell’uomo odierno (o della donna), per poco còlto ch’egli sia, il di lei nome si associa con idee sentimentali, romantiche e poetiche.’<sup>11</sup> The same stands for Catullus. According to T.P. Wiseman’s re-appraisal of Catullus’ poetry, the modern and ancient sensibilities have found a point of contact in the lyrics of Catullus. In 1985 the scholar noted: ‘Of all the Latin poets, Catullus is the one who seems to speak most directly to us’.<sup>12</sup> Wiseman demonstrated that Catullus’ modern fortune is the product of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century idealism that fostered Comparetti’s views: ‘For the mainstream of Catullan influence, what made the difference was a combination of Romanticism and the more scientifically philological scholarship of the nineteenth century.’<sup>13</sup> Wiseman’s study revealed that, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Catullan *liber* was romantically conceived as the poet’s personal

<sup>9</sup> Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> On Carducci’s influence on Pascoli’s comparativism: Giuseppe Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, *GSLI*, 161 (1984), 507-543 (pp. 509-512). On Swinburne and Sappho, Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, pp. 112-156. On Pound and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Catullan reception: Wiseman, pp. 226-229.

<sup>11</sup> Domenico Comparetti, *Saffo e Faone dinanzi alla critica storica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1876), quoted in Adriana Chemello, ‘Saffo: intersezioni e contaminazioni di una fabula dal XVI al XIX secolo’, in *Saffo tra poesia e leggenda: fortuna di un personaggio nei secoli XVII e XIX*, ed. by Adriana Chemello (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2012), pp. 9-30 (p. 24).

<sup>12</sup> Wiseman, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Wiseman, p. 213.

reflection on his unrequited love for Lesbia. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century re-appraisals of both Sappho and Catullus stand on these traditional archetypes.<sup>14</sup> The symbolic value attributed to Sappho and her successor Catullus refracts also onto the classical lyricism of the four poets here treated.

Bruno Gentili lists the characteristics of Sappho's poetry that were so appealing for the romantic-idealistic poets: the erotic subject matter, the pathos, the dimension of memory:

Una esperienza, che si presta sempre e facilmente, come la cultura romantico-idealistica ci ha insegnato, a interpretazioni modernizzanti tendenti a spiritualizzare l'amore come sentimento nella poesia di Saffo e a scorgere in essa l'ideale della pura bellezza e dell'eterno femminile. [...] Ma questa esperienza comune che rivive nel ricordo trova sempre la sua ambientazione culturale e la sua mediazione divina in situazioni tipiche nelle quali la gioia del bello insieme goduto è anche gioia che la visione del ridente apparato floreale d'Afrodite e la presenza della dea hanno destato nella vita amorosa della comunità.<sup>15</sup>

Gentili underlines the anachronism of the romantic interpretations of Sappho and the bias of 19<sup>th</sup>-century idealistic appropriations. Sappho's poetry cannot be reduced to the sole individual expression of the poet's emotions. In fact, all archaic Greek poetry, including Sappho's, was born out of a ritual religious or communitary context.

Vincenzo di Benedetto, describing the literary conventions of Sappho's epithalamia, speaks of 'eros istituzionalizzato'.<sup>16</sup> Wedding songs described the ritual during which the bride was brought to the groom at dusk, while the boys of the chorus sang. The bride, about to lose her virginity, was often compared to a flower. Once together, the spouses were escorted to the bridal chamber. The bride's female friends traditionally gathered before the door, but a friend of the groom would bar their entry. While the

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<sup>14</sup> Wiseman, pp. 211-245.

<sup>15</sup> Bruno Gentili, 'Storicità della lirica greca', in *Storia e civiltà dei greci*, ed. by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, 10 vols (Milan: Bompiani, 1977-1978), II: *Origini e sviluppo della città: l'arcaismo* (1978), pp. 383-461 (pp. 441-442).

<sup>16</sup> Vincenzo di Benedetto, 'Introduzione', in *Saffo: poesie*, ed. by Franco Ferrari (Milan: BUR, 1994), pp. 5-78 (p. 10).

girls scorned the groom's friend, from inside the chamber the bride invoked the god Hymenaeus in a refrain.<sup>17</sup> The passionate descriptions of the power of *eros* ('the shaker of limbs'), the eroticism of the fragments in which Sappho's rapture irresistibly led her to invoke *thanatos* were, very likely, expression of a collectivity.

All types of classical lyricism analysed here absorb the Sapphic thematic archetype of *eros* and *thanatos*. Yet all four poets are also aware of the ritualistic aspect of archaic poetry. In different ways, their classical lyricism skilfully manipulates the tension between the private and public spheres inherent to the love / death poetic pair of Sappho's poetry.

Sappho's historical reality is also enmeshed with the legend formed around her figure over two thousand years.<sup>18</sup> Having very little information on her life since antiquity, the absence of a defined historical portrait invited a hugely prolific mythopoeia on the Lesbian poet. Both the Italian and the American authors exploit the two sides of Sappho's reception: the historical and the mythical. A vast literary material raised the historical Sappho to the status of mythical figure. She is the character of many literary fictions and poetic idolisations. She is associated with a poetic ideal of beauty (Alcaeus called her divine), divine inspiration (Plato named her 'the tenth muse'), and often defined the lyric archetype (in different traditions she is also referred to as the feminine Homer).<sup>19</sup> A tradition going as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century also tells that Sappho killed herself for the love of the mythical fisherman Phaon, jumping off the White Rocks of Leukas.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Fränkel, pp. 172-173.

<sup>18</sup> Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion* (London: Vintage, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> See 'Testimonia', in *Greek Lyric*, trans. by David A. Campbell, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1982), I: *Sappho-Alcaeus*, pp. 2-51.

<sup>20</sup> DeJean, *passim*; Chemello, *passim*; Margaret Williamson, *Sappho's Immortal Daughters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 5-33.

In the Latin tradition, Cicero, Catullus, Horace all mention Sappho in encomiastic terms, but it is Ovid who seals the fame of her legend, dramatizing her figure. In the *Heroides* he makes Sappho the subject of his Epistula 15.<sup>21</sup> In a form of dramatic monologue, in the Ovidian Epistula Sappho expresses her love for Phaon, writing about her erotic desire and the pain caused by the unrequited love. Drawing on the ancient myth that described Phaon as a mythical fisherman loved by Aphrodite, Ovid's Epistula consecrated Sappho's fame. The Epistula was enormously successful, translated widely from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and subject to continuous appropriations all over Europe, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the legend of Sappho is still alive. Both Giovanni Pascoli and Ezra Pound engage with the Phaon version of Sappho's myth.

Greek and Latin poetry were characterised by a strict division into genres. In Greece the close connection between archaic poetry, cult and ritual resulted into the ancient separation in genres, including lyric, elegy and iambic poetry. While the criteria of delimitation are still being debated, the genres were differentiated according to performance, purpose, audience and context. The metre and language employed also varied according to the genre.<sup>23</sup> By the time of Catullus, the ritualistic aspect of poetry was less prominent. Catullus wrote his poems to be performed or read for artistic purposes.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the Greek genres were assimilated by Latin

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<sup>21</sup> P. Ovidii Nasonis *Epistulae Heroidum*, ed. by H. Dörrie (Berlin: Gruyter, 1971).

<sup>22</sup> See Chemello, pp. 9-30. On Epistula 15 see Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 277-299 and Peter E. Knox, 'Introduction', in *Ovid: Heroides*, ed. by Peter E. Knox (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 1-34 (pp. 12-13).

<sup>23</sup> Gentili, *Poesia e pubblico*, pp. 42-66; R.L. Fowler, 'Elegy and the Genres of Archaic Greece', in *The Nature of Early Greek Lyric: Three Preliminary Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 86-103. On ritual and archaic poetry, Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, *Towards a Ritual Poetics* (Athens: Foundation of the Hellenic World, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Quinn, 'The Poet and his Audience in the Augustan age', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 30.1 (1982), 75-180; Maija Väisänen, *La musa dalle molte voci: studio sulle dimensioni storiche dell'arte di Catullo* (Helsinki: HSH, 1988), pp. 9-68.

poetry.<sup>25</sup> These definitions are connected to the specific socio-historical environment of ancient Greek and Latin poetry and their performative oral aspect, which was lost with the Greek and Roman civilisations. There is no real equivalent of the ancient genres in 20<sup>th</sup>-century poetry. A lot of the translations and appropriations studied in this thesis involve a genre crossover, disseminating the lyric of Sappho and Catullus, their poetic personae, or fictional characters into dialogic genres. For these reasons, my analysis does not retain the ancient subdivisions unless required by the discussion.

### **The Scholarly Background to Classical Lyricism**

The last twenty years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the interest in Sappho, Catullus and their reception by Anglo-American classicists. Most recently, Josephine Balmer's book *Piecing Together the Fragments: Translating Classical Verse, Creating Contemporary Poetry* (2013) presents a critical account of Balmer's personal experience as a translator of the two ancient poets, exploring the evolving relationship between textual scholarship and translation as a creative act from antiquity to the modern day.<sup>26</sup>

Sappho's revival wave was part of a rediscovery by Gender Studies, Women Studies and Feminist scholars initiated by the groundbreaking work by Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1937* (1989).<sup>27</sup> After DeJean, Margaret Williamson's *Sappho's Immortal Daughters* (1995) attempts to reconstruct Sappho's voice through her fragments, separating the historical Sappho from her legend. Williamson argues

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<sup>25</sup> D.S. Raven, *Latin Metre: an Introduction* (London: Faber, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> In chapter 2 Balmer briefly engages also with the translations of Ezra Pound and Anne Carson, but only as an aside to her main argument. Josephine Balmer, *Piecing Together the Fragments: Translating Classical Verse, Creating Contemporary Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Greene, 'Introduction', in *Re-Reading Sappho*, ed. by Greene, pp. 1-9 (pp. 1-4). Prins provides an overview of classical scholarship on Sappho's reception in *Victorian Sappho*, pp. 3-8.

that Sappho's lyrics create the idea of 'a specifically female poetic inheritance'.<sup>28</sup> Page duBois' postmodernist interpretation of the fragments of Sappho as body-in-pieces in *Sappho Is Burning* (1995) maintains that Sappho's work is an unintelligible object of desire, characterised by absence and eternally out of reach. duBois' interpretation was useful to set certain elements of Carson's classical lyricism into the Postmodernist Feminist tradition, although I will not approach Carson's poetry from a Feminist or Gender Studies angle.<sup>29</sup>

The collections of essays edited by Ellen Greene, *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* and *Re-Reading Sappho: Reception and Transmission*, give an overview of the diverse scholarly approaches to Sappho and of the poet's reception up to the late 1990s. *Re-Reading Sappho* was the first study dealing exclusively with the subject matter of Sappho's afterlife and her reception.<sup>30</sup> While many of the essays are by Feminist scholars, the volume collects several other approaches to Sappho's afterlife.

Yopie Prins' essay 'Sappho's Afterlife in Translation' focuses on:

English translations of Sappho, using translation not only as a mode of reception but as a theoretical model for the problem of reading Sappho. Rather than reclaiming Sappho's 'original voice', I approach the Sapphic fragments as simultaneous cause and effect of translation. The moment of oral performance during Sappho's lifetime is therefore replaced by another kind of performativity: it is the performance of translation itself that ensures Sappho's afterlife.<sup>31</sup>

My investigation of the relationship between translation and classical lyricism shares Prins' premises that translation is one of the modes of reception of the classics and that the process of translation can be seen as a form of performance in itself. While Prins 'analyse[s] and historicise[s] different strategies for the constitution of Sappho

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<sup>28</sup> Williamson, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Page duBois, *Sappho Is Burning* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Greene, 'Introduction', p. 4; *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. by Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Prins, 'Sappho's Afterlife in Translation', p. 37.

as lyric subject within an English lyric tradition', my analysis and historical evaluation of the role of Sappho as a lyric archetype in relation to the four case studies adds a transnational perspective to this approach. Moreover, while Prins deals exclusively with fr. 31, I treat Sappho's entire corpus as well as Catullus' poetry. Prins also signed a monograph entitled *Victorian Sappho* (1999). The book argues that what we now call 'Sappho' is in many ways an artefact of Victorian poetics and late 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture. Much of the historical analysis contained in this book represents the background to my textual examination of Pascoli and Pound. Chapter 8 in Margaret Reynolds' *The Sappho History* (2003) gives a first insight into what she calls the 'Modernist Sappho', emerging from the appropriations of the group of poets composed of Richard Aldington, H.D. and Ezra Pound.<sup>32</sup>

The scholarship on Catullus' reception is also prolific: the New Critical interpretation by Kenneth Quinn in *The Catullan Revolution* (1959; 1999) proposes Catullus as the representative of a poetic novelty with affinities to the poetics of the 'New' promoted by Anglo-American Modernists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While I refer to Quinn's discussion of Pound's translations in Chapter 3 my approach is not New Critical.

Julia Haig Gaisser's 1993 monograph on Catullus' European reception in the Renaissance paved the way to further studies in the field. Gaisser also edited the volume *Catullus in English* (2001) gathering translations of Catullan poems from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Catullan Provocations* (1995) by Robert Fitzgerald includes a chapter on the literary fortune of Catullus in late 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature in English, exploring its relationships with performativity. Theodore Ziolkowsky's 'Anglo-American Catullus' (2007) gives an overview of the translations and

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<sup>32</sup> Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003), pp. 206-230.

appropriations of Catullus in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was useful at the preliminary stages of my research. The more recent *A Companion to Catullus* (2007) by Marilyn Skinner includes a section on Catullan Reception and one on Catullan translations. The essay by Elizabeth Vandiver ‘Translating Catullus’ focuses exclusively on translations of Catullus in English.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned above, Wiseman’s study on the historical figure and context of Catullus’ *liber* contributed to isolate the preconception behind the 19<sup>th</sup>-century interpretation of Catullus’ work with a brief excursus on the relationship of 20<sup>th</sup>-century English poets with this tradition. Prins’ monograph has a similar approach to Wiseman’s study, yet focuses on Sappho. My study considers the period immediately following Prins’ and Wiseman’s analyses of the English tradition. Considering how 20<sup>th</sup>-century classical lyricism revisits 19<sup>th</sup>-century approaches to Sappho and Catullus, I concentrate on the Italian and North American situations.

The presence of Sappho and Catullus in Italian literature is largely understudied. As Adriana Chemello notes in the introduction to her recent volume on the reception of Sappho in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian literature published in 2012, the critical attention to the literary fortune of Sappho has been very limited in Italy. The studies on the reception of Catullus are even scarcer. Comparative studies and reception are still two very small fields of Italian studies. At the same time, Italian classicists hardly ever consider classical reception. There is no comprehensive study of the legacy and reception of ancient lyric in the Italian 20<sup>th</sup> century, neither on Sappho nor on Catullus. On the Italian Studies front, the available scholarship is a minor part of the critical debate around single authors, or of wider studies on the

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<sup>33</sup> Julia Haig Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); *Catullus in English*, ed. by Julia Haig Gaisser (London: Penguin, 2001); Robert Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Theodore Ziolkowsky, ‘Anglo-American Catullus since the Mid-Twentieth Century’, *IJCT*, 13 (2007), 409-430; Elizabeth Vandiver, ‘Translating Catullus’, in *A Companion to Catullus*, ed. by Skinner, pp. 523-541.

poets' relationship with the classical tradition (I will list the monographic studies available on both the Italian and the American poets in the course of the thesis). Moreover, the studies of the classical legacy in the work of Pascoli and Quasimodo are hardly ever situated within an international context. My thesis' approach to classical lyricism, drawing the parallelism between Italy and North America is unprecedented in the field.

### **Tracing the Path of Classical Lyricism**

My methodology in this study is comparative. The analysis of classical lyricism in the two literatures was carried out first nationally and diachronically, in second instance, transnationally. In the second phase the results of each of the four case studies were compared and evaluated against the other three. Italy's and North America's disparate histories in terms of linguistic and geographical connections with Greek-Latin antiquity have allowed me to study the evolutions of classical lyricism from separate points of view, affording a more thorough picture than the exclusively national. The Anglo-American Modernists were deeply fascinated by Medieval Italian literature. Ezra Pound lived in Italy for a large part of his life; like Eliot, he studied Dante, and translated widely from Cavalcanti. At the same time, many Italian 20<sup>th</sup>-century intellectuals established a literary dialogue with the American Modernists.<sup>34</sup> As well as in the original material and the innovative analysis proposed in the single chapters, the originality of my study lies in its comparative approach. The North American example served as a foil to the Italian situation. It provided an original

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<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Luciano Anceschi, *Idea della lirica* (Milan: Edizioni di Uomo, 1945), pp. 13-15; Eugenio Montale, *Sulla poesia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), pp. 435-553 and the doctoral thesis by Doreann Lalor, 'Italian Post-War Experimentalism in the Wake of English Language Modernism' (Unpublished Thesis, University of Oxford, 2011), in *Oxford University Research Archive*, <<http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:238508c2-eb42-460a-b8c1-a01d58f15630>> [Accessed 19 July 2013].

comparison, placing the Italian tradition within an international context, and thus filling a serious gap in scholarship.

In order to draw the most accurate picture of the state of classical lyricism, the textual and historical interpretative work was supported, where possible, by archival research. Thanks to the Isaiah Berlin Scholarship, between February and April 2011 I was able to study the translations of Pascoli and the unpublished correspondence of Quasimodo. I researched the collections of Casa Pascoli (Barga), Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, Archivio del Novecento at La Sapienza University in Rome and Fondo per la Tradizione Manoscritta of Pavia University. This was a very fruitful time during which I was able to collect a wealth of unpublished manuscript material by Giovanni Pascoli and Salvatore Quasimodo. I include the transcriptions of the relevant autographs in the Appendix. This comprises two unpublished manuscripts by Pascoli containing over forty unpublished fragments of translations of Sappho and several Sapphic poetic rewritings. I have introduced, described and dated the two MSS containing this material in my forthcoming article 'Giovanni Pascoli and Sappho: Two Unpublished Manuscripts'. During my archival research I also found a lot of relevant unpublished correspondence between Salvatore Quasimodo and Luciano Anceschi regarding the composition of *Lirici greci*. While I was not able to consult Ezra Pound's manuscripts, I have nevertheless discussed the draft of Pound's unfinished opera *Collis O Heliconii* (1932-1934), transcribed for the first time in 2003 by Margaret Fisher.<sup>35</sup> Because she is still alive, there is no available archive gathering Anne Carson's papers. In 2011 I conducted an email interview with the poet enquiring into her relationship with the classical legacy, translation and the lyric. This material is also included in the Appendix.

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Third Opera: Collis O Heliconii* (Emeryville, CA: Second Evening Art, 2005).

I have avoided applying an external theoretical framework to my study. While I treat aspects of the classical tradition, classical reception and translation, I do not subscribe to any school of thought or angle my discussion according to any fixed theoretical position. If my historical and textual approach may be considered conservative, this study aims at tracing the role of Sappho's and Catullus' lyric internally to the single poetics of the four authors and in relation to their respective literary histories. I rely on a scholarly approach that builds its own original interpretative categories from the textual and historical analyses behind its studies. In certain places of my discussion I will employ some categories drawn from Reception and Translation Theory to isolate certain textual dynamics. However, I will handle these categories as a set of interpretative tools and never as top-down theoretical grids. My study in fact exploits 'classical lyricism' as an internal category of enquiry.

There is another methodological issue to be addressed. The Sapphic corpus has gone through several editions, which saw the number of fragments attributed to Sappho progressively growing throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each of the authors I consider in the thesis employs a different edition of the fragments. Giovanni Pascoli uses the third and fourth editions of Sappho's fragments edited by Theodor Bergk (1867; 1882). Ezra Pound studied Henry Wharton's *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Rendering and a Literal Translation* (1895), and read the newly found Sapphic fragments edited by John Maxuell Edmonds. The source text for the translations by Salvatore Quasimodo in *Lirici greci* is the *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* (1936) edited by Ernst Diehl, while Anne Carson mostly refers to the last edition of the fragments of Sappho by Eva-Maria Voigt.<sup>36</sup> Whenever I refer to a Sapphic fragment I employ the

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<sup>36</sup> *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, ed. by Theodor Bergk, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 3 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1866-1867), III: *Poetas Melicos* (1867) and *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, ed. by Theodor Bergk, 4<sup>th</sup> edn, 3 vols (Leipzig: Teubner, 1878-1882), III: *Poetas Melicos* (1882); *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Rendering and a Literal Translation*, ed. by Henry Thornton Wharton, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Lane, 1895), pp. 181-186; J.M.

numeric classification of the individual editions, followed by the name of the editor. Whenever possible I also give the equivalent numbering in the Voigt edition, which this thesis takes as reference text for Sappho. In each chapter, therefore, the term ‘Sapphic corpus’ or ‘source text’ refers to the extant corpus as defined by the edition employed by each poet. Since there are several extant MSS of the *liber*’s text, the textual transmission of Catullus does not present this issue. Unless the authors provide the Latin text of the lyrics discussed, throughout the study I refer to the Oxford edition of Catullus’ *carmina* edited by R. Mynors in 1958.<sup>37</sup>

### **Voicing Classical Lyricism**

The thesis is structured in four chapters. Each chapter discusses classical lyricism in the translation and poetic appropriations of one of the four case studies. The first two chapters analyse the Italian tradition, the last two the North American examples. Chapter 1 is on Giovanni Pascoli, Chapter 2 on Salvatore Quasimodo, Chapter 3 on Ezra Pound and Chapter 4 on Anne Carson. The study will consider elements of the reception of Sappho and Catullus that are linked to the single poetics of the four authors, the relationship with the authors’ translation method and theoretical approach to the classical tradition. These topics will be contextualised within the two national literary histories. Throughout the discussion and in the conclusion I will finally highlight the transnational elements that link the four types of classical lyricism under scrutiny.

Each chapter is divided into three sections: 1) a general introduction to the authors in relation to the presence of Sappho and Catullus in their work 2) a

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Edmonds, ‘Three Fragments of Sappho’, *The Classical Review*, 23.4 (1909), 99-104 and ‘More Fragments of Sappho’, *The Classical Review*, 23.5 (1909), 156-158; *Anthologia lyrica graeca*, ed. by Ernst Diehl, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Leipzig: Teubner, 1936); *Sappho et Alcaeus*, ed. by Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 1971).

<sup>37</sup> C. *Valerii Catulli Carmina*, ed. by R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958).

theoretical layout and discussion of the authors' poetics of appropriation in relation to the classical tradition, ancient lyric and translation 3) a close reading and historical discussion of textual examples drawn from published work, as well as unpublished material, in order to define the role of Sappho and Catullus within the individual authors' oeuvres.

## Chapter 1

### **Giovanni Pascoli and Classical Lyricism: the Eternal Blooming of a Poet's Mind**

*Purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro  
Languescit moriens lassove papavera collo  
Demisere caput, pluvia cum forte gravantur.  
(Virgil, Aeneid, IX, ll. 435-437)*

Giovanni Pascoli (1855 -1912) was a poet, a philologist and a keen translator of the classics; his knowledge and active command of the ancient languages was outstanding: he composed as much in Latin as he did in Italian, and his Greek epigrams stand out as refined stylistic exercises.<sup>1</sup> An intellectual investment in the classical tradition is evident in Pascoli's poetry and criticism. The matter of his *Poemi conviviali* (1904), for instance, is largely classical; his famous essay 'Il fanciullino' (1903), which illustrates the core of his poetics, argues in favour of the relevance of ancient literature to a contemporary writer.<sup>2</sup> Antiquity, the primitive and their literary manifestations are foundational to Pascoli's idea of poetry as the expression of the universal qualities of human beings throughout the ages.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The poet began to study and translate the classics in primary school, he then graduated with a dissertation on the Greek lyric poet Alcaeus and became professor of Latin and Greek language at university. Cfr. *Alceo. Tesi per la laurea* (1882), in *Prose disperse*, ed. by Giovanni Capecchi (Lanciano: Carabba, 2004), pp. 79-97; 'Cronologia', in *Poesie e prose scelte di Giovanni Pascoli*, ed. by Cesare Garboli, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), I, 85-243 and Maria Pascoli, *Lungo la vita di Giovanni Pascoli* (Milan: Mondadori, 1961), *passim*. All references to Pascoli's Latin poetry are from *Carmina*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, ed. by Manara Valgimigli (Milan: Mondadori, 1960). Luigi del Santo lists six poems in Greek by Pascoli in 'La Grecia nell'opera trilingue di Giovanni Pascoli', in *Giovanni Pascoli: poesia e poetica. Atti del convegno di studi pascoliani. San Mauro 1-2-3 Aprile 1982*, pp. 109-156 (pp. 131-137) and 'Il Carducci poeta in un epigramma greco del Pascoli', in *Pascoli. Atti del convegno nazionale di studi pascoliani. San Mauro Pascoli 11-12-13 Maggio 1962*, pp. 73-85; see also Vittorio Citti, 'L'eroe d'Italia: un inedito greco pascoliano', in *Testi ed esegesi pascoliana. Atti del convegno di studi pascoliani. San Mauro Pascoli. 23-24 maggio 1987* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1988), pp. 49-56.

<sup>2</sup> 'Il fanciullino', in *Prose di Giovanni Pascoli*, ed. by Augusto Vicinelli, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1946), I, 5-56.

<sup>3</sup> Nava, 'Pascoli e il folklore', and 'Introduzione', in *Poemi conviviali*, ed. by Giuseppe Nava (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), pp. vii-xxx (pp. xviii-xix).

Pascoli made the works of Homer, Horace, Catullus and the Greek lyric poets Sappho, Alcaeus, Pindar and Bacchylides central to his poetry; translation was the main agent of the author's deep connection with ancient epic and lyric. Beginning with his *Volgarizzamento alla Batracomiomachia* (1880) and, subsequently, in 'Regole di metrica neoclassica', over the years he built his own metrical system to reproduce Greek and Latin quantitative metres in Italian.<sup>4</sup>

In the last fifty years a large section of the scholarship on Pascoli has focused on the role of Greek and Latin literature in his poetry and language: Gianfranco Contini's essay, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli' (1955), Alfonso Traina's study of the poet's bi-lingualism, the commentaries by Cesare Garboli in *Poesie e prose scelte* (Mondadori, 2002) and by Giuseppe Nava to *Poemi conviviali* (Einaudi, 2008) devote seminal pages to the issue. From different points of view they underline with philological accuracy the vast intertextual patterns in Pascoli's opus, unfold the implications of his multi-lingual abilities for his poetry and show that the poet's approach to Greek and Latin literature was meticulous, original, and ultimately modern.<sup>5</sup>

Pascoli's translations from the classics were first collected in the posthumous volume *Traduzioni e riduzioni*, edited by his sister Maria and published in 1913.<sup>6</sup> The anthology was reissued in various revised and expanded editions until Augusto Vicinelli brought out the ninth and definitive one for 'Classici contemporanei Mondadori' in 1958. The new edition included numerous additional translations,

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<sup>4</sup> 'Negli esametri della mia traduzione si conservano le θέσεις al loro posto. Che con ciò siano piuttosto un poco somiglianti che uguali a quegli antichi', Giovanni Pascoli, 'Proemio', in *Poesie*, ed. by Augusto Vicinelli, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), IV, 1781-1782. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the vernacular poetry of Pascoli are from this edition. Cfr. Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 361-365. See also 'Regole di metrica neoclassica', in *Prose*, I, 985-1009 and Guido Capovilla, *La formazione letteraria del Pascoli a Bologna* (Bologna, CLUEB, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Gianfranco Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli (1955)', in *Poesie*, I, lxii-xcvii; Alfonso Traina, *Il latino del Pascoli: saggio sul bilinguismo poetico*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Bologna: Pàtron, 2006); Cesare Garboli, 'Al lettore', in *Poesie e prose scelte*, ed. by Garboli, I, 3-76; Nava, 'Introduzione'.

<sup>6</sup> *Traduzioni e riduzioni di Giovanni Pascoli*, ed. by Maria Pascoli (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1913).

which enlarged the corpus of the *princeps* considerably. This set text is now considered the *vulgata* of *Traduzioni e riduzioni*, to which I will hereafter refer with the abbreviation *TR*.<sup>7</sup>

The few marginal studies available on *TR* deal, mostly, with Pascoli's translations from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, respectively contained in the first two sections of the anthology.<sup>8</sup> Despite the Homeric material amounting to about a half of the entire book,<sup>9</sup> a scrutiny of the remaining sections of *TR* reveals that the epic strand dialogues with a plethora of texts representative of several other genres. Lyric, epigram and fable are the most frequent. The critics though have largely neglected the sections 'Miscellanea', 'Da Catullo-Orazio-Virgilio', 'Favole', 'Poesia popolare eroica e civile', 'Dai carmi Latini moderni'.

Greek lyric appears to be a marginal presence in the anthology. The 'Miscellanea' section includes one fragment of Anacreon, one by Alcman and only two odes of Sappho: 'Preghiera a Afrodite' and 'Dolor d'amore', the translations of fr. 1 Bergk (1 Voigt) and 2 Bergk (31 Voigt) respectively.<sup>10</sup> Critical analyses have often deemed the Sapphic translations mere exercises in metrics, therefore less representative examples of Pascoli's poetic value.<sup>11</sup> However, this evaluative

<sup>7</sup> *TR* is reprinted in *Poesie*, IV, 1527-1786.

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Siciliani, 'Giovanni Pascoli, traduttore', *La Cultura Moderna* (15 June 1913), 90-93; Gianfranco Chiodaroli, 'Il Pascoli traduttore', *Acme* (May-August 1953), 207-234; Francesco Flora, 'Classicità e impressionismo nella poesia del Pascoli', *Convivium*, new ser., 6 (1955), 641-650; Nicola Gardini, 'An Ancient Soul in a New Body: Giovanni Pascoli's Homeric Translations', *Italian Studies* 66 (2011), 55-71. Giacomo Devoto, 'Problemi delle traduzioni pascoliane', in *Studi per il centenario della nascita di Giovanni Pascoli, pubblicati nel cinquantenario della morte. Convegno bolognese (28-30 marzo 1958)*, 2 vols (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1962), II, 57-68; Pietro Giannini, 'Le traduzioni metriche di G. Pascoli', in *Teorie e forme del tradurre in versi dall'Ottocento fino a Carducci: atti del convegno internazionale, Lecce, 2-4 Ottobre 2009*, ed. by Andrea Carrozzini (Lecce: Congedo, 2010), pp. 379-396; Mario Bianchi, 'Oltre il limitare: l'Omero adulto di Giovanni Pascoli. Le traduzioni pascoliane dell'*Iliade* e la questione della metrica neoclassica', *RP*, 23 (2011), 9-30.

<sup>9</sup> From p. 1533 to p. 1628.

<sup>10</sup> The Alcman translation, 'Notte', is an addition of Vicinelli to the 1958 edition.

<sup>11</sup> L. Fiorentino, 'Pascoli traduttore e riduttore', in *Pascoli: atti del convegno nazionale di studi pascoliani, San Mauro Pascoli 11-12-13 maggio 1962*, pp. 87-103 (p. 98); Manara Valgimigli, 'Traduttori vecchi e nuovi' (1946), in *Uomini e scrittori del mio tempo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), pp. 203-210 (p. 206); Giannini, p. 379.

approach distracts from the significance of these translations as testimonies of Pascoli's reception of Sappho.

The history of the composition and the printed text of *Traduzioni e riduzioni* is tortuous. A critical edition of this volume is still to be born, and the secondary literature in the area is limited. As Francesco Citti remarks in his preparatory article to the national edition 'al momento attuale gli interrogativi che si presentano a chi si accinge a por mano all'edizione di questa significativa raccolta sono più numerosi delle risposte certe.'<sup>12</sup> *TR* is the only available printed collection of Pascoli's translations. As far as the *princeps* edition is concerned, we do not know whether the poet left any specifications regarding the criteria of publication to his sister Maria before his death, or to what extent Maria intervened in the compilation. While *TR* augments the canon set by the *princeps* edition of the anthology, it does not collect the entire corpus of Pascoli's poetic translations, and excludes all translations in prose. Moreover, several translations still lie unpublished in the Archivio di Casa Pascoli in Castelvechio, including versions from ancient and modern authors.<sup>13</sup>

As my forthcoming article 'Pascoli and Sappho: Two Unpublished Manuscripts' demonstrates, the limited representation of Sappho in *TR* is misleading.

<sup>12</sup> Francesco Citti, 'In margine alla edizione di *Traduzioni e riduzioni*', *RP*, 19 (2007), 33-70 (pp. 6-70). Cfr. Francesco Citti, 'In margine all'edizione di *Traduzioni e riduzioni* (2)', *RP*, 22 (2010), 21-59.

<sup>13</sup> Francesco Citti lists some of the prose translations excluded from *TR* and some of the unpublished papers in 'In margine', p. 46: 'Nell'archivio di Castelvechio le versioni poetiche appaiono disseminate non solo nelle cassette specificamente dedicate alle traduzioni (come ad esempio LXX 8 e 9 soprattutto da Callimaco, Catullo, Omero, Orazio, Saffo, Teocrito, Virgilio; LXXI 4 da Aristofane e Orazio; LXXI 5 da Orazio; LXXIV 3 da Saffo, La favola, Batracomiomachia e L'invenzione di Orlando; LXXVIII 3-4 da Publilio Siro; LXXXIII copie di Maria delle traduzioni oraziane), ma anche in quelle che raccolgono i materiali di *Antico sempre nuovo* (LXV 1-2), e i vari corsi su Teocrito, Virgilio, la metrica, la grammatica greca e latina. Ne sono già emerse le riduzioni da Poe e Heine, pubblicate dallo Schinetti [P. Schinetti, 'Pagine inedite di Giovanni Pascoli', *Il Secolo XX* (May 1912)], dagli *Uccelli* di Aristofane [Vittorio Citti, 'Quella portentosa fantasmagoria. Un frammento di traduzione aristofanea dalle carte del Pascoli', *RP*, 3 (1991), 155-188] da Omero e Apollonio Rodio, comprese nel corso *Come la poesia epica degeneri naturalmente in eroicomica*. [Cfr. A. Da Rin, *Pascoli e la poesia epica. Un inedito corso universitario di Giovanni Pascoli* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1998)]. Subsequently some of the autographs were published in journals: Francesco Citti and C. Neri, 'Abbozzi pascoliani inediti da Teofrasto (*Caratteri* 23 e 24)', *Eikasmos*, 20 (2009), 337-364; Francesco Citti, 'Due traduzioni oraziane giovanili di Giovanni Pascoli', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 82 (2011), 211-220.

As part of the research supporting this thesis I conducted a targeted scrutiny of the holdings of the Archive of Casa Pascoli in Castelveccchio. There I found two manuscripts containing numerous translated fragments of Sappho and several Sapphic appropriations written by Pascoli in the early 1880s. The first one is the notebook ‘Studi di traduzione | dal Greco’. It comprises thirtynine translations from Sappho’s fragments including two versions of fr. 1 Bergk and one of fr. 2 Bergk, which differ completely from ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ and ‘Dolor d’amore’. The second autograph, folio 8<sup>r-v</sup>, is a single sheet of paper including a poetic translation of Sappho’s fr. 3 Bergk (34 Voigt) followed by a brief commentary and a series of rewritings in Italian of fr. 109 Bergk (114 Voigt).<sup>14</sup> My article describes the MSS, dates them and provides an interpretative transcription of the autographs, which I incorporate in Appendix 1 and 2. Several other notebooks with scholarly annotations on Sappho, her history and legend also emerged from my archival research.<sup>15</sup> This shows that Pascoli translated the larger part of the extant Sapphic canon from an early age. While the *poema conviviale* ‘Solon’ (1895), which contains two Sapphic pastiches, has been widely

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<sup>14</sup> I here follow the autographs classification of the Archivio di Casa Pascoli, Castelveccchio Pascoli, Comune di Barga: the number in Roman numerals refers to the box in which the autographs are located, the number in Arabic numerals to the sub-folder. Cfr. Archivio di Casa Pascoli box LXXIV, file 3 ‘Quaderni Vari’, n. 8, fols 159-176 and LXX, 9, fol. 8<sup>r-v</sup>. For these early translations Pascoli employed the third edition of Sappho’s fragments by Theodor Bergk (1867). For the later translations in *Lyra* and ‘Solon’ Pascoli adopted Bergk’s fourth edition (1882). As Vittorio Citti has shown in ‘La ricezione dell’antico nei *Poemi conviviali*’, in *I Poemi conviviali di Giovanni Pascoli, atti del Convegno di studi di San Mauro Pascoli e Barga, 26-29 settembre 1996*, pp. 99-131 (p. 109). Since there are no substantive variants of the fragments I discuss in this chapter between the third and the fourth edition, I will always refer to the text of the fourth 1882 Bergk edition.

<sup>15</sup> See the notebook ‘ΨΑΠΦΑ’ (LVIII, 13, fols 7-15), containing a study on Sappho and Phaon; a second notebook (LXXXI, 3, fols 97-99; 104-119); a single sheet with a series of Sapphic fragments in the original Greek (LXXXI, 3, fol. 129); the notebook ‘Saffo’ (LXXIV, 3, fols 1-15) including biographical information on the poet and scholarly notes on her poetry. cursory mentions of Sappho also in XXI, 5, fol. 5; fol. 8; LXXX, 3, fol. 11; fol. 233. Cfr. Cecilia Piantanida, ‘Pascoli and Sappho: Two Unpublished Manuscripts’, *Filologia Italiana*, 10 (2013), 181-214, *passim*.

studied, Sappho's overall reception in Pascoli's oeuvre has received very little critical attention.<sup>16</sup>

As is the case for Catullus and Horace,<sup>17</sup> around which the anthology *Lyra romana* (1895) and the two *saturae* in Latin *Catullo calvos* (1897) and *Fanum vacunae* (1910) revolve, Sappho inhabits not only Pascoli's vernacular poetry, but also his criticism and his Latin verse.<sup>18</sup> The autographs are to be added to the rest of the Sapphic material scattered throughout Pascoli's poetry and prose. Garboli's re-evaluation of the poet's juvenilia in *Poesie e prose di Giovanni Pascoli* for the first time pointed at the poet's orientation towards Lesbian lyric during his last years at university in Bologna (1873-1882). Pascoli wrote his dissertation on Alcaeus (1882); the essay also provided several translations in prose of the fragments of Sappho. The two poems 'Ἔρω τὸν Ἀδωνί' (1881) and 'Epitalamio Lesbico' (1882), which are built on different translations of Sapphic fragments, date from the same period.<sup>19</sup> 'Solon' sprung from Pascoli's reflections on the poetry of Sappho, her myth and the impact of her poetry on the Western poetic tradition. It was written during the compilation of *Lyra romana* and roughly at the same time as *Catullo calvos*. The introductory essay to *Lyra romana*, 'Storia della poesia lirica in Roma sino alla morte di Orazio', included a prose cento of several Sapphic fragments.<sup>20</sup> 'Preghiera a Afrodite' and

<sup>16</sup> The interest has focused primarily on the Sapphic presence in 'Solon'. Luigi Siciliani, 'I Poemi conviviali di Giovanni Pascoli', *Atene e Roma*, 90-91 (1906), 161-91; G. Bonfante, 'Pascoli e Saffo', *Italica*, 24 (1944), 21-24; Carlo del Grande, 'Pascoli e i poeti greci', in *Pascoli: discorsi nel centenario della nascita* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1955), pp. 283-306 (pp. 296-97); Giacomo Debenedetti, 'Solon', in *Pascoli: la rivoluzione inconsapevole* (Milan: Garzanti, 1979), pp. 197-264; P. Gibellini, 'Saffo, Catullo & Co.', in *Dicibilità del sublime*, ed. by T. Kemeny (Udine: Campanotto, 1990), pp. 209-216; Vittorio Citti, 'Solon e la ricezione dell'antico', *RP*, 8 (1996), 63-80 and 'I poemi conviviali', pp. 104-126; Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, pp. 9-20.

<sup>17</sup> Manara Valgimigli, 'Poesia e poetica di Giovanni Pascoli', in *Uomini e scrittori del mio tempo*, pp. 131-143 (p. 142).

<sup>18</sup> Given the limited space of this chapter, my analysis here focuses exclusively on Pascoli's works in Italian.

<sup>19</sup> In Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 369-379; cfr. Cesare Garboli, 'Pascoli Lesbico', *Paragone: Letteratura*, 11-12 (1997), 3-8.

<sup>20</sup> In this order, fragments 29, 62, 68, 4, 54, 53, 52, 39, 88, 90, 85, 38, 42, 93-95 Bergk compose the cento. Cfr. Giovanni Pascoli, 'La poesia lirica in Roma: commentario primo' (1899), in *Lyra*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn

‘Dolor d’amore’ were published for the first time in an expanded version of the introduction entitled ‘La poesia lirica in Roma: commentario primo’. The new essay prefaced the revised edition of the anthology, issued with the new title *Lyra* in 1899. The two Sapphic odes were then reprinted in the *princeps* and following editions of *TR*.<sup>21</sup>

Widening the canon of *TR*, the material presented by my article calls for a re-definition of the key-role played by Lesbian poetry in the development of Pascoli’s lyricism. The paper enucleates two correlated Sapphic periods in Pascoli’s oeuvre. The first one, to which ‘Ὡ τὸν Ἄδωνιν’, ‘Epitalamio Lesbio’ and the MS translations belong, coincides with Pascoli’s university and Matera years (1880-1884); the second one spans from 1895 to 1899, during which Pascoli worked as professor of classics at Bologna and Messina university and wrote the cento of *Lyra romana*, ‘Solon’ and the two Sapphic translations.<sup>22</sup>

Folio 8<sup>r-v</sup>, exemplifying Pascoli’s poetic laboratory and his appropriation technique, reveals the connection of Sapphic poetry with Pascolian images of defloration through floral representations. It shows how Pascoli integrates the Sapphic hymenaic material into his Italian poetry. Pascoli translates Sappho’s fr. 109 Bergk and subsequently incorporates it into different poetic rewritings through a series of word substitutions. The invocation to ‘Παρθενία’ in Sappho’s epithalamion is first translated with the vocative ‘Verginità’. In Pascoli’s following rewritings of the fragment, the word ‘Verginità’ is substituted by means of a poetic analogy with the phrase ‘Botton di rosa’ (cfr. Appendix 2).

What is particularly telling of this series of substitutions by analogy is that

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(Livorno: Giusti, 1915), pp. xiii-lxxxix, now in *Prose*, I, 645-766 (pp. 661-64). Hereafter I will refer to this essay with the abbreviation ‘Commentario’.

<sup>21</sup> Garboli, I, 1169.

<sup>22</sup> See ‘Cronologia’, pp. 173-196.

Pascoli employs the phrase ‘Botton di rosa’ also in a poem from the cycle ‘Nelle nozze di Ida’ (1895), which mirrors the hymenaic context of the Sapphic lines. The reworkings of folio 8<sup>r-v</sup> demonstrate a direct link between the hymenaic poetry of Sappho and Pascoli’s representation of blooming as a poetic symbol of eroticism, defloration and poetic creation. Comparing the language and imagery of the autographs with Pascoli’s vernacular poetry in *Myricae* (1891-1903) and *Poemetti* (1897), I showed that the relationship between Sappho’s poetry and the sexual theme in Pascoli is characterised by a generative linear progression: eroticism / Sapphic lyricism => phytomorphic analogy => poetic creation. Pascoli’s use of floral analogies, which connote the woman as a flower and an object of frustrated desire, as well as the creative act, I argue, should be placed within a Sapphic framework.

This chapter will for the first time study the Sapphic strand within Pascoli’s oeuvre. I will analyse the Sapphic autographs in comparison to the largely acknowledged Catullan strand in Pascoli’s poetry. The translations of Sappho and Catullus will be situated within the broader context of Pascoli’s poetics, especially focusing on their relation to his general poetic translation theories. I will finally analyse the Sapphic / Catullan strand’s intersections with folklore, ritual, and Pascoli’s use of floral imagery as symbol of eroticism and poetic creation.

In section 1 I will define the role of the classical legacy in Pascoli’s poetics; in section 2.1 I will trace the Sapphic strand, comparing translations of *TR* with the *MSS*; in section 2.2 I will carry out an evaluation of the Catullan strand against Pascoli’s reception of Sappho, and in section 3 I will discuss Pascoli’s classical lyricism in relation to his oeuvre and poetic voice.

## 1. Looking for the Primitive: the Classical Legacy and Translation

From the ‘Nota per gli insegnanti’ included in the school anthology *Sul limitare* (1900) we know that the translations contained in the *princeps* edition of *TR* were organised by Pascoli to be published as a section of a volume called *Regole e saggi di metrica neoclassica, con una lettera a Giuseppe Chiarini* written between 1896 and 1899.<sup>60</sup> The first part of the book was printed in 1900, but the volume was never published in its entirety. It comprises the letter to Chiarini, followed by the essay on the rules of neoclassical metrics. From the 1900 typescript we know that the second part of the book would have included the translations now gathered in *TR*, providing some practical exempla of Pascoli’s metrical theory:

Ecco alcune prove di traduzione dal Greco e dal latino. Le presento ai miei giovani colleghi delle scuole classiche, non come modelli da imitare, ma come tentativi da migliorare. Si leggano le *Note metriche* in fondo al volume. G.P.<sup>61</sup>

The letter ‘A Chiarini’ and the ‘Regole’ were published without the translations for the first time in 1925 in the volume edited by Maria, *Antico sempre nuovo*.<sup>62</sup> Most translations in *TR* were first published in school anthologies edited by Pascoli between 1895 and 1903: *Lyra romana* (1895, then *Lyra* 1899; 1903; 1911) and *Epos* (1897) on lyric and epic Latin poetry, and the ones dedicated to the Italian tradition: *Sul limitare* (1900; 1901; 1906) and *Fior da fiore* (1901; 1902).<sup>63</sup>

The didactic dimension and the practical connection to the metrical treatise that provided the original contexts to Pascoli’s translations are evidently lost in *TR*.

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Nota per gli insegnanti’, in *Sul limitare* (1900) (Milan: Sandron, 1924), pp. xxix-xxxi (p. xxxi). On metrical aspects in Pascoli see the commentary to the single poems by Maurizio Perugi in *Giovanni Pascoli: Opere*, ed. by Maurizio Perugi, 2 vols (Milan: Ricciardi, 1981), *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> *Prose*, I, 1009.

<sup>62</sup> ‘A Giuseppe Chiarini’ and ‘Regole di metrica neoclassica’, in *Prose*, I, 904-976 and 985-1009 respectively. Cfr. Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, II, 180-184; Felicita Audisio, ‘Pascoli: metrica “neoclassica” e metrica italiana’, *La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana*, 8<sup>th</sup> ser., 3 (1995), 34-91.

<sup>63</sup> Francesco Citti, ‘In margine’, pp. 34-37. Giovanni Pascoli, *Fior da Fiore* (Palermo: Sandron, 1900) and *Epos* (Livorno: Giusti, 1897).

Yet Pascoli believed that practising translation spurs language acquisition and poetic creativity. In his view, teaching the ancient languages meant training the students to translate them. On the occasion of his new appointment as professor of Greek and Latin grammar at the University of Pisa, Pascoli affirmed that his task as a teacher was ‘to translate’. According to Pascoli, the best translations maintain the source texts’ proportion of diction, content and form:

Dobbiamo, insomma, osservare, traducendo, la stessa proporzione che è nel testo, del pensiero con la forma, dell’anima col corpo, del di dentro col di fuori. A ciò bisogna studiare e ingegnarsi: svecchiare, sovente, ciò che nella nostra lingua pareva morto; trovare, non di rado, qualche cosa che nella nostra letteratura non è ancora.<sup>64</sup>

A translator concerned with adherence should revive the obsolete aspects of his own language (‘svecchiare [...] ciò che [...] pareva morto’), and, when required, find new linguistic solutions (‘trovare [...] qualche cosa che [...] non è ancora’).<sup>65</sup> Translation therefore becomes a discovery of an equivalent dimension in the source and target language as well as of the creative potential hidden within the Italian.

This potential corresponds to that which ‘nella letteratura greca e romana è in alcuni scrittori o almeno in alcuni scritti ciò che si può chiamare l’eterno, che è sempre nuovo’ (‘La mia scuola di grammatica’, p. 253). Through the confrontation with the past, translation leads to a fuller knowledge of the state of the present. Through the comparative process of translation the poet’s self-awareness is heightened and the appraisal of the ‘eternal’ qualities of language is enabled. The ‘eternal that is always new’ defines ‘the poetic’ through the ages, whereby the poet-translator finds an equivalent of the past text in the present language. Considering

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<sup>64</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, ‘La mia scuola di grammatica’ (1903), in *Prose*, I, 241-263 (p. 247).

<sup>65</sup> This notion has two illustrious precedents in Horace, *Ars Poetica*, ll. 60-73 in *Q. Horati Flacci Opera*, ed. by D.R. Shackelton Bailey, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1995) (hereafter all references to Horace will be from this edition) and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, IX, i, ll. 11-14 in *M. Fabi Quintiliani Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim*, ed. by M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).

ancient texts as archetypal examples of ‘the poetic’, Pascoli almost exclusively translated from the ancient languages. The essay ‘Il fanciullino’ reads:

Tu sei antichissimo, o fanciullo! E vecchissimo è il mondo che tu vedi nuovamente e primitivo il ritmo [...] col quale tu, in certo modo, lo culli o lo danzi! Come sono stolti quelli che vogliono ribellarsi all’una o all’altra di queste due necessità, cha paiono cozzare tra loro: veder nuovo e veder da antico, e dire ciò che non s’è mai detto e dirlo come sempre si è detto e si dirà. (pp. 17-18)

The *fanciullino* is the faculty enabling poets to approach reality as a child who sees the world for the first time, speaking a new language. As a remnant of the primitive quality of human beings, the *fanciullino* is paradoxically defined ‘antichissimo’. As Nava’s studies underline, the poetics of the *fanciullino* and Pascoli’s preoccupation with the ancients spring from the poet’s all-encompassing fascination with the recovery of ‘the primitive’ as a locus of the essential qualities of men. Ultimately, for Pascoli the poet is the privileged person who can discover the eternal qualities of human beings and mould them into an aesthetic dimension.<sup>66</sup>

On the one hand, influenced by the sociological studies of James Sully and Herbert Spencer, Pascoli saw in popular culture and folklore the roots of the returning human interest in birth, death and marriage. Through the dialects, proverbs, and popular songs of rural populations, ‘si è venuto esprimendo attraverso i secoli “quel fanciullino collettivo che è il popolo”’.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, ‘Il Pascoli filtra il dato folclorico attraverso le fonti classiche.’<sup>68</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the birth of comparative philology, with Italian scholars such as Domenico Comparetti and Pio Rajna, and of the comparative anthropology of Max Müller and Salomon Reinach, provided the framework to Pascoli’s syncretic approach to his sources.<sup>69</sup> In his view,

<sup>66</sup> Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>67</sup> Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, p. 522.

<sup>68</sup> Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, p. 534.

<sup>69</sup> Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, p. 525; p. 541.

literature is a universal system finding different expressions in the single national literatures throughout time. The ‘fanciullino’, the primitive, and the ancient as three forms of expression of the human basis of literary tradition inform Pascoli’s investment in the poetry of Sappho and Catullus.

The principle of ‘equivalence in difference’ between source and target language characteristic of Pascoli’s translation theory was formalised in 1959 by Roman Jakobson’s study ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’. Jacobson’s essay was followed by George Mounin’s *La machine à traduire: histoire des problèmes linguistiques* (1964). They both argue that equivalence in translation is based on ‘universals’. Going a step forward, J.C. Catford’s *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965) affirms that ‘translation equivalence occurs when an SL [source language] and a TL [target language] text or item are relatable to (at least some of) the same features of substance’. All these studies assume the general stability of the source text.<sup>70</sup>

If for Mounin and Catford the common ‘substance’ would be defined by a series of linguistic and cultural features, for Pascoli the basis of the equivalence between source and target text is primarily aesthetic. Aesthetic equivalence is achieved through formal and linguistic approximation. In order to attain a degree of formal approximation, Pascoli devised his system of neoclassical metrics. He pursued linguistic adherence structurally—by use of syntactic calques and by a scrupulous linguistic interpretation of the source. In fact, for Pascoli the source text was not a stable entity. As far as Sappho is concerned, Pascoli employed different editions of the Sapphic corpus as they were issued throughout the years. Secondly, Pascoli would

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<sup>70</sup> Roman Jakobson, ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, in *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 428-435; George Mounin, *La machine à traduire: histoire des problèmes linguistiques* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964); J.C. Catford, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: an Essay in Applied Linguistics* (London: OUP, 1965), p. 50; Lawrence Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 139.

often dig into the critical apparatus of the editions to recover the ‘etymological sense’ of the words he was translating. This emerges from both his Homeric and, as I will show below, his Sapphic versions.<sup>71</sup> Translation thus appears as a teleological and archeological attempt at recovering the original meaning of the source text.

The aesthetic principle behind Pascoli’s translation theory envisages a hierarchical view of poetry and translation in which poetic value is embodied in the ‘eternal’ and authentic qualities of a text. Pascoli’s fascination with spontaneity, popular forms of expression and archetypes are akin to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theories of the primitive, which were also assimilated by the Romantics.<sup>72</sup> William Wordsworth’s notion that ‘The Child is father of the Man’ is based on a paradox akin to the theories of the *fanciullino* as the conscience of the poet beholding the surrounding reality.<sup>73</sup> These ideas are some of the key cultural references informing the interpretative horizon of Pascoli’s translations.<sup>74</sup>

Believing in the inherent primacy of the past over the present, Pascoli is concerned with highlighting the similarities and the recurring patterns between past and present cultures:

Consoliamoci con la considerazione che il nuovo [...] proposto come esempio non è poi tanto utile. Meglio vivificare l’antico, ché da questo viene l’ispirazione, da quello non scende che l’imitazione; e l’imitazione uccide, mentre l’ispirazione crea. (‘Nota per gli insegnanti’, p. xxx)

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<sup>71</sup> Fiorentino, pp. 94-98.

<sup>72</sup> Cfr. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, ‘Discours sur les sciences et les arts’ (1750) and ‘Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes’ (1755), in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Launay, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1971), II: *Oeuvres philosophiques et politiques*: pp. 52-68; 204-261. Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Heritage of Rousseau* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> ‘My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold’ (l. 7), in *Wordsworth’s Poetical Works*, ed. by E.D.E. Selincourt (Oxford: OUP, 1940), p. 226; Pascoli translated Wordsworth’s poem ‘We Are Seven’ (*Wordsworth’s Poetical Works*, pp. 236-238) in *Fior da Fiore*. The translation is reprinted in ‘Miscellanea’ as ‘Siamo sette’, p. 1729.

<sup>74</sup> Cfr. Gianfranco Contini, ‘Giovanni Pascoli’, in *Letteratura dell’Italia unita, 1861-1968* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), pp. 249-253 (p. 250).

Here is the notion that what is past can teach something useful. The new enters the didactic dimension only when it is a re-appropriation of the memories of antiquity, a re-embodiment of what is dead forever. Elena Salibra remarks that ‘Il tecnicismo *vivificare* si ricollega al concetto espresso nel “Fanciullino” che “il nuovo non si inventa, si scopre”, attraverso la personificazione di ciò che è assente o morto o di ciò che è inanimato’.<sup>75</sup> The connection of translation with revivification adds a ritualistic aspect to the process. The translator is the agent of a repeated ritual of re-enactment of an unrecoverable dead past, through which the poet discovers poetic creation. Yet the revivification is never complete. Pascoli in fact states the impossibility of bringing past writers back to life:

Saranno [gli scrittori] ben altro nelle nostre, di quel che nelle loro pagine: oh! sì, morti spesso o sempre, invece che vivi; ombre e non corpi; ma le ombre assomigliano ai corpi perfettamente: le ombre come degli eroi così dei poeti conservano nell’Elisio gli stessi gusti che avevano in terra. Se vogliamo evocarli nella nostra lingua, essi, quando obbediscano, vogliono essere e parere quel che furono. (‘La mia scuola di grammatica’, p. 250)

The process leading from source to target language represents a literary ritual re-enactment of past texts. The products of these re-enactments are shadows of the past, which populate the target text through the contact with the source text. Translation is thus activation and actualisation of memory. The memory of the ancient past and the primitive lost childhood are the realm of the poetic to such an extent that their re-enactment becomes the necessary condition for poetry itself. The present constitutes the vehicle of this process, but never a poetic dimension.

The notion of the past’s aesthetic primacy over the present develops from a view of literature conceived on a diachronic, vertical line. Its counterpart would be the Modernist visualisation of literature on a synchronic and horizontal plane. Pascoli’s

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<sup>75</sup> Elena Salibra, ‘Modelli letterari e modelli linguistici nelle antologie italiane’, in *Voci in fuga: poeti italiani del primo novecento* (Naples: Liguori, 2005), pp. 87-126 (pp. 87-88).

view, though, does not coincide with the hierarchical idea typical of 19<sup>th</sup>-century classicism. The poet does not regard the ancients as an ultimate ideal of perfection to imitate. He rather invites his students to shun mimesis. He favours the exploration of one's own identity by means of a poetic re-enactment of the past. Consequentially, translation should never be imitation, but rather a creative act of discovery. Referring to Catullus, Pascoli comments: 'Egli tradusse per esprimere il sentimento nuovo che l'invadeva tutto' ('Commentario', p. 692). Pascoli did the same in that translation is the main vehicle of exchange between the ancient languages and his own poetry.

While the *fanciullino* may stand as the father of the poet, Pascoli considers the classical tradition as a mother:

Si riconosce col sorriso una madre che ci arrise qualche millennio prima che nascessimo. L'uomo sente allora per quali misteriose fibre sia congiunto all'umanità che fu e quella che sarà, e comincia a consolarsi non solo dell'essere nato come tanti altri, che morirono, ma anche del dover morire lasciando tanta parte di sé ad altri che nasceranno.  
[...] Non solo ricordare e onorare i morti, ma ripensare il pensiero di una madre buona [...] come potrà dirsi inutile o disutile? È natura: a lei non vogliate contrastare. [...] Un popolo che non cerchi sé stesso nel suo passato non c'è.<sup>76</sup>

The translation of the classics becomes a key moment of self-exploration.

Establishing an indispensable dialogue with the lyric poets of antiquity, translating ultimately is an ethical stance.

For Pascoli poetry has a consolatory function because it is memory of the dead. Yet the memory is contingent on the survival of the song of the poet: 'il problema della morte delle parole lo ossessiona tanto quanto il problema della morte delle creature'.<sup>77</sup> Pascoli's positivistic intellectual attitude is counterbalanced by his strong awareness of the fleeting quality of human nature, the transient existence of

<sup>76</sup> 'Prefazione da *Lyra romana* (1894)', in Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 1042-1051 (pp. 1045-1048). See the reference to Virgil's Eclogue IV, l. 60: 'Incipe, parve puer risu cognoscere matrem', in 'Si riconosce col sorriso una madre.' *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. by R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli', p. lxxxvi.

civilisations and their languages: ‘Dov’è la lingua che nasce viva, non morta o morente?’<sup>78</sup> As Nava and Daniela Baroncini note there is a Nietzschean aspect of eternal return of death in Pascoli’s approach to the classical tradition; a modern contradictory anxiety and awareness of caducity working against the regenerating power of poetry.<sup>79</sup> The song of the poet can be made present only by a fading memory. In the end, even poetry dissolves, is lost, and eventually forgotten.<sup>80</sup>

The notion of the transitory nature of existence and of art governed by θάνατος ἄθάνατος can be found in *TR*, too. The themes of death and of passing time are the most persistent undercurrents in the compilation,<sup>81</sup> together with the semantic area of children, or ‘fanciullini’,<sup>82</sup> and the ever-present interest in the Myricaeen *arbusta*. ‘Si noti la scelta [...] quasi istintiva della maggior parte delle poesie e dei brani da lui tradotti: eroi, fanciulli, madre, natura, morte. Ciò che Egli più ammirava, ciò che più amava, ciò che più pensava’, Maria advised in her note to the reader of *Traduzioni e riduzioni*.<sup>83</sup> Death being the definitive condition of man, love must express itself against it. So Eros is ‘fratello della morte’—as Pascoli explicates in his introduction to *Lyra*.<sup>84</sup> The two Sapphic odes ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ and ‘Dolor d’Amore’ insert themselves in this dialectic between *eros* and *thanatos*.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Il ritorno’ (1896), in Capecci, pp. 287-297 (p. 292).

<sup>79</sup> Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, pp. xxi-xxiii and Daniela Baroncini, ‘Pascoli e l’inquietudine del classico’, *RP*, 15 (2003), 9-22 (p. 21).

<sup>80</sup> ‘Il ritorno’, p. 293.

<sup>81</sup> On death: Callinus, ‘Si muore!’; Tyrtaeus, ‘La morte più bella’; Anacreon, ‘La pura della morte’; Catullus, ‘Alla tomba del fratello’; Aesop, ‘La disperazione delle lepri’; from the *Chanson de Roland*, ‘La morte del conte Orlando’; Eduard Bauernfeld, ‘La camicina da morto’; José Antonio Calcaño, ‘Il cipresso’; William Wordsworth, ‘Siamo sette’. On time passing: Hesiod, ‘Ecco gli uomini simili al vecchio ch’ha tre piedi’ (‘L’inverno’), Theognis, ‘Stolidi gli uomini [...] che piangono i morti, | [...] non la giovinezza che va.’ (‘Tristezze e sorrisi amari’); Horace, ‘Pensiamo a vivere’; Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Il tempo che fu’.

<sup>82</sup> Hesiod, ‘L’aratura’: ‘L’uomo ch’è savio per sé, può dire: “Mi fabbrico un carro”; | bimbo, che non sa già: “Son cento gli aggeggi del carro | cui procurar fa d’uopo da prima ed avere per casa”’; Wordsworth, ‘Siamo sette’: ‘E non arriva alla dolce fanciulla dal tenero corpo’. From popular Greek and Illirian songs, ‘Per il mondo’.

<sup>83</sup> Maria Pascoli, ‘Al lettore’, in *Poesie*, IV, 1529.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Commentario’, p. 655.

## 2.1 Sappho and the Blooming Flowers of Dusk

When first published in the ‘Commentario’ of *Lyra*, the translations of Sappho ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ and ‘Dolor d’amore’ were introduced by a cento of prose translations of several other Sapphic fragments, giving a picturesque description of Lesbian poetry and society.<sup>85</sup> In the cento, Pascoli envisages the two odes as ruins of an ancient temple of which ‘due solo statue sono intere o quasi’: fr. 1 Bergk and 2 Bergk were the only two poems by Sappho still extant in almost complete form at the time Pascoli was writing.<sup>86</sup>

E qual incanto a un’occhiata che si getti sui frammenti di Sappho la bella. Essi danno l’immagine d’una rovina d’un bel tempio antico: due sole statue sono intere o quasi; del resto rimane qualche capitello, qualche pezzo di fregio, qualche scheggia di bassorilievo, una mano, un piccolo piede; tutto a terra. Tra l’edera e i rovi essi biancheggiano, e gli usignoli hanno posto qua e là il loro nido di foglie secche; e la luna piena illumina il luogo misterioso e una fonte gorgoglia e il vento stormisce tra gli alberi. Lunghe file di vergini e fanciulli si vedono passare, se pure non sono nuvole bianche così tenui che ne trasparisce l’azzurro del cielo. Una stella d’oro è nel cielo; e si sente un grido, lontanissimo e quasi vano, ripetuto da gracili voci: *Hymenaon, Hymenaon*. Ma a volte passa un’ondata di dolore e di passione: ‘Muore, Cytherea, il molle Adonis: che facciamo? palma a palma, o fanciulle, battete; stracciate le tuniche. *O ton Adonin!*’ Quanto tempo è passato! come esso qui ha mostrata la sua potenza, abbattendo, seppellendo, distruggendo! Eppure: ‘Intorno il vento fresco sussurra tra i rami del melo, e allo stormir delle foglie fluisce il sonno profondo—donne di Creta così bellamente una volta danzavano coi piedi delicati intorno all’amenò altare, calcando molli il tenero fior dell’erba—piena appariva la luna, ed esse come stettero presso l’altare... —è tramontata la luna e le Pleiadi, è mezza notte, il tempo passa, e io dormo sola— il nunzio di primavera, l’usignuolo della voce d’amore... —che cosa a me, cara rondinella di Pandione? ...’ La fantasia compie il frammento che sorride intero, per un istante, come un’apparizione, e poi vanisce lasciandoci della grazia nel cuore. Ecco la fanciulla innamorata: ‘Dolce madre, no non posso tessere questa tela, domata dall’amore d’un giovinetto, per la molle Aphrodite.’ Ecco una bambina: ‘Io ho una bella bimba, che ha la grazia dei fiori d’oro, Cleis l’amata, per la quale io né la Lydia tutta né l’amabile...’ E che cosa di più forte e gentile di questi tocchi? ‘come una bimba corro alla madre battendo le ali— Amore mi scorre il cuore, vento che nel monte si gettò sulle quercie—come il dolce pomo arrossa in cima al ramo, in cima del ramo più in cima; se ne dimenticarono i coglitori; no, non se ne dimenticarono, ma non poterono

<sup>85</sup> ‘Commentario’, pp. 661-666.

<sup>86</sup> These are preceded by another prose translation of fr. 29b (138 Voigt): ‘Stammi in faccia, caro, e spandimi la grazia che hai negli occhi.’

arrivarvi—come il giacinto nei monti i pastori pestano coi piedi e a terra rosseggia il fiore... —Espero, tu porti quanto disperse l’aurora, porti l’agnella, porti la capra, riporti alla madre il suo ragazzo’. Qual dolcezza ingenua di lode, che sa di convivio nuziale, in queste espressioni, ‘più bianca dell’ovo, più oro dell’oro’!

Sappho la bella non è morta e non morrà mai; ella non è davvero quella di cui parlo così: ‘Morta tu giacerai, una volta; e memoria di te non sarà né allora né poi; ché non sei partecipe delle rose della Pieria; e anzi oscura nelle case dell’Invisibile andrai coi ciechi morti svolazzando’.  
(‘Commentario’, pp. 662-664)

In this order, fragments 29, 62, 68, 4, 54, 53, 52, 39, 88, 90, 85, 38, 42, 93-95, 68b

Bergk compose the cento.<sup>87</sup> The two odes and the cento belong to the second Sapphic nucleus in Pascoli’s work dating to the years 1895-1899. Most of the published material on Sappho by Pascoli belongs to this period. The first nucleus is traceable to the first half of the 1880s, to which the two Sapphic MSS belong.<sup>88</sup>

The collage used to describe the art of ‘Sappho la bella’ provides a romanticised version of Sappho’s poetry and her legend.<sup>89</sup> The lacunas of her fragments kindle Pascoli’s imagination (‘la fantasia compie il frammento’). He creates a narrative raising Sappho’s work to the status of poetic ideal. The momentary poetic epiphany (‘per un istante, come un’apparizione’) stimulated by the corrupted state of Sappho’s corpus stands out as the actualisation of the theory that ‘La poesia consiste nella visione d’un particolare inavvertito, fuori e dentro di noi’ (‘Fanciullino’, p. 42). Pascoli employs Sappho’s lyrics to reconstruct an idyllic portrait of archaic Greece, populated by lovers, girls, boys and brides appearing in ritual processions. The ritual songs give voice to Sappho’s fragments. Garboli records

<sup>87</sup> Corresponding to fr. 138, 140, 55, 2 (ll. 5-8), inc. auct. 16, 154, 168b, 136, 135, 102, 132, inc. auct. 25, 47, 105a, 105b, 104a Voigt. Cfr. Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 1168. Pascoli refers to Bergk (1882) in ‘Solon’ (1895) (Vittorio Citti, ‘I poemi conviviali’, pp. 124-126). It is safe to assume he also used this edition of the fragments of Sappho in ‘Commentario’.

<sup>88</sup> For the division of Pascoli’s oeuvre in two interconnected Sapphic nuclei, see Piantanida, pp. 184-209.

<sup>89</sup> Cfr. Plato’s description of Sappho in *Phaedrus*, 235c: ‘δῆλον δὲ ὅτι τινῶν ἀκήκοα, ἢ του Σαπφουῶς τῆς καλῆς ἢ Ἀνακρέοντος τοῦ σοφοῦ’, cfr. *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, trans. by H.N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 436. Cfr. Piantanida, pp. 181-182.

the influential aura of Pascoli's teacher Giosue Carducci acting on the idealised portrait of the cento: 'Come si vede, tutto Pascoli in una capocchia di spillo lesbico, anche se le fanciulle provengono 'in ordin lungo' dal Carducci di "Fantasia".'<sup>90</sup>

Carducci, as Pascoli's teacher, also encouraged the poet's syncretism. Nava pointed out that the two poets shared a common interest in comparative anthropology.<sup>91</sup>

A similar mythopoetic take on the figure of Sappho shapes 'Solon', as Giacomo Debenedetti remarked.<sup>92</sup> Both the cento and 'Solon' were first published in 1895; this was a crucial year in Pascoli's creative life, during which his poetic investment in Sappho's poetry becomes more explicit. The poem depicts the affirmation of the monodic lyric of Sappho over the convivial elegiac tradition embodied by the poet Solon. As the proemial poem of *Poemi conviviali*, 'Solon' stands out as a statement of poetics and a meta-poetic reflection on literature, in which Sappho embodies the highest poetic archetype.

The poem contains two Sapphic odes, one on love and one on death, constructed through echoes and translations from the Lesbian poet's corpus.<sup>93</sup> A woman from Eressos, to be identified with Sappho herself,<sup>94</sup> sings them. 'Sappho la bella non è morta e non morrà mai', Pascoli had forcefully concluded his account of Lesbian poetry in *Lyra*. This is qualified in 'Solon': 'il poeta fin che non muoia l'inno, | vive, immortale' ('Solon', ll. 74-75). As long as her poetry remains alive, Sappho's will not be forgotten. In these lines, Pascoli's preoccupation with the transitory nature of literature and language emerges. The dependence of poetry on the survival of memory, as explicated in his prose, takes poetic form, resounding as a

<sup>90</sup> Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 1168.

<sup>91</sup> Nava, 'Pascoli e il folklore', pp. 509-512.

<sup>92</sup> Debenedetti, 'Solon', p. 233.

<sup>93</sup> In the first ode (ll. 41-60), at ll. 41-44 cfr. fr. 53, 3, 4, at ll. 46-48 cfr. fr. 2, l. 13 and fr. 40 and 42; in the second ode (ll. 64-83), cfr. fr. 136. See Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, pp. 12-20.

<sup>94</sup> The city in the island of Lesbos where Sappho and Alcaeus were born.

warning.<sup>95</sup> In the light of this programmatic statement, the entire *Conviviali* collection may be considered as Pascoli's attempt to delay the degenerative process inherent to literature and language.

The metrical structure of the two Sapphic odes is a re-elaboration of the *systema sapphicum* that Pascoli developed in 'Regole di metrica neoclassica'. In his metrical system Pascoli renders the Greek Sapphic stanza with five *endecasillabi saffici* and a *quinario*.<sup>96</sup> The metrical structure of this stanza is explained with reference to Catullan and Horatian verse in his treatise:

PENTAPODIE: SAFFICO o endecasillabo saffico. Due dipodie trocaiche con in mezzo un dattilo. La dipodia, che in Orazio è sempre di trocheo e spondeo e in Catullo è anche di due trochei, è di due trochei per lo più nella nostra lingua. Le cesure principali sono: a) dopo la terza arsi, b) dopo la seconda e quarta arsi, c) dopo il terzo trocheo. ('Regole di metrica neoclassica', p. 1005)

The *pentapodie* in the two odes are built with two trochees at the beginning and end of the line and a dactyl in the middle, eliminating the caesura and putting the main stress on the fifth syllable. As Garboli notes, these are the same *endecasillabi saffici* Pascoli employed in 'Preghiera a Afrodite' and 'Dolore d'amore', which were conceived as exemplary Italian renditions of Pascoli's neoclassical Sapphic stanza.

The 1880s autographs, particularly the rewriting of fr. 1 (to which I will hereafter refer as MS 1bis), reveal Pascoli's early commitment to metrical rendition. At the time, the poet was yet to formalise his metrical system. Throughout his first Sapphic period he employs the Italian Sapphic, with three *endecasillabi a minore* stressed in fourth position, and a *quinario*, reproducing the Greek adonic. While Pascoli's neoclassical Sapphics depart from the established literary tradition, this

<sup>95</sup> Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, p. xxiii and pp. 10; 19.

<sup>96</sup> Cfr. the entry '*Systema sapphicum*' in: 'Metrica della lirica romana', in *Lyra*, pp. xc-cxii (pp. xcix-c). The same Sapphics are employed in 'Cristantemi' (1895), 'Convito d'Ombre' (1906-1913), in the translations from Horace and in 'La santa famiglia' by Leone XIII (1903), cfr. Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 1168-1169.

metre inserts itself within the Italian metre of classical derivation dating back to the *Quattrocento*.<sup>97</sup> Most of the Sapphics of *Myricae* and *Canti di Castelvecchio* follow the traditional Italian metre.

The strict rules of the *endecasillabi saffici* employed in ‘Solon’ and the odes of *TR*, which Valgimigli heavily criticised for their linguistic clumsiness,<sup>98</sup> limit Pascoli’s translation in terms of semantic equivalence.<sup>99</sup> This is particularly evident in the *TR* translations (for ease of consultation, I include the Bergk edition of the Greek fragments and the texts of ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ and ‘Dolor d’amore’ in Appendix 3 and 4). For instance, in ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ Pascoli translates the opening epithet ‘Ποικιλόθρο’ (literally: ‘dal trono variopinto’) with ‘trono adorno’. He thus provides a four-syllable metrical equivalent to the Greek word, but moves away from the semantic area of ‘ποικίλος’, related to the sphere of colours. Another instance of this kind is ‘δολόπλοκε’ (literally: ‘tessitrice d’inganni’) translated with the locution: ‘piena di vie’, which loses the mischievous connotation of the Greek adjective. Pascoli’s solution also forfeits the originality of the image: the epithet ‘δολόπλοκε’ actually seems to be a neologism invented by Sappho.<sup>100</sup>

Freer is the rendition of ‘αἴψα δ’ ἐξίκοντο’, with ‘rapido, eccoli!’ Pascoli’s phrase emphasises the punctual quality of the action expressed by the aorist tense, conveying the speed of the sparrows by omitting the verb ‘ἐξίκοντο’ in his translation. The Italian translations shift the text from the past to the present tense by excluding the second Greek verb in the past tense, ‘ἄγον’. This increases the impressionistic effect, recalling the image of ‘Dialogo’ (1891) in *Myricae*: ‘Scilp: i passeri neri sullo

<sup>97</sup> Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 738.

<sup>98</sup> Valgimigli, ‘Traduttori vecchi e nuovi’, p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> Note that in the *princeps* the titles are absent. Each poem is introduced under the heading Sappho by the roman numerals I and II respectively.

<sup>100</sup> *Lirici greci: antologia*, ed. by Gabriele Burzacchini and Franco Degani (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1977), p. 126.

spalto' (l. 1). Pascoli's translation targets occasionally appear to be contradictory, alternating linguistic approximation, adherence to the imagery, and strict rhythmic equivalence.

As opposed to the word for word calques of the Homeric translations, in which the Italian word order matches the Greek, 'Preghiera a Afrodite' re-arranges the word order of the Greek. The epithet 'trono adorno' opening the Greek ode is, in the Italian translation, moved to the second line. '[F]iglia di Giove' takes the place of 'eterna', which is pushed to the end of the line; while the name of the goddess 'Afrodite', found at the end of the Greek line, is moved to the opening in the Italian poem. Pascoli though manages to preserve the overall structure of the ode as well as its main formal features, such as the parallel dyadic structure and the anaphora of the penultimate Sapphic.

Pascoli's translation maintains an elevated register throughout the seven stanzas. The poem has the solemn tone of a formal invocation to a divinity, anticipated by the title of the ode, 'Preghiera a Afrodite'. Aphrodite appears ineffable. She is a goddess who bestows her kindness on the speaker; she addresses 'Clara' from the upper spheres: she is seen as eternal ('eterna'), omnipotent ('piena di vie', 'nume') and regal (she sits on a throne, 'trono adorno'). Remarking the distance between the goddess and the speaker with its tone and diction, the Italian poem overlooks one of the most peculiar characteristics of the Greek ode. Sappho's stylistic originality in fr. 1, as Bruno Gentili shows, also lies in her ability to shorten the distance between the human and divine spheres through her diction:

L'Afrodite saffica non ha nulla della dea tradizionale dell'epica. [...] [L]e sue maniere, i suoi atteggiamenti sono più umani, più dolci, più confidenziali, si

direbbero non proprio di una dea, ma quasi di un'amica prediletta del tiaso.  
[...] Tale l'Afrodite della prima Ode.<sup>101</sup>

In Pascoli's translation Aphrodite does not address 'Clara' in a friendly tone; the two belong to completely separate spheres and the hierarchy is clear: the speaker is praying the divinity, prostrated. The appellative 'πότνια' that could be rendered with 'lady' ('signora') is rather translated with 'nume', pertaining to the semantic area of the divine. Aphrodite is asked to go to war with the poet rather than to seal an allegiance between peers, as 'σύμμαχος' suggests. Moreover, in Sappho's ode Aphrodite is described in the first line by what is not 'mortal' ('ἀ-θάνατ[α]'). The locution 'ἀθανάτω προσώπῳ' is literally translated with 'immortal tuo viso', but Pascoli employs the word 'eterna' to translate 'ἀ-θάνατ[α]' in the first stanza. The epithet 'eterna' does not describe Aphrodite in opposition to living mortal beings, but rather as a separate numinous entity; with this choice Pascoli distances the figure of Aphrodite even further from the human sphere. This may be justified by metrical constrictions: 'eterna' is a three syllable word ending with a trochee, while the Italian 'immortale' has an extra syllable which would not fit into the *endecasillabo*. However, 'eterno' is an adjective dear to Pascoli and a defining component of his poetics of appropriation of ancient literatures, which he describes as possessing that quality of 'eterno che è sempre nuovo'.

This solution connects the ode to the poetics of *thánatos athánatos* explicated above. Death is not only the counterpart of eros, in classical terms; with birth and marriage it is also an essential element of the life cycle. Death, birth and marriage are topical features of Pascoli's poetry. In the preface to *Canti di Castelvecchio* the poetic re-elaboration on death is made foundational to the collection: 'Ma la vita, senza il

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<sup>101</sup> Bruno Gentili, 'La veneranda Saffo', *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, 2 (1966), 37-62 (p. 58).

pensier della morte, senza, cioè, religione, senza quello che ci distingue dalle bestie, è un delirio, o intermittente, o continuo, o stolido o tragico'.<sup>102</sup> The human awareness of death is thus connected to a religious experience of life, which finds a performative enactment in rituals. As in a ritual, poetry and translation re-enact the life / death cycle.

Pascoli's texts show his full awareness of the strong connection between monodic lyric and ritualised forms of worship and social rituals, such as marriage. In the 'Commentario' the original context of Sapphic and Catullan epithalamia is made explicit through a description of the wedding ritual: 'S'udiva il tintinnio della lira: le donne, sulla porta di casa, guardavano ammirando il corteo nuziale passare' (p. 651). The epithalamia are explicitly framed in their wedding ritual context: 'convivio nuziale'. Pascoli's tendency to trace the anthropological roots of the lyric emerges.

In the light of the autographs and the rest of the versions in *TR*, the raising of the tone of the target text occurring in 'Preghiera a Afrodite' constitutes an exception. Pascoli, in fact, usually lowers the register of the sources through the use of everyday language. Both MS1 and MS1bis are characterised by lowly linguistic choices and a familiar domestic tone.<sup>103</sup> The distance between the speaker and the goddess is much less evident in MS1 than in 'Preghiera': Aphrodite sits on a 'seggiola', rather than a throne, bringing the entire poem to a homely level. The goddess is asked not to chide the poet ('né con rimbrotti'), to act for the poet's sake ('di fare [...] fà tu stessa') instead of 'adempiere' her prayers, and to become the speaker's ally: 'siimi alleata', while the choice to use 'rimbrotti' reinforces the familiar tone of the poem.<sup>104</sup> MS1 and 'Preghiera' show two opposite trends: in the former Pascoli deliberately appropriates Sappho's language and text into his own individual linguistic horizon by

<sup>102</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, 'Prefazione' (1903), in *Poesie*, II, 499-500 (p. 499).

<sup>103</sup> Piantanida, p. 202.

<sup>104</sup> For another analysis of the two MS versions of fr. 1 see Piantanida, pp. 199-202.

lowering the tone and diction of the poems; in the latter he employs a lofty language emphasising the distance between the human and the divinity.

Sappho's poem exploits the structures and literary conventions of the 'kletic hymn'—a prayer to a divinity.<sup>105</sup> With the title 'Preghiera a Afrodite' Pascoli frames the ode within the same genre. However, in the Italian context, 'preghiera' is immediately associated with the Christian-Catholic tradition. Pascoli's interest in ritual forms as archetypes of the human, as for wedding rites and epithalamia, may have played a role in his decision to stress the prayer-like quality of fr. 1. His oeuvre is dappled with references to Christian-Catholic festivities.<sup>106</sup>

The translation exploits fr. 1's prayer-like quality, of which, according to Pascoli's translation method, the target text should provide an aesthetic equivalent. This would justify the lofty and removed tone of his version of the prayer, widening the distance between the speaker and Aphrodite. Pascoli's deliberate use of the Christian-Catholic context would also explain his decision to remove any linguistic element referring back to Sappho's homosexuality. In this way the figure of Clara / Sappho would fit within a ritualistic Christian context. The poetic laboratory of the 1880s and some autograph notes on Sappho's lovers show that Pascoli knew of Sappho's homosexuality. Yet the heterosexual normalisation of Clara / Sappho's sexuality would be necessary in order for the prayer to fit the Christian doctrine. MS1's penultimate stanza reveals Pascoli's decision to excise all the feminine pronouns 'quella':

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<sup>105</sup> Gentili, 'La veneranda Sappho', p. 52; Burnett, pp. 246-248. See also the 'Du-Stil' convention of prayers and sermons by which the divinity is directly addressed, in Eduard Norden, *Dio ignoto: ricerche sulla storia della forma religiosa*, ed. by Chiara Tommasi Moreschini (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2002), pp. 261-285.

<sup>106</sup> Cfr. 'donde pel Corpusdomini', 'Il dittamo', l. 2; 'Sogno di Rosetta'; 'Nelle nozze di Ida'; 'Lo stornello'; 'Calendimaggio' and the series 'Ognissanti'.

Poichè *quella che* fugge, presto inseguirà  
           se      ti  
 e *quella che* non riceve *di* doni, invece li darà  
           se  
 E *quella* che non ama, presto amerà  
       se  
           anche se non voglia.<sup>107</sup>

In the second draft of the translation (MS1bis) the pronouns completely disappear, removing any explicit reference to the sexuality of the pursued lover:

chè s'or ti schifa, ti verrà *pur* dietro;  
   [p]oi  
 E se i regali ti rimanda, presto  
                                   |or|  
 ne darà; t'amerà, via, s'or non t'ama  
       f [arà]                          [s]e  
           Voglia o non voglia

Excising the feminine pronouns and adding the direct accusatives 'ti' to the verbs describing the consequence of the behaviour of Sappho's lover ('ti schifa', 'ti verrà poi dietro', 'ti rimanda', 't'amerà'), Pascoli brings MS1bis to the private domain. The stanza shifts from asserting a general rule describing love effects (MS1), to describing Clara / Sappho's personal sphere (MS1bis). MS1bis fragment describes a typical lyric scenario of unrequited love structured on two characters: the poet / speaking voice and the beloved.<sup>108</sup> The same scenario is maintained in 'Preghiera a Afrodite'.

Pascoli's published work appropriating Sappho engages mostly with the heterosexual version of her legend: besides 'Preghiera a Afrodite', 'Solon' focuses on the myth of Sappho's love for the beautiful shepherd Phaon. Given Pascoli's interest in this myth and its connections to natural cycles of death and rebirth, his decision to

<sup>107</sup> In the quotations from the MS, the italics indicate words that are excised in the MS. The words inserted in the lines below the italics are, in the MS, overwritten onto the excised words.

<sup>108</sup> Piantanida, p. 202.

give a heterosexual portrait of Sappho may be following this literary tradition. If so, ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ and the MSS translations would be inserted within Pascoli’s wider anthropological comparativism and exploration of solar myths.

The poet’s eccentric rendition of the names in ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ reflects Pascoli’s grounding of the Sapphic ode in an anthropological discourse. The verb Πείθω (literally: ‘persuade’ / ‘convincing someone with enticing words’) is translated with ‘Dolce-parola’. The Greek verb is rendered with an epithet constructed on the etymological Latin roots of its Italian equivalent ‘persuadere’. The Latin *per-suadere*, does indeed retain the meaning ‘dolce’ in its *suadus*.<sup>109</sup> He also translates ‘Ψάπφ’ with ‘Clara’, reading the root of σαφής in Sappho’s Greek name.<sup>110</sup> Pascoli thus connects the Lesbian poet and her monodic lyric to the sphere of light.<sup>111</sup> Highlighting the forgotten etymological roots of the proper nouns of gods and heroes is one of Pascoli’s translation techniques. He employs it throughout his Homeric translations and in his Sapphic cento, where Hades (from Sappho fr. 68) is called ‘l’Invisibile’.<sup>112</sup>

In a letter to Adolfo De Bosis Pascoli speaks with reference to the first ode in ‘Solon’, providing an explanation for his translation in ‘Preghiera’:

Si fonda in vero su un’idea che credo tutta mia che o Sappho fosse persona mitica significando la chiarezza crepuscolare (Sapfò = clara) o la poetessa così nomata scherzasse in certo modo sul suo nome. Certo Faone significa Sole e probabilmente Sole Occidente. Con quel canto io spiegherei come nelle poesie di Sappho potesse trovarsi l’accento al salto di Leucade (Rupe Leucade è per me l’orizzonte, la linea che passa il sole tramontando, seguito dalla sua amante, la Sappho, la chiarezza crepuscolare).<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> On the etymology of *persuadere*, Ottorino Pianigiani, *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Florence: Ariani, 1926)

<sup>110</sup> Fiorentino, p. 98.

<sup>111</sup> Extracting symbolic meanings from the roots of patronymics was a common practice of 19<sup>th</sup>-century classical scholarship. See Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>112</sup> Fiorentino provides a list of these occurrences in *TR*, pp. 94-98. Cfr. Francesco Flora, p. 642.

<sup>113</sup> Maria Pascoli, *Lungo la vita*, p. 416; Giovanni Pascoli and Adolfo De Bosis, *Carteggio*, ed. by M.L. Ghelli (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1998), p. 41.

His linguistic choices in the translation of proper names in fr. 1 are justified by the connection he establishes with the solar version of the legend of Sappho and Phaon—the name of Phaon in Greek, means ‘bright’ and contains the root of the word φάος primarily denoting the light of the sun.<sup>114</sup> According to this myth, Sappho, unrequited by the beautiful shepherd Phaon, decides to jump off the Leukadian Rock.<sup>115</sup> The first ode pronounced by the woman from Eressos in ‘Solon’ is structured on this myth:

M'è lontano dalle ricciute chiome,  
 quanto il sole; sì, ma mi giunge al cuore,  
 come il sole: bello, ma bello come  
 sole che muore.

Dileguare! E altro non voglio: voglio  
 farmi chiarezza che da lui si effonda.  
 Scoglio estremo della gran luce, scoglio  
 su la grande onda,

dolce è da te scendere dove è pace:  
 scende il sole nell'infinito mare;  
 trema e scende la chiarezza seguace  
 crepuscolare.

(ll. 49-60)

As is also evident from the letter to De Bosis, in the ode Phaon functions as a mythical allegory for the sun (‘come il sole [...] muore’) and Sappho functions as the dusk-light following the sun (‘la chiarezza seguace | crepuscolare’) beyond the horizon, which is physically defined by the Leukadian Rock. The myth explains the alternation of darkness and light during the day through a story of unrequited love, linking the natural phenomena to the pattern of *eros* and *thanatos*. In order to be reunited with her beloved, the Sun, Sappho’s only wish is to die: ‘Dileguare! E altro non voglio: voglio | farmi chiarezza che da lui si effonda.’ In these lines, death is a relentless force shaping

<sup>114</sup> On the meanings of ‘φάος’, Maria Grazia Ciani, *ΦΑΟΣ e termini affini nella poesia greca: introduzione a una fenomenologia della luce* (Florence: Olschki, 1974), pp. 5-85.

<sup>115</sup> Gregory Nagy, ‘Phaeton, Sappho’s Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 77 (1973), 137-177 (pp. 141-144).

the natural cycles and poetry itself. The internal narrative of the ode mirrors the wider motifs structuring ‘Solon’.

While Wilamowitz speculated that Sappho’s poetry must have included the poet’s version of this story, Gregory Nagy has shown that this is highly unlikely. The myth of Sappho and Phaon is a fictional re-elaboration of later sources.<sup>116</sup> By making the woman from Eressos signing the myth, Pascoli conflates the historical and legendary Sappho into one character. Thus, ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’'s normalising translation may be the result of Pascoli’s conflation of the historical and legendary reception of Sappho. The insertion of Sappho’s translation within a Christian context is filtered through the classical myth.

Nava remarks that the interpretation of the legend of Sappho and Phaon as a solar myth in *Poemi conviviali* reflects some of the cardinal points exposed by Max Müller’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century comparative anthropology: ‘Il Müller pone a fondamento d’ogni credenza, d’ogni religione, il sorgere del sole, che costituisce per lui l’esperienza fondamentale dei popoli primitivi [...]. L’aurora e il sole costituirebbero quindi le costanti dei miti della stirpe ariana.’<sup>117</sup> *The Science of Language* (1861) and *The Science of Religion* (1870) by Müller were indeed both present in Pascoli’s library in French translation.<sup>118</sup> In *The Science of Religion* the anthropologist states:

The highest god had received the same name in the ancient mythology of India, Greece, Italy and Germany [...]. These are not mere names: they are historical facts. [...] These words are not mere words, but they bring before us, with all the vividness of an event which we witnessed ourselves but yesterday, the ancestors of the whole Aryan race, thousands of years it may be before Homer and the Beda, worshipping an unseen Being, under the selfsame name,

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<sup>116</sup> Nagy, pp. 141-144.

<sup>117</sup> Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, p. 537.

<sup>118</sup> Nava, ‘Pascoli e il folklore’, p. 537. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May & June 1861*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862) and *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution in February and March 1870* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1870).

the best, the most exalted name, they could find in their vocabulary under the name of Light and Sky.<sup>119</sup>

Drawing a connection between Sappho's name, her myth and the etymological root of the Greek word for light, Pascoli reinforces the archetypal function of the Lesbian poet in his system of thought as well as in his poetry. As a poet, mythical character and sign on the page, Sappho becomes the historical evidence that language, religion (in the form of myth) and poetry come from a common root: light.

The Leukadian rock is mentioned in relation to the light of dawn in 'Le Memnonidi', a later poem in *Conviviali*: 'La bianca Rupe tu vedrai, dov'ogni | luce tramonta, tu vedrai le Porte | del Sole e il muto popolo dei sogni' (ll. 97-99).

References to the Leukadian rock are found also in Homer, *Odyssey*, XXIV, ll. 1-18, in the introduction to the second *nekya*, translated by Pascoli and included in *TR*:<sup>120</sup>

[...] Ed era la loro guida  
 Ermes il dio salutare, per i muffiti sentieri  
 Oltrepassarono l'acqua d'Oceano, la Rupe di Luce,  
 Oltre le porte del Sole passarono e il regno de' Sogni  
 ('Oltretomba', ll. 13-14).

Pascoli translates the Homeric 'Λευκάδα πέτρην', with la 'Rupe di Luce'. He stresses the aspect of light rather than the whiteness evoked by Λευκάδα, which is on the other hand maintained in the passage from 'Le Memnonidi'. The name contains the adjective λευκός, whose primary meaning is 'white', and only secondarily 'bright'. As is evident from the poet's notes to his translation, he interpreted this passage as another solar myth: 'E il destino di Achille si compì, ed egli morì giovane ed Ermes (il Crepuscolo) conduce al prato asfodelo le anime dei proci'.<sup>121</sup> Hermes is the light of dusk, performing an equivalent function to Sappho in 'Solon'. He accompanies the

<sup>119</sup> Max Müller, *The Science of Religion*, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup> Cfr. Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, p. 70.

<sup>121</sup> *Poesie*, IV, 1780.

souls beyond the line of the horizon—represented by the Leukadian Rock—, into the night and so to their afterlife.

Nagy explains the Homeric passage as one of the solar myths developed around the Leukadian Rock. He compares the route to the afterlife with the journey of the sun setting. Pascoli's comparativism links the myth of Sappho and Phaon to the same mythical archetype. Nagy's study supports this argument. He establishes a link between the accounts of the solar myth of Sappho and Phaon, the sexual motif and the representations of dawn. In particular he establishes a parallelism between the fall from the rock and falling into a swoon from intoxication or from lovemaking.<sup>122</sup> He finally links the solar myth with Sappho's fr. 1 arguing that:

By loving Phaon, [Sappho] becomes parallel with Aphrodite, who loves the native Lesbian hypostasis of the Sun-God himself. By diving from the White Rock, she does what Aphrodite does in the form of Evening Star, diving after the sunken Sun in order to retrieve him the next morning in the form of Morning Star. If we imagine her pursuing the Sun the night before, she will be pursued in turn the morning after. There is a potential here for *amor uersus*, a theme which haunts Sappho elsewhere:

καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει<sup>123</sup>

Pascoli's translation of the names in 'Preghiera' exploits the mythical allegory of light and darkness thus anticipating the parallelism between solar myths and the motif of unrequited love at the basis of Nagy's argument on *amor uersus*.

The recurrent theme of dawn and sun setting in correlation to patterns of death and rebirth is accompanied by a frequent employment of the aubade form throughout Pascoli's oeuvre (cfr. 'Alba' and 'Rammarico' in *Myricae*, 'Alba' in *Primi poemetti*, the section 'Miti' in *Poesie varie*, the section 'Il Sole' in 'La canzone del Paradiso' and several occurrences of dawn in *TR*, including the episode from the *Odyssey*,

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<sup>122</sup> Nagy, pp. 142; 172-177.

<sup>123</sup> Nagy, p. 175. On allegories of light and darkness, Avgi-Anna Maggel, 'Tithonus and Phaon: Mythical Allegories of Light and Darkness in Sappho's Poetry', in *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*, ed. by Menelaos Christopoulos, Efimia D. Karakantza and Olga Levaniouk (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2010), pp. 121-132.

‘L’isola dell’Aurora’). The folkloric and classical elements are brought together in these poems with multifaceted symbolic meanings.<sup>124</sup>

Pascoli was keen to explore the anthropological foundations of ancient lyric and its connections with ritual. He wanted to write a study on Lesbian poetry which would extend the knowledge of Sappho’s poetry ‘non deducendola soltanto dal poco che ci è rimasto negli scrittori, ma inducendola dal molto che da Saffo dovè derivare dalla poesia popolare’.<sup>125</sup> The link between Sappho and archaic popular culture is hinted at in ‘Solon’ where the woman from Eresso speaks exactly at the time of the Anthesteriae, the festival of the flowers in honour of Dionysus, taking place in Athens between the 11 and the 13 of the month of Anthesterion (between February and March). Nava explains:

Di origini campestri, la festa associava il culto di Dioniso, e i relativi riti misterici, con quello dei morti, che si credeva tornassero a visitare i loro luoghi e che alla conclusione delle cerimonie erano invitati a tornare nell’Ade, con la formula: ‘alla porta di Kères’. Il nesso rinascita della vegetazione— ritorno dei morti è una costante folclorica di varie culture, nel Pascoli ricorrente per ragioni autobiografiche e dotte insieme.<sup>126</sup>

Sappho functions as a mythical figure, the archetypal author of the first lyric poetry in the Western canon, and one of the classical filters to Pascoli’s folkloric interest. The parallelisms the poet draws between Sapphic poetry, its mythical representations, contemporary popular festivities (celebrating birth, marriage and death), as well as the religious and natural calendars, strike one as Pascoli’s attempts to recover the primitive, eternal quality of humans through the ages.

‘Dolor d’amore’ follows a translation method akin to ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’.

Yet the more linear syntax of the Greek fragment allows for a smoother Italian

<sup>124</sup> See Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, p. 60, and ‘Pascoli e il Folklore’, pp. 537-543.

<sup>125</sup> See *Lungo la vita*, pp. 161-162 and G. Nencioni, ‘Da Matera a Bologna: lettere inedite di Giovanni Pascoli’, *Nuova Antologia*, 77 (1 dicembre 1942), 148-153 (pp. 149-150).

<sup>126</sup> Nava, *Poemi conviviali*, p. 13.

translation. As a result Pascoli took less structural and linguistic liberties. The genitive nouns ‘φωνεύσας’ and ‘γελαίσας’ become two infinitives at ll. 3-5: ‘dolcemente parlare’ and ‘ridere un riso’. These two phrases echo Horace’s ode to Lalage: ‘dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo, | dulce loquentem’ (ll. 23-24), which have also been appropriated by Petrarch in the famous *RVF* 159, l. 14 (‘et come dolce parla | et dolce ride’).<sup>127</sup> The two-word combination ‘romba | fanno’ solves the split verb ‘ἐπιρρόμβεισι’ at ll. 11-12. Pascoli probably needed a disyllabic word at the beginning of line 12 to make the adonic work, while the derivative ‘romba’ was one of the poet’s favourite onomatopoeias, often recurring in his vernacular poetry.<sup>128</sup>

The ending of the poem may seem far-fetched; in fact, it is a fine example of the poet’s scholarly approach to translation. There is no Greek equivalent in the text for ‘folle’—Bergk gives the last line as: ‘φαίνομαι (ἄλλα)’, adding in his critical notes to line 16: ‘ἄλλα, i.e. ἠλεή (*demens*) *adieci*’.<sup>129</sup> This fragment, and in particular line 16, had been plagued by an extremely poor textual transmission since medieval times. The *crux* was solved only recently by the discovery of a papyrus of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, published in 1965 by Manfredo Manfredi, including the end of the fourth stanza of fr. 2. The conjectured ‘φαίνομαι (ἄλλα)’ was emended and substituted by the current authentic *lectio*: ‘φαίνομ’ ἔμ’ αὐται’ (lit: ‘I appear to myself’).<sup>130</sup>

In comparison to ode 1, ‘Dolor d’amore’ is characterised by a more intimate tone. Pascoli renders the confession of the speaker through a lowly register: ‘ἐνάντιος’ is rendered with ‘in faccia’ rather than ‘in viso’ and the sweat in l. 13 ‘sgocciola’, with popular nuances. The word ‘faccia’ is typical of the everyday diction of Pascoli’s

<sup>127</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. by Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), p. 735.

<sup>128</sup> Cfr. ‘Massa’, l. 11; ‘Il giorno dei morti’, l. 182; ‘Sera festiva’, l. 11; ‘L’Angelus’, II, l. 2; ‘Poemi di Ate’; ‘La madre’, l. 31; ‘Il ciocco’, II, l. 204; ‘Cometa di Halley’, IV, l. 5. Cfr. Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, II, 1765-1766.

<sup>129</sup> Bergk (1882), p. 90.

<sup>130</sup> Marcello Gigante, ‘Invito allo studio dei risultati papirologici (Sul testo della Seconda Ode di Saffo)’, *Cultura e Scuola*, 28 (1968), 30-41 (p. 36).

Sapphic translations. The version of fr. 2 in fol. 162 of ‘Studi di Traduzione’, to which I will hereafter refer with the abbreviation MS2, also translates the same line with ‘il quale di faccia’. Pascoli employs the word ‘faccia’ extensively in other versions: the MSS ‘Studi di Traduzione’ (fol. 162), folio 8<sup>r</sup> and the prose translation from Pascoli’s dissertation’s *Alceo* all translate fr. 3’s ‘εἶδος’ with ‘faccia’. ‘Studi di Traduzione’ (fol. 165) also reads ‘stammi anche in faccia amico’ for ‘Στᾶθι κᾶντα φίλος’ in fr. 29, which is similarly translated in *Lyra*’s cento: ‘stammi in faccia, caro’.

‘Dolor d’amore’ elevates its register only in two instances: ‘ridere un riso’ adds a polyptoton absent in the original, and the poetic ‘fiso’ instead of ‘fisso’. Throughout the poem, the focus is on the personal perspective of the speaker. As in the Greek Pascoli starts the poem with ‘A me’, a locution repeated at ll. 5 and 6, and in the alternative form ‘mi’ at l. 8, thus setting the limits of the poem within the speaker’s personal sphere right from the opening.<sup>131</sup> The expression ‘dolce- | mente parlare’ is parallel in form and meaning to the ‘Dolci-parole’ of ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’. It thus establishes a dialogue with the previous lyric. Both poems tell a story of unrequited love. In ‘Dolor d’amore’ the tie between love and death is strengthened, becoming cardinal in the ending. In the frenzy of love the narrator is covered in sweat and pervaded by a ‘tremore’. In Pascoli’s poetry the word usually denotes the exterior manifestation of a feeling (‘vidi il tremor del mento’, ‘Mia madre’, l. 28; ‘tremor quatit ossa’, *Chelidonismos*, l. 46; ‘cum strepitu tremor impulit oppida deinceps’, *Sermo*, l. 500).<sup>132</sup> This brings us back to ‘Solon’: ‘il mio non sembra | che un tremore’ (ll. 46-47). As in the Greek, the symptoms of love are very

<sup>131</sup> On the personal dimension of the Greek poems see Hutchinson, p. 169.

<sup>132</sup> For the occurrences of the words ‘tremare’, ‘tremolare’, ‘tremolio’, ‘tremolo’ and ‘tremulo’ see Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, II, 1797, and 1794-1798.

similar to those of an illness,<sup>133</sup> so that the poem concludes: ‘e poco già dal morir lontana’. Pascoli’s depiction of *eros* and *thanatos* typical of his Sapphic portrait in ‘Solon’ are emphasised in the translation.

Pascoli’s habit of digging into the critical apparatus for alternative solutions to the set text in Greek is confirmed by the MS version in ‘Studi di Traduzione’. By translating ‘ἀλλὰ καμ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε’ with ‘la bocca resta spalancata’, Pascoli favours one of the emendations specified by Bergk in the footnotes to ἔαγε: ‘Cobet Mmen. N. I 362 πέπαγε corrigit’. ‘πέπαγε’ is the perfect of ‘πήγνυμι’, which means ‘to become solid or stiff’, from which the poet draws the fixity of the image ‘bocca spalancata’.

The only other poem Pascoli translates twice in the manuscripts and also employs in ‘Solon’ is fr. 3 Bergk. The fragment links another natural topos of Pascoli’s poetry to the Sapphic framework: the moon. The first MS translation of fr. 3 is found in fol. 162 of ‘Studi di Traduzione’, to which I will hereafter refer as MS3. The second translation, written probably at a second stage,<sup>134</sup> is in in folio 8<sup>r</sup>, which I will refer to as MS3bis (cfr. Appendix 2). Sappho’s archetypal function in Pascoli’s literary imagination emerges from the poet’s commentary to this fragment:

Non è codesto un graziosissimo idillio mitico nella  
sua indeterminatezza? *Ma datelo in mano a*  
*uno di codesti poeti convenzionali*  
La luna è bella, è [xxxxx] e splendida come l’argento:  
bianca  
*gli atelle* n’hanno invidia e *si* nascondono la faccia.  
le s[telle] |disp[.]re|  
Questo non è mito: non fa appello a nessuna tradizione:  
a nessuna favola: a nessuna rappresentazione plastica  
pittorica: è proprio naturalmente sbocciato nella mente  
di Saffo

<sup>133</sup> The Greek vocabulary in the second half of the poem is found also in medical literature. See *Lirici greci*, ed. by Burzacchini, p. 145.

<sup>134</sup> Piantanida, p. 205.

The nocturne, sprung as a bloom from Sappho's sensibility and creative imagination, echoes in 'Solon'. In the *poema conviviale* we find a direct reference to the full silvery moon shining over a Georgic landscape in the song of love sung by the woman from Eresso:

Splende al plenilunio l'orto; il melo  
trema appena d'un tremolio d'argento...  
Nei lontani monti color di cielo  
sibila il vento.

Muggia il vento, strepita tra le forre,  
su le quercie gettasi... (ll. 41-46)

Fragment 4 Bergk contributes to the subtext of these two stanzas too: 'Ἄμφι δὲ  
ψῦχρον κελάδει δι' ὕσδων | μαλίνων, αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων | κῶμα καταρρεῖ.' In 'Solon' the wind blows through the leaves of the apple trees, and 'strepita'. This verb is employed also in the unfinished MS draft translation of this fragment:

E (intorno) il freddo (vento? acqua.) strepita per rami  
dei meli, e delle foglie (fol. 163)

In the prose translation of the same fragment in 'Commentario', the poet had used 'sussurra' and 'stormire' to describe the sound of the wind ('Intorno il vento fresco sussurra tra i rami del melo, e allo stormir delle foglie fluisce il sonno profondo'). The wind is one of the most recurrent natural elements in *Myricae*.<sup>135</sup> And the verb 'stormire' echoes the description of 'profondissima quiete' in Giacomo Leopardi's 'L'infinito': 'E come il vento | Odo stormir tra queste piante' (ll. 5-6).<sup>136</sup>

Leopardi's 'Ultimo Canto di Saffo' is a clear precedent to Pascoli's appropriation of the myth of Sappho and Phaon in 'Solon'. In this respect, Pascoli's translations of Sappho enter a dialogue with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century tradition that saw the greatest Italian poets of the time confronting themselves with the Lesbian fragments.

<sup>135</sup> Cfr. 'Dialogo'; 'A Ruggero Pascoli'; 'Ultimo canto'; 'Le monache di Sogliano'; 'Germoglio'.

<sup>136</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. by Mario Fubini and Emilio Bigi (Turin: Loescher, 1964), pp. 116-117.

Ippolito Nievo, Giacomo Leopardi, Ugo Foscolo before him had translated Sappho's poems and made use of the imagery provided by Sappho's poetry as well as her myth.<sup>137</sup>

The description of fr. 3 in folio 8<sup>f</sup> and the ensuing translation and poetic reworkings of fr. 109 Bergk in folio 8<sup>v</sup> show that the recurrent Sapphic images of 'blooming flowers' in Pascoli's oeuvre connect lyric poetry to its anthropological roots in ritual and popular culture. Folio 8<sup>v</sup> gives the literal translation of fr. 109:

Verginità, verginità dove m'andasti che non sei quà:  
Non tornerò verso te più, non tornerò, non mai, *mai* più  
|non|

As we have seen, in the third rewriting of this fragment Pascoli substitutes the word 'Verginità', translation of 'Παρθενία', with the frase 'Botton di rosa':

Botton di rosa, botton di rosa.  
Dove m'andasti, dove sei tu?

A similar phrase is employed in the Sapphic stanzas Pascoli wrote for the wedding of his sister Ida, in 'Nelle nozze di Ida' (1895):

Ricordi? la siepe...ricordi? ...  
di rose era tutto un bottone;  
e larghi s'aprivano i fior di  
passione!  
(ll. 1-4)

This connects the lament for the loss of maidenhood described in the Sapphic epithalamia to the phytomorphic representation of virginity in Pascoli's poem, which also ends on a virgin's lament: 'Cantava una vergine: fior di | passione!' (ll. 7-8). The

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<sup>137</sup> Cfr. Ippolito Nievo, *Le odi di Saffo Lesbica letteralmente volgarizzate* (1856), in *Tutte le opere di Ippolito Nievo*, ed. by Marcella Gorra, 6 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1970), I, 485-486. Ugo Foscolo, 'Odi di Saffo' and 'Versioni e imitazioni: da Saffo', in *Poesie*, ed. by Guido Bezzoli (Milan: Rizzoli, 1976), pp. 250-251 and pp. 429-431. Giacomo Leopardi, 'Scherzi epigrammatici', in *Poeti greci e latini*, ed. by Franco d'Intino (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1999), pp. 5-23 (p.14) and *Canti*, pp. 239-242 (p. 240).

substitutions establish a direct link between Sappho's fragments and phytomorphic representations of defloration in Pascoli's poetry.<sup>138</sup>

With 'Nelle nozze di Ida' Pascoli seems to engage with the conventions of ancient epithalamia, in which the bride or the groom are given floral attributes.

Sappho's fr. 93 and 94 Bergk, for instance, are two fragments of epithalamia which attribute floral qualities to the bride. Fragment 93 Bergk is from a wedding song comparing the bride to a red apple:

Οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρω ἐπ' ὕσδῳ  
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ· λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπῆες,  
οὐ μὲν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

In fr. 94 Bergk we find the image of purple flowers lying on the ground within a wedding context:<sup>139</sup>

Οἶαν τὰν ὑακινθὸν ἐν οὖρεσι ποίμενες ἄνδρες  
πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δὲ τε πόρφυρον ἄνθος. . .

Pascoli exploits a similar analogic image to refer to the loss of maidenhood in his third autograph reworking:

S'è aperto il fiore, sbocciò la rosa,  
cadran le foglie, non torna più.  
|la gioventù|  
bocciuol di rosa [++++++] più.  
non torni

As I have also shown in my article, the juvenilia 'Ἔ τὸν Ἄδωντ' (1881) and 'Epitalamio Lesbio' (1882) confirm that Pascoli's epithalamia explicitly engage with fr. 93 and 94. The former poem takes its title from Sappho's fr. 108 Bergk (168 Voigt). It is a wedding song containing sapphic appropriations:

A lui da' rami l'Amadriade occhieggia  
De' suoi bocciuoli, e lagrima la vite

<sup>138</sup> Piantanida, p. 209.

<sup>139</sup> Piantanida, p. 211.

Nuda: oh! lasciata la paterna reggia  
 Scendi Afrodite  
 (ll. 17-20)<sup>140</sup>

Garboli remarks that in this poem ‘la dedica ai giovani sposi suggerisce un parallelo fitosomatico tra gli elementi di una natura rivivificata e il corpo della sposa resa feconda nel rito dionisiaco della deflorazione.’<sup>141</sup>

The latter poem, which first appeared in October 1882 in the *Opuscolo per nozze Sanguineti-Ottolenghi*, contains the translation of fr. 93 and 94 Bergk:<sup>142</sup>

Quello che al melograno  
 sboccia purpureo fiore,  
 salvo è da piè villano  
 di scorrente pastore.  
 Ma perde il suo colore  
 quand’uom se lo disvelle!  
 (ll. 15-25)

The fourth poetic reworking in folio 8<sup>r-v</sup> (‘Ma Perché [...] vuole farlo’) shows how Pascoli fits the phytomorphic representations of Sapphic origins into a contemporary ritualistic popular context. On the one hand, he continues to refer to the previous hymenaic context; on the other, he frames it into the familiar festivities of Easter:

viole e rose, rose e viole  
 non fanno gioia che solo a Pasqua  
 sono sbocciate per appassir.

The analogic representations of flowers are a locus through which Pascoli constructs his poetic syncretism. The lines are *doppi quinari*, whose rhythm recalls that of the popular ballads and stornelli employed by Pascoli in *Canti di Castelvecchio*. The phrases ‘viole e rose’ and ‘rose e viole’ echo Leopardi’s ‘mazzolin di rose e viole’ at

<sup>140</sup> In Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 371-373.

<sup>141</sup> Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 369.

<sup>142</sup> Oldcorn, p. 119; Garboli, *Poesie e prose*, I, 377-379; Piantanida, p. 209.

the beginning of ‘Il sabato del villaggio’ (l. 4).<sup>143</sup> ‘The violets, roses and seeds (‘Se’ la semenza’) insert the fragment into a rural farming landscape; while the reference to Easter connotes both a festive and a religious context. As in ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ the ancient and contemporary frames intermingle.

Beside the textual connection with ‘Nelle nozze di Ida’, the reference to ‘viole e rose’ in the fourth poetic reworking in fol. 8<sup>v</sup> moves the poem to Pascoli’s familiar context. The poet often employs the names ‘Viola’ and ‘Rosa’ to refer to his sisters in *Primi poemetti* (1897-1904) and particularly in the first section ‘La sementa’, first published in the 1897 edition entitled *Poemetti*.<sup>144</sup> Nadia Ebani notes:

In realtà, i *Poemetti* del ’97 sono compresi tra l’alba e il risveglio di due sorelle—Rosa e Viola—e il tramonto e il sonno di due fratelli—i Due fanciulli—[...]. Ma di mezzo, tra capo e capo, si susseguono componimenti legati l’uno all’altro dal filo di interrogativi che ad ogni testo si spostano di oggetto: quale sogno di fertilità, di amore e di generazione, quale avanzamento è concesso all’uomo, quale conoscenza, quale volo che non sia l’involarsi a se stesso e quale frutto che non sia prodotto di morte, e poi quale libertà o trionfo sul tempo o felicità: quale poesia?<sup>145</sup>

It is not by chance that in *Poemetti*, especially with ‘Digitale purpurea’ and ‘Il vischio’, the symbol of the woman-flower acquires the strongest sexual connotations.<sup>146</sup> The two poems employ parallel analogies to the one exploited in the first reworking of 8<sup>v</sup>, describing a rose opening, falling on the ground and fading. The famous beginning of ‘Gelsomino notturno’ employs the same eroticised image: ‘E s’aprono i fiori notturni’.

Like the rewritings of folio 8<sup>v</sup>, ‘Nelle nozze di Ida’ links Easter, blooming and Pascoli’s memories of family celebrations. The same sense of loss felt by the poet in fol. 8<sup>v</sup> and conveyed by the lament for the wedding of his sister in the line ‘tra le sue

<sup>143</sup> Leopardi, *Canti*, p. 193.

<sup>144</sup> Cfr. *Primi poemetti*, ed. by Nadia Ebani (Parma: Guanda, 1997), pp. ix; 15-76. On the different editions of *Poemetti* see the ‘Introduzione’ by Nadia Ebani, pp. ix-xxxi.

<sup>145</sup> Ebani, p. ix.

<sup>146</sup> Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, *Simboli e strutture della poesia del Pascoli* (Florence: D’Anna, 1966), p. 59; Piantanida, p. 210.

braccia, già un'altra se'' is expressed in section IX of 'Nelle nozze di Ida'. Here Ida ('Reginella') is sorely missed by her brother during the celebrations for the 'Pasqua fiorita':

O Reginella, e questo è l'ultimo anno  
 Che a noi l'ulivo la tua man dispensa:  
 quelle tue mani non imbandiranno  
 più la mia mensa.

The last fragments in 8<sup>v</sup> finally compare the woman to a seed. This metaphor is rich, bringing the spheres of love, sex, and marriage in contact with that of the natural cycles:

Cadean le foglie, restava un seme,  
 Se' tu quel seme e un altro egli è.

The poetic reworkings display a progression from the image of the flower blooming, then fading and transforming into a seed, which might give fruit, mirroring the different stages of Ida's life, passing from being a virgin to the state of married woman to that of a mother. The passing of time in relation to humans and the natural cycle frames the section 'La sementa' in *Poemetti*:

La vicenda del seme—nascita, maturazione, falciatura, e di qui la garanzia di nuova semente—è rappresentazione non solo di un ciclo di ordine contadino o del perpetuarsi dell'amore per una *renovatio* familiare, ma dell'incarnazione del Verbo, della crescita e uccisione del Cristo per la rigenerazione perenne dell'Umanità.<sup>147</sup>

The Easter reference in the preceding fragment shows that these multiple analogic associations connoting coming of age, death and rebirth populate Pascoli's poetry from the 1880s, and that their original nucleus is to be found in Sappho's lyric.

The image of the culled flower in the Sapphic hymenaic context typical of the autographs and *Primi poemetti* is paralleled and made richer in *Canti di Castelvecchio*, where Pascoli traces its popular folkloric origins: 'Non credano mai le

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<sup>147</sup> Ebani, p. xi.

mie soavi lettrici che io inventi! Non sono da tanto. E poi, non mi piace si debba e che...si possa... [...] Un'esperienza che tutte possono fare, è quella del fiore reciso, che si apre e si mette al sole'.<sup>148</sup> In 'Il croco' he refers to the popular custom:

tu apri il tuo cuore,  
ch'è chiuso, che duole,  
ch'è rotto, che muore,  
nel sole! (ll. 29-32)

Yet the crocus in this poem alludes to the poet, rather than a woman:

tu lesò, o poeta  
dei pascoli, fiore  
di croco!  
(ll. 11-12)

*Myrica*'s 'Viole d'inverno', contains a precedent to the image of poetic creation as blossoming:

Ché sempre, se ti agghiaccia la sventura,  
se l'odio altrui ti spoglia e ti desola,  
spunta, al tepor dell'anima tua pura,  
qualche vïola.  
(ll. 17-21)

And yet folio 8<sup>f</sup> connects the two images of the poet-flower and of poetry as blooming of its mind in the description of the nocturne in fr. 3 Bergk: 'è proprio naturalmente sbocciato nella mente di Saffo'. Lyric poetry is the blooming of a poet's mind.

The same metaphor is employed in the 'Preface' to *Canti di Castelvechio*: 'Mettono queste poesie i loro rosei calicetti (che l'inverno poi inaridisce senza farli cadere) intorno alla memoria di mia madre.' (p. 709) Thus the Sapphic flower, blooming, opening, being culled, or fading recalls ritual hymenaic wedding rituals celebrated in ancient epithalamia. They connote contemporary rural culture, and ultimately poetic creation as blooming:

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<sup>148</sup> 'Preface' to *Canti di Castelvechio*, in *Poesie*, II, 709.

Solo però quando l'epos cessò di fiorire, quando fu mietuta quella messe e portato via quel raccolto la lirica germinò, per così dire, nella maggese di quello. ('Commentario', p. 647)<sup>149</sup>

## 2.2 Catullus and the Perpetual Ritual of Lyric

As his critical work shows, Pascoli argued for the derivative nature of Latin lyric from the original nucleus of archaic Greek poetry, including the monodic lyric of Sappho:

Nella Grecia, da cui, come da maestra di Roma e di tutti, è bene cominciare, risonavano nei tempi lontani grida come: *ie Paieon, io Bacche, Hymen ai o, ai Line*: gioia, delirio, amore, morte [...]. ('Commentario', p. 645)

Nei paesi Aeolici la donna ebbe una libertà ignota nel resto dell' Hellade; e quindi in essi fiorì la poesia erotica e simpotica, che sono spesso la stessa cosa, poiché il convivio è sovente la scena dove si svolge il piccolo dramma d'amore. Tutto col tempo si mescolò e confuse; ma la nota primitiva persiste sempre: le anfore, benché infuse d'altro liquore, conservano il sottile e vago aroma del primo che vi fu versato; e questo aroma sembra mutare la natura e l'essenza del secondo. Come è sospirato l'amore nell'elegia! come è amaro e scurrile nello iambo! E se il pensiero della morte entra nella dolce melodia del simposio amoroso, come ne viene cacciato dalla gioia del vivere! 'I soli possono tramontare e ritornare: noi, appena tramontato questo breve dì, una notte dobbiamo dormire, infinita, senz'alba...Dammi mille baci, poi cento, poi altri mille, poi altri cento...' Così nell'anima del poeta, come il cupo ronzio del mare nelle volute della conchiglia, è l'eco dei convivii antichissimi dopo i quali ardeva la pira, dopo i quali dalla casa, in cui la gente udiva da ore un giocondo strepito, uscivano e l'allegria compagnia dei giovani che cantavano canzoni cui le donne chiudevano le orecchie, e i gentili cori di vergini e fanciulli, che le donne, fattesi sugli usci, ammiravano. ('Commentario', pp. 652-653)

Archaic Greek poetry, with its roots in popular rituals and convivial settings, is identified with the original archetype of the lyric, which developed in Latin and subsequent literatures. Carmen 5, by Catullus, quoted in the prose excerpt 'I soli possono tramontare [...] poi altri cento...' is referenced as an exemplary locus in which Greek elegiac poetry, monodic lyric and iambic verse came together. The three

<sup>149</sup> On 'maggese' see, 'Lavandare', ll. 9-10: 'Quando partisti, come son rimasta! | Come l'aratro in mezzo alla maggese'.

poetic genres are contained in a single poetic utterance. In Pascoli's view, Catullan lyric thus collapsed the strict divisions of ancient poetic genres, yet preserving the 'primitive' quality of the lyric.

It is not by chance that this *carmen* describes the love of Catullus and his lover through a solar metaphor. By adding the phrase 'senz'alba' and expanding the image of the eternal night ('nobis cum semel occidit brevis lux | nox est perpetua una dormienda', ll. 4-5) Pascoli employs one of the key words of his poetry: 'dawn'. He brings the poem to an inversed aubade context, exploiting the double connotation of 'nox', meaning both night and death. The longing for an eternal night ('nox perpetua') parallels the yearning of Sappho to follow Phaon beyond the horizon in the representation of 'Solon'.

Pascoli's poetry keeps Sapphic and Catullan lyric close to each other. In *Catullo calvos* there are explicit and implicit references to Sappho. Explicit ones to fragment 95 (104a Voigt), 'έσπερε, πάντα φέρωσ, όσα φαίνολις έσκέδασ' αύωσ, | φέρεις οϊν, φέρεις αίγα, φέρεις άπυ ματέρι παιδα', in the lines 'Perge, ne maledic, puer | namque vespere te domum | sidus et referet' (ll. 222-224), and implicit ones through the references to Catullus 51—itself a Latin translation of fr. 2 Bergk.<sup>150</sup> Both the Sapphic and Catullan influences follow the patterns established by Pascoli's wider poetics of appropriation of the classics, the primitive, and his notion of 'fanciullino'.<sup>151</sup> The dialogue between Greek and Latin lyric and the assimilation of the former into the latter described by Pascoli is foregrounded by the poet's translations.

<sup>150</sup> See *Catullo calvos*, 'Ille | mi par esse deo', ll. 59-60; 'nimiumque gestis', l. 68; 'tintinnant aures', l. 91.

<sup>151</sup> 'Commentario', pp. 732; 682. Pascoli treated choral lyric, too. Pindar and Bacchylides are the subjects of 'I vecchi di Ceo' (1904). Cfr. his essay on Bacchylides' newly found papyri 'Dalle tombe egizie' (1896-1897), in Capecechi, pp. 139-159.

*TR* contains ten translations from Catullus: ‘Suffeno’ (carmen 22), ‘La Statua’, ‘Ariadna’ and ‘Baccanale’ (three extracts from carmen 64), ‘Catullo non oblia’ (an excerpt from carmen 65), ‘Giuramenti’ (carmen 70), ‘Contradizione’ (carmen 72), ‘L’inestricabile’ (carmen 75), ‘Odio e Amore’ (carmen 85) and ‘Alla tomba del fratello’ (carmen 101). The same great themes at the basis of Pascoli’s fascination with Sappho come into play in his translations of Catullus. The themes of erotic love, death, and wedding rituals are at the forefront: ‘Catullo non oblia’, ‘Giuramenti’, ‘Contradizione’, ‘L’inestricabile’ and ‘Odio e amore’ treat the theme of love and frustrated desire, ‘Baccanale’ and ‘Alla tomba del fratello’ explicitly engage with ritualistic subjects.

As for Sappho, Pascoli’s reception of Catullus stresses the relationship between poetic imagery, the hymenaic context and wedding rituals. This is evident from his three translations from carmen 64. Catullus’ carmen recounts the mythical wedding of Peleus and Thetis. It is the longest poem in Catullus’ corpus. Pascoli, though, extracts three fragments focusing on three highly erotic images from Ariadne’s myth. ‘La statua’ describes the naked body of Ariadne who has been abandoned on the shore by her beloved Theseus.<sup>152</sup> Ariadne, the daughter of Dionysos, is compared to a Maenad. The Dyonisian sphere is evoked in the third excerpt, too. ‘Baccanale’ describes a bacchanal, during which Ariadne takes part in an orgy in honour of Dionysos, and, with the other Maenads, chants the ritual invocation to the god (‘urlando euoè, euoè’, l. 5). The second excerpt entitled ‘Ariadna’ shows how Pascoli, through his translations, traces the poetic patterns of the literary archetypes that inform his poetics. The eight lines from carmen 64 (ll. 86-93)

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<sup>152</sup> Cfr. Ariosto’s description of the body of Olimpia in canto XI, lxxvii-lixx of *Orlando furioso*, ed. by Lanfranco Caretti, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), I, 280-281.

constituting ‘Ariadna’ are one of the poetic loci where sexual desire and eroticism are described by similitude to floral images:

Lui non appena fissò curiosa con gli occhi la pura  
figlia del re, cui vedeva sbocciare la sua cameretta  
piena di soavità, tra le blande carezze materne:  
come un arbusto di mirto cui nutre con l’onde l’Eurota,  
come i colori che suscita e sparge la brezza d’aprile:  
ecco non prima di lui declinava l’ardore degli occhi,  
che la trascorse una fiamma per tutta la bella persona  
dentro, e senti che pungea le midolle dell’essere il fuoco.

[hunc simul ac cupido conspexit lumine uirgo  
regia, quam suavis exspirans castus odores  
lectulus in molli complexu matris alebat,  
quales Eurotae praecingunt flumina myrtus  
auraue distinctos educit uerna colores,  
non prius ex illo flagrantia declinavit  
lumina, quam cuncto concepit corpore flammam  
funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis.]  
(Carmen 64, ll. 86-93)

The fragment describes Ariadna’s falling in love with Theseus and her sexual attraction to him through metaphors of blooming. ‘[C]ameretta’ translates the diminutive ‘lectulus’ with Petrarchan echoes (‘O cameretta che già fosti un porto’, *RVF*, 234, l. 1).<sup>153</sup> As soon as she sees Theseus, the room fills with a scent of blooming flowers. Exploiting analogic connections between the arousal of erotic desire and the natural awakening in spring, Pascoli freely translates ‘suavis exspirans castus odores lectulus’ with ‘vedeva sbocciare la sua cameretta’. The suave smell (‘suavis odores’) of the Latin is conveyed visually and by association with the verb ‘sbocciare’, referring to flowers blooming and emanating a scent. The analogy with flowers is continued in the following lines: ‘come i colori che suscita e sparge la brezza d’aprile’. Pascoli’s ‘i colori’ metonymically recalls the previous image of blooming flowers.

<sup>153</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. by Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), p. 969.

Pascoli's emphasis on the relationship between poetry and wedding rituals emerges from the subtler intertextuality of *Canti di Castelvecchio*. The poem 'La nonna' is built on a line taken from Catullus 61. The notes to the second edition of the collection read: 'Per rendere poi a ognuno il suo, confesso che è di Catullo il canto "La nonna": Cana...anilitas Omnia omnibus annuit'.<sup>154</sup> Carmen 61 accurately describes a Roman wedding ritual. With this poem Catullus deliberately appropriates the Greek literary form of the epithalamion, varying its traditional structure.<sup>155</sup> Stylistically, the language of the carmen is divided between the high register of the Greek Kletic hymn and the lowly register of the popular Italic tradition of the *fescennina iocatio*. Taking after Sappho, carmen 61 connects the hymenaic theme to floral imagery. Paolo Fedeli notes that 'malgrado la perdita quasi totale degli epigrammi di Saffo, si sentono nel c. 61 echi della sua poesia, specie nei paragoni degli sposi con elementi del mondo vegetale o nelle delicate rappresentazioni della sposa'.<sup>156</sup> Thus carmen 61's appropriation of the Greek literary tradition, the Sapphic imagery and the poem's syncretic character may be considered as the poetic enactment of Pascoli's theories on literary tradition. The Catullan poem embodies the poetic quality of the 'eterno che è sempre nuovo' by mixing different literary traditions, different poetic forms and the references to the primitive quality of humans.

Extracting a cursory reference to the passing of time and old age from the Catullan poem, in 'La nonna' Pascoli constructs a re-enactment of an old woman's surrender to death. Catullus' lines 'usque dum tremulum movens | cana tempus anilitas | omnia omnibus annuit' (ll. 154-156) are assimilated in the first stanza and throughout the poem. '[T]remule / a / o', translation of 'tremulum', recurs in lines 8,

<sup>154</sup> *Poesie*, p. 710.

<sup>155</sup> Paolo Fedeli, *Il carme 61 di Catullo* (Freiburg: Edizioni Universitarie Friburgo, 1972), pp. 110-120.

<sup>156</sup> Fedeli, p. 13.

19, 25 and ‘capo d’argento’, for ‘cana’, is employed in line 3. In addition, both the Italian poem and the Catullan *carmen* contain a poetic address to a group of children: ‘tollite, o pueri, faces’ in the Catullan *carmen* (l. 114), and ‘bimbi’ (l. 4) in the Pascolian poem.

‘La nonna’ exemplifies Pascoli’s complex use of intertextual references, offering several interpretative layers. In the Catullan wedding song context, the reiterative ‘si’ pronounced by the grandmother resounds as the word of a spouse of a Christian wedding. In fol. 8<sup>r-v</sup> and ‘Nelle nozze di Ida’ marriage is explicitly connected with the loss of the bride’s maidenhood at the ritual level, and to the disintegration of the *nido* at the personal level. In ‘La nonna’, dissolution, represented by the grandmother’s surrender to death, is inescapably linked with the hymenaic context of Catullan / Sapphic origins, providing another variation of the poetic trope of *eros* and *thanatos*.

In addition to ‘La nonna’, intertextual references to Catullus are found in *Varie* with the poem ‘Passer mortuus est’, a direct quotation from *carmen* 3, the dirge for the death of Lesbia’s sparrow, and in the Latin poetry, which I cannot discuss here due to the constraint in space, with the 1897 *satira Catullo Calvos* featuring Catullus engaging in a poetic agon with his friend Calvo.

### 3. The Ancient Greek Singers from Castelvechio: Pascoli's Monodic Lyricism

Pascoli's idiosyncratic imprint on the language and topics of *TR* and the MSS analysed in the previous sections traverse his corpus of translations as a coherent unity, even though they were conceived independently. The study of the simultaneous presence of varied linguistic registers encompassing the popular, the dialect as well as the literary in *TR* gives a good picture of how all of Pascoli's translations fit in his poetics.<sup>157</sup>

The specificity of diction and the employment of dialect in the section 'Miscellanea' and 'Dalle letterature moderne' carry Pascoli's signature: 'il cavicchio del giogo', 'un marrello' ('La sementa'); 'Mese dei tòrcoli' ('L'inverno'); 'questi miei cernecchi' ('La paura della morte'); 'alcun barroccio' ('L'alba'); 'gattici e olmi [...] Lodole, cardellini' ('Ora gioconda'). So do the onomatopoeias: 'il *cucù* del cuculo tra i rami del leccio' ('L'aratura'); 'si tentennavano al vento' ('Ora gioconda'); 'iù iù u iù iù u' ('Il mago merlino'); 'Dlin Dlin' ('La conversione di Merlino'); 'dell'onde il chióccolio' ('La pace'), and the diminutives used throughout the anthology: 'primaticci capretti', 'bevicchiaci', 'tremulo maestralino', 'il vecchietto' ('Delizie estive'); 'un ramicel di mórtola' ('Dolor d'amore'); 'Mamma mia', 'Mamma cara' ('Per il mondo'); 'Un uccellin cantava' ('La figlia del re'); 'La camicina da morto'.<sup>158</sup> The tendency to employ popular or domestic diction, deliberately connecting his translations with his wider poetics of the primitive, has emerged also in my analysis of the lowering of the register in the autograph translations of Sappho, and in the Catullan appropriation in 'La nonna'.

<sup>157</sup> Fiorentino, pp. 92-94.

<sup>158</sup> On Pascoli's style: Contini, 'Giovanni Pascoli', pp. 251-252; on onomatopoeias: Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli', pp. lxix-lxxi.

Actually, the apparently random choice of fragments in ‘Miscellanea’ can be grouped according to common themes, reflecting recurrent topics of Pascoli’s oeuvre. These are the alternation of the seasons and the passing of time: Hesiod’s ‘Delizie estive’, ‘L’inverno’; Callimachus’ ‘L’alba’; Theognis’ ‘Tristezze e sorrisi amari’; the natural and pastoral world: Hesiod’s ‘La sementa’; Ovid’s ‘Le spighe’; Theocritus’ ‘Ora gioconda’ and ‘Il canto di Lytierre’; and death: Callinus’ ‘Si muore’; Tyrtaeus’ ‘La morte più bella’; Anacreon’s ‘La paura della morte’; Simonides’ ‘La bella morte’. Particularly interesting are Hesiod’s ‘L’aratura’ and Apollonius’ nocturne, which treat all these themes: ‘Notte [...] | [...] anche il custode de li atrii s’addormentava, | e la madre priva de’ bimbi ahi! morti, sopita ecco era nel sonno’. Love, often frustrated, is of course another recurrent theme, and it is the subject of Sappho’s odes, Archilochus’ ‘Pensieri d’amore’\*, Hipponacte’s ‘Lamento della miseria’\*, Plato’s ‘Epigramma amoroso’\*, and Callimachus’ ‘Dictyna’.<sup>159</sup>

Pascoli’s neoclassical metrics appreciated the linguistic specificity of ancient Greek and Latin poetry, in which he recognised a remnant of ‘primitive’ poetic rhythms. His translations provided an alternative metrical system to the Italian traditional prosody, preserving the ratio of form and content of the source in the target language. The originality of his metrical theories and his experimental language, breaking away from the Italian tradition, partly re-establish the inter-dependence of source and target language:

[I]l morto scrittore di cui è morta la gente e la lingua, deve venire innanzi e dire nella nostra lingua nuova, dire esso, non io o voi, il suo pensiero che già espresse nella sua lingua antica. [...] Ognuno faccia indovinare, se non sentire, le predilezioni che ebbe da vivo, quanto a lingua e a stile e a numero e a ritmo. (‘La mia scuola di grammatica’, pp. 249-250)

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<sup>159</sup> \* Poems added by Vicinelli.

From his experiments with etymological roots, and calque techniques, it is evident that translation for Pascoli involved a bending and a stretching of both the source and the target language for the sake of rhythmic and linguistic accuracy. His work on the uncovering of hidden connections between ancient and contemporary cultural traditions was aimed at preserving the original nucleus of ancient poetry in the process of translation from source to target language.

In Pascoli's comparativism, the 'otherness' and 'foreignness' of the Greek and Latin texts in relation to contemporary Italian carry less weight than the possible consonances between ancients and moderns. Especially in terms of diction, Pascoli's translations are 'appropriative'. His plurilingualism and highly personalised vocabulary tend to associate all ancient texts with a common linguistic matrix. This is to the partial detriment of their specificity. The Homeric material aside—hastily defined in derogatory terms by Benedetto Croce as 'Omero rimbambinito'—,<sup>160</sup> Pascoli's translations colour ancient Greek and Latin texts with his individual diction. The removal of any reference to Sappho's homosexuality from 'Preghiera' to fit a Christian context indeed suggests that Pascoli was deliberately operating according to a form of 'domestication', as self-conscious normalisation of the source text within the receiving culture.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, the use of diminutives and analogic floral images in the translations of Catullus 64 narrow the gap between Latin poetry, Latin language and Pascoli's poetic horizon.

In his original poetry, too, the perspective is always singular and unitary.

Gianfranco Contini notes:

Presente è un solo soggetto, non veramente dilatato all'umanità, l'uomo in generale in quanto dica: io. [...] E se manca l'uomo, manca la storia. [...] È

<sup>160</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'Giovanni Pascoli' (1906), in *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, 6 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1964), VI, 72-129 (p. 126).

<sup>161</sup> On definitions of 'domestication' and 'foreignisation' in translation, Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: a History of Translation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1-20.

Pascoli solo che parla. Evidentemente, se Pascoli sposta l'accento dall'uomo verso la natura, avrà luogo nella sua poesia la voce della natura, ma poiché le cose, le cose sotto il livello dell'uomo, non hanno voce, vorrà dire che la parte la interpreterà il soggetto.<sup>162</sup>

Pascoli's subjective relationship with translation from ancient languages is complicated by his active command of Latin. Traina speaking of Pascoli's bilingualism shows how in Pascoli's oeuvre Latin and Italian represent two phases of the same language:

Il paradosso—o il miracolo—pascoliano sta nell'aver attuato virtualità implicite in un sistema linguistico che non è più strumento di comunicazione, e lo ha potuto fare grazie a un bilinguismo che non era giustapposizione o sovrapposizione di due lingue diverse, ma compresenza di due fasi della stessa lingua. [...] Questo ha, dopo secoli, rimesso in moto la dialettica tradizione-innovazione, in cui consiste la vita di ogni linguaggio.<sup>163</sup>

Unsatisfied with the limits of a national language, the poet pursued a universal tongue, expression of a universal literature, superseding the specificity of national idioms and expressing the collective identity of humanity:<sup>164</sup> 'non è affatto impossibile che nell'avvenire [...] torni a formarsi, una letteratura internazionale su quelle nazionali; una letteratura [...] che sopra esse faccia circolare il pensiero e il sentimento comune.'<sup>165</sup> Greek and Latin could represent the bases for such a language because they were already dead, that is, not in current use.

Like his investment in comparative anthropology, this utopian and humanitarian view reflects Pascoli's *Belle Époque* positivism.<sup>166</sup> His confidence in the communicative power of words and in the chance to revive the dead languages, his faith in the heuristic qualities he attributes to poetry itself, alongside the poet's unrelenting thirst for knowledge reflect, partly, a faith in a progressive evolution

<sup>162</sup> Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli', p. lxxx.

<sup>163</sup> Traina, p. 227. Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli', pp. lxxviii-lxx.

<sup>164</sup> Cfr. 'Un poeta di lingua morta', in *Prose*, I, 155-164 (pp. 160-161).

<sup>165</sup> 'La mia scuola di grammatica', p. 254.

<sup>166</sup> Cfr. Contini, 'Giovanni Pascoli', p. 250.

towards the revelation of a universal truth, typical of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century European frame of mind.<sup>167</sup>

Pascoli's tendency to subjective lyricism embraces the majority of his translations, linguistically and formally. The long epics of Homer, Hesiod and Virgil are reduced to lyric fragments. Even the metre, supposed to replicate that of the epic poems—these translations are in Pascoli's 'neoclassical' hexameters—, actually reflect the poet's lyricism. Nicola Gardini showed that these hexameters were a combination of an *ottonario piano* and a *novenario piano*. The *novenario* is one of Pascoli's beloved metres, which he mostly employs in *Canti di Castelvecchio*.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the poet never translated the Homeric material, or Virgil, from beginning to end. In *TR*, the epics are split into shorter episodes, each introduced by a title, as self-contained poems. Descriptive lines judged superfluous or scenes estimated unessential to the poetic or narrative success of the passage in question are often excluded from the translation, resulting in an overall incrementation of the lyric intensity of the portions.<sup>169</sup>

As in a form of Romantic lyricism, Pascoli's poetry dialogues with his investment in ancient lyricism. The subjective and comparative tendencies are poetically shaped into a formal propensity for the lyric fragment. For instance, in *Myricae*, 'Tre Versi dell'Ascreo' condenses three hexameters of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (ll. 737-739) into a Sapphic stanza:

'Non di perenni fiumi passer l'onda,  
che tu non preghi volto alla corrente  
pura, e le mani tuffi nella monda  
acqua lucente'  
(ll. 1-4)

<sup>167</sup> Mario Pazzaglia, *Pascoli* (Roma: Salerno Editrice), pp. 14-15.

<sup>168</sup> Gardini, 'An Ancient Soul', pp. 63-67.

<sup>169</sup> Salvatore Quasimodo will use this technique in his own translations of Homer, Vergil and Ovid. Cfr. Salvatore Quasimodo, *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, ed. by Gilberto Finzi, 10<sup>th</sup> edn (Milan: Mondadori, 1996).

The displacement and de-contextualisation of the Greek line into the Sapphic dissolves Hesiod's voice.

The poem opens the section 'Pensieri' in *Myricae*. Every poem in this section is composed of two Sapphic stanzas. 'La civetta', 'Campane a sera', 'Ida e Maria', four lyrics in the section 'In campagna' ('Il vecchio dei campi'; 'Dall'argine'; 'Dopo l'acquazzone'; 'Sera d'ottobre'; 'Novembre') and the entire section 'Alberi e fiori' are also in Sapphics. The *endecasillabi* of these stanzas, though, are not the *endecasillabi sapphici* built accordingly to Pascoli's rules of neoclassical metrics—the one used in 'Solon' and for the translations of the Sapphic odes in *TR*. Most of the stanzas of these poems are Italian Sapphics of canonical rhyming *endecasillabi*, the greater part *a minore* and followed by a *quinario*, the same metre Pascoli employed in MS1b. The Sapphic stanza appears to be rooting the Italian tradition in the classical legacy. The Sapphic is one of Pascoli's privileged forms in his short-lyric collections, *Myricae* and *Canti di Castelvecchio*.

The confessional lyric quality of more epic works such as *Poemi conviviali* was underlined by Contini, who describes Pascoli's epic-lyric mode: 'c'è nei *Poemi conviviali* una specie di controcanto intimistico che rappresenta un partito dialetticamente misto da mettersi sullo stesso piano a cui appartiene di diritto il controcanto epico dei *Poemetti*.'<sup>170</sup> Garboli follows suit and underlines the unremitting presence of Pascoli's lyric self as the subject of his poetry: 'un poeta che non è solo l'autore delle sue poesie, ma, per quanto egli si getti addosso una maschera fin troppo riconoscibile, ne è il soggetto latente e invisuto, un'ombra, un io che non ha mai saputo trovare, a dispetto della sua opera, la sua identità e la sua forma.'<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Contini, 'Il linguaggio di Pascoli', p. lxxv.

<sup>171</sup> Garboli, 'Al lettore', p. 34.

Pascoli's voice is monodic in that it can sing only within his highly individualistic world of memories, in which the past defines the present and it is the only possible poetic dimension. The subjective approach to poetry, his syncretism, which often affected dissolution of the original source into Pascoli's voice and language, make Pascoli's appropriations of Sappho and Catullus inescapably bound to his own poetic horizon. The two ancient poets are therefore treated as archetypal lyric authors, where Pascoli finds the most poignant examples of the universal qualities of humans. They provide the link between poetry, nature and popular culture. On these grounds they also provide Pascoli with a set of images and symbols that constitute his poetic framework for the depiction of eroticism, ritual and poetic creation.

Mingling with the personal memories of the poet and facing the inevitability of death, Pascoli's classical lyricism looks inwardly. Sappho's and Catullus' poetry, representative of the anthropological foundations of the lyric, is projected onto a highly subjective dimension, which is characterised by a closed system of symbols coloured by Pascoli's poetic voice.

## Chapter 2

### Salvatore Quasimodo and Classical Lyricism: the Solitude of Absence

*Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,  
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,  
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,  
And of ourselves and of our origins,  
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.  
(Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West')*

In 1940 the Sicilian poet Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) published *Lirici greci*—to this day, the most famous anthology of Italian translations of ancient Greek lyric poetry. With *Lirici* Quasimodo publicly entered the world of the classical legacy and sealed the relationship between his poetry, the classics and translation. The dialogue between ancient Greek and Latin literature and his poetry, which would become a distinctive mark of Quasimodo's *oeuvre*, had been evident since his first collection *Acque e terre* (1930). Echoes of Sappho, Alcaeus, Homer, Catullus, Virgil and Ovid had progressively become stronger in *Oboe sommerso* (1932) and *Erato e Apollion* (1936). With the release of the anthology, for the first time Quasimodo made the explicit connection between his poetics and archaic Greek lyric.

When Quasimodo published the first edition of *Lirici*, he was at the apex of the hermetic stage of his career.<sup>1</sup> With affinities to the French symbolism of Verlaine and Mallarmé, in the aftermath of WWI Hermeticism had developed into one of the

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<sup>1</sup> Most critics indicate the period between 1940 and 1942, the date of publication of *Lirici greci* and the collection *Ed è subito sera* respectively, as the final apex of Quasimodo's hermetic period. See Luciano Anceschi, 'Ermetismo', in *Enciclopedia del Novecento* (Milan: Treccani, 1972), II, 741-751, republished as 'Luciano Anceschi: poetiche dell'Ermetismo', *Il verri*, 6<sup>th</sup> ser., 11 (1978), 10-43; Silvio Ramat, *L'ermetismo* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1969), pp. 380-383; Franco Fortini, 'Da Ungaretti agli ermetici', in *La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, 10 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1976), X: 2, pp. 299-346 (pp. 319-320); Niva Lorenzini, *La poesia italiana del novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), p. 112. Mario Petruccianni delimits the hermetic period of Quasimodo to the years 1936-1938: 'Quasimodo Ermetico', in *Quasimodo e l'ermetismo: atti del I incontro di studio, 15-16 febbraio 1984, Modica* (Modica: Centro Nazionale di Studi su Salvatore Quasimodo, 1986), pp. 21-39 (p. 37); Natale Tedesco problematises this label in *Salvatore Quasimodo e la condizione poetica del nostro tempo* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1959), pp. 23-51.

most prominent literary movements in Fascist Italy.<sup>2</sup> By the outbreak of the second world conflict, poets including Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale, Mario Luzi and Quasimodo himself, working alongside *critici militanti* such as Carlo Bo, Giuseppe Macri and Luciano Anceschi, were discussing and actively promoting the hermetic poetics. Their speculations were based on the notions of ‘letteratura come vita’, ‘poetica della parola’, ‘poesia pura’. All poetry was seen as a series of lyric fragments. Facing the impossibility of engaging with the external reality plagued by the Fascist regime’s propaganda and the war, hermetic poetry retreated into the inner subjective dimension of the self, voicing the song of isolated poets. Advocating the autonomy and self-sufficiency of art, Hermeticism conceived poetry as revelation of a metaphysical absolute. Quasimodo’s investment in the classical lyric and the lyric fragment emerges from this cultural environment and the contemporary preoccupation with a re-definition of poetry as monodic lyric song.<sup>3</sup>

Being the first of a long series of translations of ancient and modern literatures into several languages signed by the poet, *Lirici greci* represents a turning point in Quasimodo’s poetic career. After *Lirici*, translation, both as a form of art and a bridging process between different cultural systems, constitutes the backbone of

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<sup>2</sup> On the history of Hermeticism see Mario Apollonio, *Ermetismo* (Padua: Cedam, 1945); Mario Petrucciani, *La poetica dell’ermetismo italiano* (Turin: Loescher, 1955); Anceschi, ‘Ermetismo’; Giacomo Debenedetti, *Poesia italiana del novecento* (Milan: Garzanti, 1974); Ramat, *L’ermetismo*; Donato Valli, *Storia degli ermetici* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1978); Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, ‘La continuità della poesia’, in *La cultura e la poesia italiana del dopoguerra* (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1968), pp. 69-121; Giorgio Barberi Squarotti and Anna Maria Golfieri, *Dal tramonto dell’ermetismo alla neoavanguardia* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Flora coined the term ‘ermetismo’ in *La poesia ermetica* (Bari: Laterza, 1936). On the poetics of Hermeticism see the studies cited above by Apollonio, Petrucciani, Anceschi, Debenedetti, Ramat, Barberi Squarotti and Franco di Carlo, *Letteratura e ideologia dell’Ermetismo* (Foggia: Edizioni Bastogi, 1981) and Luciano Anceschi, *Le poetiche del novecento in Italia: studio di fenomenologia e storia delle poetiche* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1990), pp. 218-236. On ‘letteratura come vita’, Carlo Bo, ‘Letteratura come vita’, in *Frontespizio* (September, 1938), now in Valli, *Storia degli ermetici*, pp. 158-165; on ‘poetica della parola’, Oreste Macrí, ‘La poetica della parola e Salvatore Quasimodo’ (1938), in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Gilberto Finzi (Milan: Mondadori, 1969), pp. 43-87; on ‘poesia pura’ Alfredo Gargiulo, ‘Idea di lirica’, in *Il fiore della lirica italiana*, ed. by Enrico Falqui and Aldo Capasso (Lanciano: Carabba, 1933), pp. i-xiii; see also Luciano Anceschi, ‘Introduzione’, in *Lirici nuovi: antologia di poesia contemporanea*, ed. by Luciano Anceschi (Milan: Hoepli, 1943), pp. 9-24 and *Idea della lirica*, pp. 1-16.

Quasimodo's aesthetic research: the intermediary between his poetic 'I' and an absent other. Significantly, his translation anthologies outnumber his collections of poetry.

Sponsoring a renewal of the classical ideal, the poet-translator of the *Novecento* contributed to remove classical texts from a static conception of the literary tradition as a monument to the past. The poet envisaged the foundation of a new literary humanism. In the process, he fostered a new approach to the practice of poetic translation as a creative act, distancing his translations from the neoclassical and romantic notions of accuracy of Ippolito Nievo, Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi, who championed the pre-eminence of the source text over its translation.<sup>4</sup>

With its innovative, subjective and creative character, Quasimodo's translation method follows in Pascoli's footsteps. Pascoli's poetics of translation tended towards the aesthetic equivalence between source and target text; the linguistic and rhythmical accuracy in the translations of ancient poetry were foundational to the recovery of the 'primitive' eternal qualities of humans and literature. Pascoli's view of literature though is degenerative. The new and the contemporary are significant only insofar as they activate the memory of the past. On the contrary, as I will show, in Quasimodo's view of the tradition, the past and the present are dimensions of the same aesthetic plane, as different moments in which poetry, as universal self-standing entity, manifests itself.

A self-taught classicist, Quasimodo never had the command of Greek and Latin achieved by Foscolo, Leopardi, Carducci and Pascoli or the refinement of academic scholars.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his life he fought the dry academicism of classical philologists. As Anceschi notes in his first introduction to *Lirici greci*:

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<sup>4</sup> Francesco della Corte, 'Tre poeti traducono Catullo', *Aufidus*, 7 (1989), 159-168 (p. 164). Quasimodo distances himself from 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sapphic translation in 'Letter of the 10:VII:XV', in *Lettere d'amore: 1936-1959*, ed. by Alessandro Quasimodo (Milan: Spirali, 1985), pp. 74-75 (p. 75).

<sup>5</sup> See Gilberto Finzi, 'Cronologia', in *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, pp. xci-xcvii.

Nella ricerca [...] di una poesia veramente nuova e contemporanea—libera cioè dall’ornato pesante dell’archeologia e del culturalismo in un linguaggio più leale e aperto—e, poi, soprattutto, nella aspirazione al raggiungimento di una rigorosa purezza lirica si ponevano le condizioni di una più approfondita ed intima lettura degli antichi poeti.<sup>6</sup>

Translation becomes a means toward a new poetic language, which may express the essence of poetry. So Quasimodo in the ‘Chiarimento e note alla traduzioni’ of *Lirici* explains:

Quella terminologia classicheggiante (per intenderci: *opimo, pampineo, rigoglio, fulgido, florido*, ecc.) che pretese di costituirsi a linguaggio aromatico, adatto soprattutto alle traduzioni dei testi greci e latini, [...] è morta nello spirito delle generazioni nuove.<sup>7</sup>

Quasimodo dismisses the linguistic ornaments of academic translations. With *Lirici greci* he tried to reinstate the value of self-standing poetic translations by assuming the role of both poet and professor. After *Lirici*, Filippo Maria Pontani’s 1969 version of the Greek lyrics left a mark in the history of ‘academic’ translation, but, having been presented as a scholarly work without artistic pretensions, it was never discussed among the several *traduzioni d’autore* of the time. After Quasimodo’s anthology the poetic and the academic spheres of influence within literature in translation are separate.<sup>8</sup>

The first section of this chapter ‘Tradition and Translation toward a Lyric Absolute’ addresses the subject of Quasimodo’s commitment to the classical legacy and how it is complicated by his approach to self-standing translation. It will appear that translating ancient lyric, for Quasimodo, is interwoven with issues of poetic voice, the poet’s aesthetic views on lyric poetry, the Italian tradition of Leopardian lyricism and the cultural temperament of Italian militant criticism between the wars.

Aligning myself with Elena Salibra, who equates ‘stile “da traduzione” e stile

<sup>6</sup> Luciano Anceschi, ‘Introduzione’ (1940), in *Lirici greci*, ed. by Niva Lorenzini (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), pp. 305-319 (p. 309). Hereafter I will refer to this edition of *Lirici greci*.

<sup>7</sup> Salvatore Quasimodo, ‘Chiarimento e note alle traduzioni’, in *Lirici*, pp. 207-208 (p. 207).

<sup>8</sup> *Lirici greci*, trans. by Filippo Maria Pontani and ed. by Simone Beta (Turin: Einaudi, 2008).

poetico'<sup>9</sup> in Quasimodo's poetry, in the second section 'Sappho and Catullus as Lyric Abstractions', I discuss the poet's translations of the Greek and Latin lyrics as expressions of a poetic ideal. *Lirici greci* was born from his original and active reshaping of lyricism through a free appropriation of the sources. Analysing Quasimodo's strategies in the compilation of *Lirici* I show that the poet's classical lyricism is primarily 'monodic' and that his translations reveal a complex relationship between their poetic 'I' and notions of solitude, memory and origins.

Within this context I include a brief examination of *Canti di Catullo* (the compendium of Catullan translations published in 1945 with the name of *Catullus Veronensis Carmina* and reissued with variations in 1955 as *Canti*). If a less strikingly original re-appropriation of its source text than *Lirici*, *Canti* confirms that Quasimodo's translations from the Greek and Latin lyrics were expressions of a unitary aesthetic ideal, but also of the poet's varying response to the contemporary cultural debates on poetry.

The impact of *Lirici greci* stretched further than Quasimodo's own appreciation. Albeit Quasimodo would try to dissociate his work from 'poesia pura' and the hermetic avant-garde after the experience of the second world conflict,<sup>10</sup> *Lirici greci* was born under these stars. Between the '40s and the '50s, *Lirici* indeed becomes one of the landmarks of Hermeticism.<sup>11</sup> The rising of *Lirici* to canonical status, the reception of the anthology and of Quasimodo's classical lyricism in the second half of the *Novecento* are addressed in the third section, 'The negative effects of success: *Lirici greci*'s reception'.

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<sup>9</sup> Elena Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1985), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Traduzioni dai classici' and 'Discorso sulla poesia' (1953), in *Il poeta e il politico e altri saggi* (Milan: Schwarz, 1960), pp. 73-76 (p. 73) and pp. 27-36 (p. 28).

<sup>11</sup> Petrucciani, *La poetica dell'ermetismo*, pp. 153-160; Niva Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', in *Lirici greci*, pp. 215-269 (pp. 222-249).

## 1. Tradition and Translation Toward a Lyric Absolute

The first edition of *Lirici greci* (with an ‘Introduction’ by Luciano Anceschi) was published in 1940 by Edizioni di Corrente [COR]. There are four subsequent main editions of the anthology: *Lirici greci* (with the ‘Introduction’ by Anceschi partially modified), Mondadori (1<sup>a</sup> Edizione ‘I poeti dello “Specchio”’), Milano, 1944 [LG1<sup>a</sup>]; *Lirici greci* (with a new ‘Introduction’ by Luciano Anceschi), ‘Biblioteca Moderna Mondadori’, Milano, 1951 [BMM]; *Lirici greci* (reproducing the 1951 ‘Introduction’ by Anceschi), Mondadori (I poeti dello ‘Specchio’), Milano, 1958 [LG3<sup>a</sup>]; and *Lirici greci*, ‘Opera Omnia’, Mondadori, Milano 1965. Only LG1<sup>a</sup> and BMM present substantive textual variants from the COR text and LG3<sup>a</sup> is the definitive text. It must be noted that the choice of lyrics in the anthology is unvaried from COR onwards. LG3<sup>a</sup> (1958) restores the COR text in most of its parts.<sup>12</sup>

Quasimodo used the *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, edited by Ernst Diehl in 1936 as source text for his translations.<sup>13</sup> Diehl’s anthology includes all fragments of monodic, choral (excluding Bacchylides and Pindar), iambic and elegiac poetry extant at the time, with a critical apparatus in Latin. Of the total of seventy-three fragments translated by Quasimodo in his anthology, forty-two are monodic lyrics. This selection includes nineteen fragments by Sappho, ten by Alcaeus, three by Erinna and ten by Anacreon. The fragments of the Lesbian poets, of Erinna and Anacreon are collected in Fascicle 4 of Diehl’s edition, ‘ΜΕΛΟΠΟΙΟΙ: ΜΟΝΩΔΙΑΙ’— a relatively minor section of the anthology which is organised in six fascicles, and dominated by Iambic, Elegiac and Choral Poetry. Yet over a half of Quasimodo’s

<sup>12</sup> The text of LG3<sup>a</sup> has been used for *Lirici*’s reprints ever since. For a list of *Lirici*’s textual variants up to LG3<sup>a</sup>, see Gilberto Finzi, ‘Note’, in *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, pp. 1326-1341. ‘Introduzione’ (1940), ‘Introduzione’ (1951) and ‘Altre circostanze, per il libro’ (1978) are now in Niva Lorenzini’s edition of *Lirici greci* (2004), at pp. 305-319, pp. 321-333 and pp. 335-341. The ‘Chiarimento e note alle traduzioni’ by Salvatore Quasimodo are also in this edition, pp. 207-218.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Chiarimento alle traduzioni’, p. 208.

anthology is concerned with monodic lyric. While in his ‘Chiarimento alle traduzioni’ he claims he is interested in both monodic and choral melic poetry and that his attention ‘legittima una uniforme disposizione dello spirito’ with both forms, *Lirici* presents only thirteen choral lyric fragments—four by Alcman, one by Stesichorus, six by Ibycus and two by Simonides. The remaining eighteen fragments are mainly from iambic and elegiac poetry by ten different authors;<sup>14</sup> two fragments are anonymous.

The most striking feature of the selection is the absence of the two choral poets Pindar and Bacchylides; an omission that Quasimodo never justifies either in his ‘Chiarimento alle traduzioni’ or in the ‘Note al Testo’, and that Luciano Anceschi’s introductions never address.<sup>15</sup> Diehl’s anthology also excludes the two poets, but because of their individual relevance in the history of ancient Greek lyric. These choral melics would deserve a dedicated volume, as T. Hudson-Williams remarks in his review of the first edition (1926) of Diehl’s anthology: ‘Bacchylides [...] has disappeared, he is no longer a man to be just “anthologised”, for after the discoveries in Egypt he has been promoted to the dignity of a Pindar, and is now a poet with “complete surviving works”.’<sup>16</sup> A representative and comprehensive anthology of Greek melic poetry should comprise these two poets.<sup>17</sup> The gap in the Italian collection would then appear an unpardonable oversight on the compiler’s part.

However *Lirici* was never presented as a critical, philological or comprehensive edition of Greek melic poetry— in fact, quite the opposite. As

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<sup>14</sup> These are Mimnermus’ fr. 1 and 2, Archilocus’ fr. 25 and 79, Theognis’ lines 1197-1202, Praxilla’s fr. 2 and 3, Lycophron’s fr. 1 and 2, Jone of Ceos’ fr. 9, Licymnius’ fr. 1-2 and 3, Melanippe’s fr. 1, the single fragment by Ibycus.

<sup>15</sup> Leone Traverso justifies the exclusion of Pindar’s and Bacchylides as ‘manifestazioni illustri—a prima vista un po’ estranee al nostro spirito’: ‘Lirici Greci’, in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 291-294 (p. 291).

<sup>16</sup> T. Hudson-Williams, ‘Review: Diehl’s *Anthologia Lyrica*’, *The Classical Review*, 39 (1925), 182-183.

<sup>17</sup> Filippo Maria Pontani’s and Burzacchini-Degani’s anthologies include choral poetry.

Quasimodo remarks his translation purported to overcome the aridity of philological exactitude.<sup>18</sup> In *Lirici* he set out to translate the Greek lyric poets with ‘una disposizione di ricerca equilirica ai testi per una resa di “voce poetica”.’ (‘Chiarimento alle traduzioni’, p. 208) The Hermetics viewed lyric as the purest poetic form. Quasimodo’s ‘ricerca equilirica’ conveys the intention behind the act of translation to achieve ‘lyric equivalence’. That is to say, the translations of *Lirici* aim at recreating the lyric mode of ancient Greek melic poetry. In this creative process, linguistic and rhythmical approximations become secondary criteria of translation.

Quasimodo’s ‘ricerca equilirica’ echoes the poetic ideals programmatically laid out by Anceschi in his first introduction to the anthology. According to the critic, contemporary poets lived in a time of spiritual correspondences between antiquity and the present (‘amabili concordanze della contemporanea spiritualità’, in ‘Introduzione’ (1940), p. 309). Having set the foundations of hermetic poetics, through their translations they could highlight the eternal metaphysical essence of poetry in ‘*una poetica della purezza lirica*’ (p. 312), common to both ancients and moderns. In Anceschi’s view, the translation of the lyrics is a programmatic operation of recovery of the lyric essence of poetry, conceived as a self-standing unity transcending space and time:

Questa aspirazione di purezza in un riconoscimento della relativa ‘brevità’ di ogni composizione poetica, che, per raggiungere il suo scopo, deve presentarsi alla nostra coscienza come *un tutto* è, appunto, la lirica—per la prima volta nata all’umanità nella Grecia. Di essa solo la *parola* (qualche parola altissima, e interrotta) ci resta, là dove era anche danza e musica: parola, danza, musica in un’invisibile armonia unitaria di ritmi. E solo l’immaginazione più libera può darci un’approssimazione felice a quel segreto.

Nell’inutilità più dichiarata di ‘commento’—per voci così assolute—limitarsi alle indicazioni antologiche, lasciare il discorso alla poesia, questo è forse, —fuori da trasposizioni in altro linguaggio o logico-critico o (come nel caso del Pascoli, ma allora: perché?) immaginativo, e fuori dagli entusiasmi

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<sup>18</sup> See ‘Una poetica’ (1950), in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 23-25 (p. 25).

forzati e dagli affannosi rapimenti dei filologi-poeti—questo è, forse, il dover, qui, più alto e responsabile.  
(‘Introduzione’ (1940), pp. 313-314)

The brevity of the fragment appears to be the essential quality of poetry. This might be another reason behind the exclusion of Pindar’s long choral odes. Rejecting the possibility of a satisfactory philological interpretation of the individual poetic utterances, as well as the mythopoietic approach that characterised Pascoli’s account of ancient lyric (see Chapter 1), the creative and poetic act of translation cannot but be appropriative. Translation is appropriation of the absolute qualities of the poetic word of the ancient poets aimed at the creation of a new classical lyricism.

Fidelity to the source text in terms of language, form and meter was less important to Quasimodo than rendering the ‘poetic lyric voice’ of the ancients and demonstrating how ancient lyric may still live in his own poetry. The Sapphic and Alcaic stanzas of the fragments by Sappho, Alcaeus and Anacreon are never maintained in the Italian. Significantly, Pascoli’s rhythmic translation ‘Preghiera a Afrodite’ (fr. 1 Diehl / 1 Voigt) is dismissed by Quasimodo in a letter to Maria Cumani referring to his own version of Sappho 1:

Ma, se ti capita, confronta la traduzione tentata dal Foscolo della stessa ode e vedrai quanto il *melodramma* abbia reso ridicola quella purissima poesia. E quella di Pascoli?  
(‘Letter of the 10:VII:XV’, p. 75)

As Giannini notes, while the poet does not give the reason for his rejection of the Pascolian version, the interrogative question conveys a negative evaluation of Pascoli’s translation.<sup>19</sup> Pascoli’s attention to metrical and rhythmical accuracy for the sake of aesthetic equivalence is very distant from the hermetic conception of translation as recreation for the expression of lyric purity.

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<sup>19</sup> Giannini, p. 379.

Quasimodo in his 'Ad Afrodite' expands the Greek Sapphics in the first stanza from four to six lines of various lengths and condenses the third into a *terzina*. The remaining stanzas are all unrhymed *quartine* with lines of various lengths: from five to thirteen-syllable lines, interspersed only occasionally with *endecasillabi piani* (ll. 2; 3; 7; 14; 15; 17; 22; 28). He does not look for an Italian metrical equivalent to the lyric meters of the Greek. In his translations he freely excises lines of the original and adds new ones, regularly expanding or reducing the source texts. In *Lirici greci* in fact there is a mutual exchange between the Greek and Quasimodo's language. The boundaries between poetic experience and translation appear blurred. Manara Valgimigli rightly remarks that, in Quasimodo's oeuvre, it is the 'poetare che si riflette sul tradurre, e non già il tradurre sul [...] poetare'.<sup>20</sup> The ancient Greek language constitutes a mesh onto which Quasimodo embroiders his own poetic diction in the process of translating; as a result, his language is articulated through the very *experience* of translation.

Whereas for Pascoli translation and poetry involved the re-enactment of the classics and their dead languages, for Quasimodo Greek and Latin were never dead since poetry is an absolute that supersedes time and space. Referring to his version of the Greek lyrics he comments: 'Sentivo, rileggendo i testi, che qualche cosa di quelle voci, di quei "numeri" (anche se non equivalenti) era passato nella nostra lingua.' According to the poet, certain rhythms ('numeri') of the Greek language and its 'voices' (the echoes of their words) live in the Italian language. This cursory observation on the relationship between the Italian language and ancient Greek appears in his 1945 essay 'Traduzioni dai classici' (p. 73). At this time he had already translated the Greek lyric as well as Virgil, Catullus and the Gospel of John. Referring

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<sup>20</sup> Manara Valgimigli, 'Poeti greci e *Lirici nuovi*' in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 313-319 (p. 318).

to the historical derivations of the Italian language from ancient Greek and Latin, Quasimodo's own poetic style and diction form in the intermesh between the ancient source and the Italian language. Because of the bond and the spiritual consonance ('uniforme disposizione dello spirito') devised by the poet between the Greeks and the moderns and Italian language, there is no anxiety of untranslatability in Quasimodo's translations, but a faith in a new living classicism. The poet explains these tenets as 'le prime architetture di un neo-umanesimo'.<sup>21</sup>

Even after the end of his direct involvement with Hermeticism, and his opening to a socially engaged form of poetry, Quasimodo's diction resounds with Greek and Latin notes. In his essay 'Il poeta e il politico' (1959) he states: 'Il poeta è la summa delle diverse "esperienze" dell'uomo del suo tempo, ha un linguaggio che non è più quello delle avanguardie, ma concreto nel senso dei classici.' (p. 50) With their 'concrete' (*concreto*) language, here meaning 'realistic' and 'immediate', the classics remain exemplary. Thus writing poetry in Italian necessarily means to engage with classical antiquity by means of translation. Greek and Latin are active agents in Quasimodo's poetry as much as any other modern language, and equally (if not more) influential to the development of Quasimodo's authorial identity.

The opening paragraph of 'Traduzioni dai classici' contains the theorisation of this all-encompassing aesthetics:

Il desiderio d'una lettura diretta dei testi di alcuni poeti dell'antichità mi spinse, un giorno, a tradurre le pagine più amate dei poeti della Grecia. Il greco ritornava a essere ancora un'avventura, un destino a cui i poeti non possono sottrarsi. Le parole dei cantori che abitarono le isole di fronte alla mia terra ritornarono lentamente nella mia voce, come contenuti eterni, dimenticati dai filologi per amore di un'esattezza che non è mai poetica e qualche volta neppure linguistica. (pp. 73-76)

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<sup>21</sup> 'Il poeta e il politico', in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 47-58 (p. 49).

Here we recover the poet's notion of the classics as cultural origins, an unavoidable term of comparison for any contemporary poet wishing to enter the European literary tradition. The rite of passage through Greek and Latin literature is a mandatory experience that becomes 'un'avventura' through language and the past. From this viewpoint, an intertextual reference to the Ur-poets of the Western tradition represents an experience deeper than a dry scholarly descent into the literature of the past. According to Quasimodo, while the confrontation with the classics—that is, the author's origins—is a necessary phase in a poet's career, he must appropriate them, and let them speak through his own lyric song. Drawing a direct line of descent from the poets of Magna Grecia, Quasimodo's relationship with the classical tradition is thus shaped by his own personal construction of poetic and personal identity. The Greeks are poetic archetypes as well as direct ancestors of the poet.

*Lirici greci* is a fundamental creative piece of Quasimodo's oeuvre. From this perspective his disregard of the two main Greek choral poets is not mere levity, but a deliberate aesthetic choice. As Anceschi programmatically states in his 1940 'Introduction', the whole structure of the translation anthology should be deemed as such. If read from this point of view, Quasimodo's compendium shows a propensity towards monodic over choral melic, and of short over lengthy fragments. In fact, the few fragments of choral poetry selected by Quasimodo are never dialogic in character: there is typically only one speaker, mostly retelling a personal experience, so that the collective element of choral poetry is completely lost in the translation. The close reading of the texts that follows in section 3 confirms that this poetic alignment with monodic lyricism and brevity springs from a deliberate shunning of dialogic genres (including the epic), born from an active collaboration with the militant critical action of Anceschi and his hermetic aesthetic agenda:

Entro i limiti di una pura (attuale e antica) idea delle poesia perciò fu osservata la scelta dei testi, ed è chiaro, ormai, il significato delle presenze e delle assenze in questa che vuol essere un'antologia dell'antologia, fatta secondo il criterio più vivo. Naturalmente è ben definito il senso anche delle esclusioni di poeti disposti a mettere a servizio della 'celebrazione' la magnificenza di uno stile esportissimo, come Pindaro: o, come Bacchilide, abile e colto in una dolcezza di analisi descrittive. E, sempre, poi, un rigore senza concessioni ha voluto la esclusione, o almeno, la limitazione nella presenza di poeti 'semilirici' (giambici o elegiaci, gnomici o politici) troppo disposti alla *sentenza*, all'*esortazione* o alla *narrazione*: a indubbie condizioni di prosa.<sup>22</sup>

Elena Salibra's study *Salvatore Quasimodo* (1985) shows that the translations of *Lirici greci* and the rest of Quasimodo's *opus* are in a dialogue: 'È innegabile la suggestione di versi di Saffo o di altri lirici, nei quali *amore, morte, solitudine* sono componenti essenziali del canto'.<sup>23</sup> The critic has proved that a specific group of words from *Lirici* populate Quasimodo's original poems: the semantic chain, 'ape-miele'; the adjectives 'cupo, celeste, profondo'; the semantic chain 'luna-cavalli'; the pair: 'fanciulli-conchiglie'; the colour red ('rosso'). Lorenzini also underlined the intertextual connection of *Nuove poesie* (1942) with *Lirici*.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Quasimodo's appropriative method drags the ancient texts into his own aesthetic framework upholding the hermetic ideology. The notes to the translation 'Vorrei veramente esser morta' are particularly revealing of Quasimodo's method and his hermetic interpretative categories:

Nell'ultima strofe, della quale sono pervenute a noi soltanto alcune terminazioni di versi, si è tentato addirittura di raggiungere la misura dei gliconei. Simili congetture, che esulano anche dal campo della filologia, sono state da me rifiutate. Ho preferito perciò che la poesia continuasse l'eco di un 'suono' che i secoli avevano interrotto sulle scritture degli amanuensi. [...] Qui la parole della poetessa, oltre la consueta potenza evocativa, acquista valori drammatici e visivi: siamo quasi al 'discorso' ma non al discorso parlato che sarà l'errore, nei periodi della decadenza, degli elegiaci (in parte) e degli gnomici. [...] L'occasione del sentimento' che invita Saffo a parlare con voce non ripetibile, con linguaggio ignoto agli imitatori dell'epica, ci rivela i moti della sua vita più segreta e con essi i costumi d'un mondo scomparso.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Anceschi, 'Introduzione' (1940), p. 315.

<sup>23</sup> Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, pp. 36; 38.

<sup>24</sup> Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, pp. 35-45; pp. 66-75. Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', pp. 261-264.

<sup>25</sup> 'Note alla traduzioni', pp. 211-212.

This passage shows that interpretative textual conjectures are rejected ('Simili congetture [...] sono state da me rifiutate'). Through translation Quasimodo aims at conveying Sappho's sonorities ('ho preferito [...] che la poesia continuasse l'eco di un "suono"'). Sappho's poem is considered a perfect example of pure lyric: it is evocative ('consueta potenza evocativa'), monologic, the fragmentary expression of an inner feeling ('siamo qui al "discorso", ma non al discorso parlato'), absolute ('voce non ripetibile'), and ultimately the revelation of a mysterious hidden dimension ('ci rivela i moti della sua vita più segreta'). Quasimodo here reads Sappho's poem according to the foundational categories of hermetic poetics, as defined by Anceschi's 1940 introduction to the anthology:

La lirica è certamente, anche per noi, 'storia del cuore dell'uomo'. Ma una tale idea, ormai, implica all'interno delle distinzioni: la 'storia del cuore' non può essere 'attuale', e neppure deve essere risolta in *diario* o in *narrazione*: essa deve avere una assoluta condizione di canto.  
(p. 310)

As Cesare Angelini noted at the time, this interpretation is deliberately equivocal:

Parlan dei lirici greci—Alceo, Saffo—che, superata l'epica, nella quale i motivi lirici era dispersi, sarebbero riusciti a liberarli—a isolarli—raggiungendo l'estremo di purezza lirica nell'estrema brevità della durata. C'è un equivoco. Anche la grande lirica greca tendeva al mito. Che è essenzialmente narrativo. [...] I cosiddetti frammenti che, secondo gli ermetici rappresenterebbero la massima conquista nella purezza lirica, sono arrivati a noi come frantumi; nativamente eran parti di liriche costruite. E di Saffo ci restan due liriche intere.<sup>26</sup>

In 1938 Carlo Bo, in 'Letteratura come vita', had stated that Hermeticism was a way of life, thus justifying the hermetic tendencies towards an ideological interpretation and evaluation of literature. Quasimodo's hermetic interpretation of Sappho, and his negative value judgment of 'discursive', non-lyric genres such as

<sup>26</sup> Cesare Angelini, 'L'ermetismo e gli ermetici', *Primato*, 1.8 (15 June 1940), 7-10 (p. 8).

elegiac and iambic poetry, appears to be an actualisation of the hermetic militant approach to the interpretation of literature. In this view, *Lirici* is an attempt to define a classical lyric canon, in the same way as the anthology *Lirici nuovi*, edited by Anceschi and published in 1943, settled the lyric hermetic canon of contemporary poetry.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, in the introduction to *Lirici nuovi* (1943) Anceschi employs the same rhetoric of his 1940 introduction to *Lirici greci*. Anceschi reflects on the song-like quality of lyric poetry with exactly the same words (emphasised in bold):

**Per noi, la lirica è ancora, certamente, ‘storia del cuore dell’uomo’. Ma una tale idea implica all’interno delle distinzioni convenienti: la ‘storia del cuore’ non può essere ‘attuale’, e neppure ha da essere risolta in diario o in narrazione: nella lirica, la parola fruisce di una franca condizione di canto in cui il suo senso logico giunge quasi al limite dell’annullamento.**<sup>28</sup>

The publication of *Lirici* happened at a crucial moment of the cultural debate around Hermeticism. Angelini’s commentary is part of the investigations ‘Parliamo dell’Ermetismo’ and ‘L’Ermetismo e gli ermetici’ led by the literary journal *Primato*. Between June and July 1940, the journal gathered fifteen contributions over three issues by hermetic and non-hermetic poets and critics, with the intent to define the terms of the developing poetics. From this operation it emerged that hermetic poets and critics ‘nell’opera altrui—ossia in quanto può attrarre la loro attività critica—ricercano al di là della pura “realizzazione” artistica la molteplicità dei lieviti morali, i segreti interessi umani, e insomma la confessione metafisica’, and that Hermeticism was controversially received by its contemporaries.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Valentina De Angelis, *L’estetica di Luciano Anceschi: prospettive e sviluppi della nuova fenomenologia critica* (Bologna: Clueb, 1983), p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> Anceschi, ‘Introduzione’, in *Lirici nuovi*, ed. by Anceschi, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Corrado Pavolini, ‘Parliamo dell’ermetismo’, *Primato*, 1.7 (1 June 1940), 7-10 (p. 8); Lorenzini, ‘Postfazione’, pp. 224-241.

## 2. Sappho and Catullus as Lyric Abstractions: Poetic Voice in *Lirici greci*

*Lirici greci*'s recurrent themes of absence and solitude, and its unitary poetic voice give a topical and a linguistic cohesiveness to the miscellaneous fragments in the collection.<sup>30</sup> The implied addressee of these lyrics can take the form of an absent person, typically an absent lover, when the narrator confronts himself / herself with unrequited love or abandonment. Alternatively, the 'poetic-I' defines itself against the (metaphorical) absence of a contingent reality. The latter aspect of the theme of absence is either resolved through syntactical and linguistic negatives or with the recreation of 'the other' through a retelling of memories, dreams or wishful thinking.<sup>31</sup> The theme of absence is a defining element of the hermetic poetics enucleated by Bo in 1938:

[L]a letteratura tende all'identità, collabora alla creazione di una realtà, che è il contrario della realtà confinata nel tempo, e senza possibilità di storia, priva d'ogni struttura. Per continuare, per sopportare ancora una rappresentazione così deformata e avvilita di realtà in cui non possono vivere i valori necessari, ci è indispensabile questa possibilità di ripresa e di riferimento spirituali.

In hermetic poetry absence means lack of poetic referents. At the time of Fascism and WWII, it represents the absence of a viable empirical reality with which to identify.

Poetic truth is thus located in a distant and mysterious beyond. In this poetic landscape, memory is thus 'memoria [dello spirito]' and 'coscienza di noi stessi ripresa ad ogni momento'.<sup>32</sup> The role of memory in Quasimodo's poetry is

<sup>30</sup> Andrea Capra argues that Quasimodo's interpretation of ancient poetry follows the paradigm of 'lirismo solitario', in 'Quasimodo e i *Lirici greci*', *I Quaderni del Vittorini*, 2 (2008), 11-40 (pp. 18-22).

<sup>31</sup> 'A Gongila', 'Ho parlato in sogno', 'Sulle belle chiome metti ghirlande', 'All'amico di un tempo', 'I mirti e le viole'.

<sup>32</sup> Bo, 'Letteratura come vita', pp. 161; 160. On absence as hermetic category see Valli, pp. 114-115 and Carlo Bo, *L'assenza, la poesia* (Milan: Edizioni di Uomo, 1945).

oppositional to its bleak present;<sup>33</sup> his interest in memory and ‘rimembranze’ that fuel poetic drive is Leopardian in character, and so is Quasimodo’s view of the poet as a lonely creature resisting the dissolution of reality and making an ethical stance in society through his poetry.

In his 1936 preface to *Erato e Apollion*, Sergio Solmi is one of the first to draw a line of continuity between Leopardi and Quasimodo.<sup>34</sup> He comments: ‘Il paradosso della lirica moderna sembra consistere in questo: una suprema illusione di canto che miracolosamente si sostiene dopo la distruzione di tutte le illusioni. [...] La favola risorge sul mondo distrutto come un miraggio sul deserto.’<sup>35</sup> The unitary poetics of *Lirici*, despite the fragmentary nature of the poems, resists the dissolution of the Leopardian illusions, affirming the possibility of a survival of the lyric voice over the destruction brought about by history. Since the time of *Oboe sommerso* (1932) ‘i giorni sono una maceria’ (‘Oboe sommerso’, l. 13), and joy can only be remembered through someone else’s experience (‘Un oboe gelido risillaba | gioia di foglie perenni, | non mie, e smemora’, ‘Oboe sommerso’, ll. 4-6). Then the poet manages to use the debris of memory for his own song: the poetic fragment becomes emblematic of lyric brevity and poetic purity.<sup>36</sup> The same attitude toward fragmentation shapes *Lirici*.

Quasimodo merges different fragments into a single poem, removes or adds lines, freely interpreting the Greek to suit his aesthetic operation. In ‘Tramontata è la luna’, for instance, he blends fragment 94; 50; 137; 52 and 20 Diehl and translates ‘πάρα δ’ ἔρχεται ὥρα’ (literally: ‘the hour passes’) with ‘anche giovinezza già dilegua’

<sup>33</sup> Giuseppe Zagarrìo, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1974), p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Mirko Bevilacqua, ‘La coscienza politica di Quasimodo’, in *La critica e Quasimodo*, ed. by Mirko Bevilacqua (Bologna: Cappelli, 1976), pp. 7-21

<sup>35</sup> Sergio Solmi, ‘Prefazione a *Erato ed Apollion*’ (1936), then revised as ‘Prefazione a *Ed è Subito Sera*’ (1942), in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 113-123 (p. 116).

<sup>36</sup> Petrucciani, *La poetica dell’ermetismo*, p. 155.

(l. 3). In the notes to the text Quasimodo affirms that he was following Lavagnini's interpretation.<sup>37</sup> However, Nicola Gardini has also underlined that Quasimodo's rendition of this poem is strongly influenced by Leopardi with reference to 'Il tramonto della luna', whose opening lines also develop a Sapphic image. The free rendition of the Greek into 'giovinezza già dilegua' seems to employ elements of Leopardi's simile describing the setting moon: 'Tal si dilegua, e tale | Lascia l'età mortale | la giovinezza.' ('Il tramonto della luna', ll. 20-22).<sup>38</sup>

The correspondences between 'Tramontata è la luna' and Leopardi's 'L'ultimo canto di Saffo' are numerous. In Leopardi's poem, the solitude of Sappho is a consequence of the poet's ugliness. Because of her physical appearance, Sappho is rejected by Phaon and is ignored by Mother Nature. Sappho's destiny is to suffer. The same themes are present in Quasimodo's poem: the speaker is neglected by the rest of the world: 'resto sola'; she is not loved: 'Scuote l'anima mia Eros'; nature and poetry fail her, her self is defined by subtraction—by what she does not have, and she cannot do: 'Ma a me, non ape, non miele | e soffro e desidero'. Quasimodo intentionally puts these three elements – solitude, unrequited love and absence of a positive referent— together, yet each idea belongs to a separate fragment of Sappho in the original Greek. Common linguistic choices connect 'Tramontata è la luna' with 'Ultimo canto di Saffo'. Sappho's lyrics intertextually emerge from the opening of Leopardi's *canzone*: 'Placida notte, e verecondo raggio | della cadente luna' (ll. 1-2), from which Quasimodo may have taken inspiration.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Lirici*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>38</sup> Nicola Gardini, *L'antico, il nuovo, lo straniero nella lirica moderna: esempi da una storia della poesia* (Milan: Edizioni dall'Arco, 2000), pp. 61-62. Leopardi, *Canti*, p. 240.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. 'a me non ride | l'aprigo margo' ('Ultimo canto di Saffo', ll. 27-28) with 'a me non ape, non miele' ('Tramontata è la luna', l. 10) and 'onde poi scemo | di giovinezza' ('Ultimo canto di Saffo', ll. 41-42) with 'giovinezza già dilegua' ('Tramontata è la luna', l. 3).

A Leopardian portrayal of the Greek poet broadly emerges from Quasimodo's language in *Lirici*'s opening section on Sappho—the largest in the anthology. On the one hand, the notions of loneliness, solitude and lack of a present referent are constant undercurrents, which stem from the compendium's general theme of absence. On the other, the word 'solitudine' and its derivatives appear only in the Sappho section: 'ora nel mio letto resto sola' ('Tramontata è la luna', l. 4); 'In me è solitudine' ('Ad Hermes', l. 2); 'Solitaria vagando' ('Ad Attide: ricordando l'amica lontana', l. 15).

In the first instance the Italian translation 'sola' sticks closely to the Greek 'μόνα', but the 'solitudine' in 'Ad Hermes' is Quasimodo's own addition, which is part of his complete reworking in his first stanza of the beginning of the very lacunose Greek fragment up to 'ἀγα[...]']' (fr. 97 Diehl / 95 Voigt).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the adjective 'solitaria' in 'Ad Attide' is absent in the Greek 'πόλλα δε ζαφοίταισ' ἀγάνασ'. These deviations from the original text emphasise the loneliness of the figure of Sappho. These are examples of *Lirici*'s (conscious or unconscious) intertextuality, engaging with the lyric tradition set by Leopardi.<sup>41</sup>

The translations are very clear examples of the overlapping of Quasimodo's 'stile da traduzione' and his own original poetry. The word 'solitudine' and its semantic chain are also characteristic of Quasimodo's *corpus* up to *Ed è subito sera* (1942) and beyond.<sup>42</sup> 'Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra' ('Ed è subito sera', l. 1)

<sup>40</sup> A literal translation of the Diehl fragment would be: 'Hermes came in [ / and I said: 'O Master, no for the blessed [ / I do not enjoy being too excited', cfr. Filippo Maria Pontani's version of the same fragment (but following the Lobel-Page edition) in 'Vaghezza di morire', ll. 1-4: Ermete venne... | io gli dissi: 'Signore... | no, per la Dea beata, | io non ho gusto di grandezze:' (Pontani, p. 103), and Antonio Aloni translating Voigt: 'Ermete giunse... | io dissi: 'Signore... no, per la (dea) beata... | non provo piacere a essere troppo esaltata', in *Saffo: frammenti*, ed. by Antonio Aloni (Florence: Giunti, 1997), p. 157.

<sup>41</sup> For other instances of this kind in Quasimodo's *oeuvre* cfr. Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, 'Le lune di Quasimodo' and Marinella Cantelmo, "'Azzurra siepe a me d'intorno": sondaggi sulla riscrittura dello spazio letterario', *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 21 (2003), 35-42 and 169-192 respectively.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. the entries 'solitario', 'solitudine', 'solo', in Giuseppe Savoca, *Concordanza delle poesie di Salvatore Quasimodo* (Florence: Olschki, 1994), pp. 230-231 and Rosario Castelli, 'Quasimodo e il sentimento della solitudine', *Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 21 (2003), 321-328.

recites the proemial title-poem of the collection. The opening poems of the following sub-sections ‘Oboe Sommerso’ and ‘Sillabe a Erato’ are centred on the same theme; the former’s first stanza meditates on abandonment (‘Avara pena, [...] in questa mia ora | di sospirati abbandoni’, ll. 1-3); the latter begins with the line ‘A te piega il cuore in solitudine’. Sappho remains a referent of Quasimodo’s poetics beyond the openly hermetic experimentations, as his 1953 essay, ‘Saffo’, shows. Her poetry is deemed the purest of all, and once again the two poets find an affinity in their shared loneliness: ‘[t]utto è già stato in questa poesia: [...] il tempo perduto si ripete nella solitudine.’<sup>43</sup>

Yet Quasimodo’s *Leopardismo* goes deeper. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century poet and his legacy shape Quasimodo’s classical lyricism. The Leopardian tradition supplements the literary heritage of the classics. Leopardi’s poetry provides Quasimodo with an alternative filter through which he may approach translation. Leopardi’s take on the classics forms the backdrop of Quasimodo’s reception of the ancients and constitutes a second starting point for his own appropriations of Greek monody. As for Pascoli, the ancient lyric tradition passed through the poetry of Leopardi and his particular appreciation of Sappho.

Anceschi who contributed to the editing and compiling of the anthology was well aware of Quasimodo’s debt to Leopardi, and was keen to acknowledge it in his 1940 introductory essay:

Nella ricerca [...] di una poesia veramente *nuova e contemporanea* [...] nella aspirazione al raggiungimento di una rigorosa *purezza lirica* si ponevano le condizioni di una più approfondita ed intima lettura degli antichi poeti.[...] Oggi, [...] nel nostro gusto e tempo (nascosto) del cuore al centro della poetica della spiritualità della Grecia stanno i grandi lirici, e per essi noi daremmo tutto Omero—epico e narratore.

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<sup>43</sup> Salvatore Quasimodo, ‘Saffo’ (1953), in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 99-108 (99-100).

Tale nuova disposizione (e diremmo ‘dimensione’) dello spirito poetico del mondo trova origine [...] per noi in special modo [in] Leopardi. [...] La lirica [...] deve avere una assoluta condizione di canto. (pp. 309-310)

Anceschi is outlining the criteria of selection and the motives behind *Lirici greci*. It is a declaration of poetic intents aimed at recuperating the lyric essence of poetry.

Anceschi’s hermetic views on the supremacy of the lyric over epic and narrative poems, and his conception of poetry as song are cognate with Leopardi’s idea of the lyric outlined in the *Zibaldone*:

Il lirico, [genere] primogenitor di tutti; [...] più nobile e più *poetico* d’ogni altro; vera e pura poesia in tutta la sua estensione; proprio d’ogni uomo anche incolto, che cerca di ricrearsi o di consolarsi col canto.<sup>44</sup>

And also:

Da queste osservazioni risulterebbe che dei tre generi principali di poesia, il solo che certamente resti ai moderni, fosse il lirico [...]. [...] [E]d è il più veramente poetico di tutte le poesie, le quali non sono poesie se non in quanto son liriche (29 Marzo 1829). Ed anco in questa circostanza di non aver poesia se non lirica, l’età nostra si riavvicina alla primitiva. (‘29-30 March 1829’, *Zibaldone*, p. 4476)

According to Leopardi, the lyric is the most poetic genre. For this reason the modern poet must write lyric poetry. In this respect the lyric is the *trait d’union* between antiquity and the contemporary. As I discussed above, Quasimodo and Anceschi considered the lyric as the only true and absolute poetry, the site of the expression of the heart of man through the ages. This form of humanism is akin to Pascoli’s retrieval of primitive archetypes. Yet Quasimodo and Anceschi uphold lyric poetry as the only true revelation of these universal qualities. *Lirici greci* stands out as a meta-poetic reflection on poetry itself.<sup>45</sup>

As Anceschi mentions in the 1940 introduction, in every individual body of fragments chosen to represent each lyric poet in the collection, there is a tendency to

<sup>44</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, ‘Recanati, 15 Dicembre 1826’, in *Zibaldone*, ed. by Rolando Damiani (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), pp. 4234-4236 [Leopardi’s numbering].

<sup>45</sup> Note that Anceschi also speaks of ‘idee concomitanti’, in ‘Introduzione’ (1940), p. 311.

pick lyrics that suited this notion of lyric as the purest and highest genre—the brief song of a single lonely poet.<sup>46</sup> The selections of fragments, especially as far as the monodic poets are concerned, are revealing. The larger fragments of Sappho, Alcaeus and Anacreon with either an epic or a political theme are not included in the anthology. From this selection one gets a warped idea of Greek melic poetry in general, and of monodic lyric in particular. We are left with Quasimodo's subjective take on it, which typically does not account for the fragment's original context, their history or their tradition. Sappho and her lyrics represent abstract epiphanies of poetry itself.

Important and representative odes by Sappho such as fr. 16 Voigt (27a; 27b Diehl), fr. 17 Voigt (28 Diehl), fr. 44 Voigt (55a; 55b Diehl)—one of the longest standing fragments—are omitted. These are all on epic subjects. The entire corpus of fragments by Alcaeus on politics, the fragments written against the dictator Pittacus (fr. G1; D14) are also absent. Beside the aesthetic criteria, which were meant to guide the selection of the purest, non-narrative, lyric fragments, the anthology's disengagement with any form of political discourse may reflect the deliberate dissociation of the hermetic group from any form of political activism during the Fascist regime.<sup>47</sup>

The hermetic debate on poetry was exclusively aesthetic. Poetry as song is a seminal element of Quasimodo's lyricism until the early 1940s. In his poetry there is always a tension between the poet's lyrical voice and its absolute self-referential language, moulded on notions of 'poesia pura'. His language up to *Ed è subito sera* (1942) shows a concern with the pre-eminence of the word as a self-contained poetic

<sup>46</sup> Anceschi, 'Introduzione' (1940), p. 315.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Mario Luzi: 'Contrariamente all'opinione, diffusasi oggi, l'ermetismo non solo non rifiutò di parlare, ma volle se mai dire troppo', in 'Situazione della poesia italiana di oggi', in *L'inferno e il limbo* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1964), pp. 211-221 (p. 215). See also Zagarrò, pp. 8-9; Valli, pp. 132-153.

element, which Oreste Macrí described as ‘poetica della parola’.<sup>48</sup> Words are ‘un esistere che si alimenta del proprio non essere’,<sup>49</sup> so that the poet’s use of language often stresses the sign over the thing described. Quasimodo’s socially engaged poetry began only after the experience of *Lirici* and the Second World War with *Giorno dopo Giorno* (1947).

Through this language, Quasimodo enhances the sense of self-isolation emerging from the theme of solitude and absence of addressee characteristic of *Lirici*. Salibra has noted that the language of Quasimodo reflects the troubled relationship of the narrator with himself, which leads to the typically Quasimodian use of self-reflexive verbs or of verbs made reflexive through the forcing of the grammar. According to Salibra ‘[q]uesta ossessione riflessiva porta ad una dissociazione dell’io da se stesso’.<sup>50</sup> The dissociation of the poetic self, appearing in dialogue with itself or with an absent ‘you’, almost completely removes the necessity for any referents external to the poetic ‘I’.

One example of this particular use of self-referential techniques in *Lirici* is found again in ‘Tramontata è la luna’, in the line ‘Ma a me non ape, non miele’. By literally translating the possessive dative ‘ἔμοι’ with ‘a me’ (instead of ‘non ho’), Quasimodo centres the line on the first person pronoun. The implication of the verb ‘to be’ is a normal habit of the Greek language, but this is not the case in Italian. Quasimodo’s choice to maintain the ellipsis of the verb ‘essere’ in the translation conveys a sense of estrangement and accentuates the already awkward use of the complement ‘a me’. Deliberately placing the word ‘ape’ before ‘miele’ and thus inverting the word order of the Greek ‘μήτ’ἔμοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα’, the poet traces a regular rhythmical and sound pattern within the first part of the line before the

<sup>48</sup> Macrí, ‘La poetica della parola e Salvatore Quasimodo’.

<sup>49</sup> Ramat, *L’ermetismo*, p. 173.

<sup>50</sup> Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, p. 23.

*caesura*. Moving the word ‘miele’ from the middle to line-closure maintains the alliterative pattern of the nasal (‘m’) throughout the verse, reproducing a similar effect to the alliterating ‘μ’ in the Greek text. The ‘a’ and ‘e’ of ‘a me’ are replicated in the ‘a’ and ‘e’ of ‘ape’ producing an internal assonance, which is also characteristic of the Greek text, where every word begins with a syllable containing a nasal and an ‘e’ sound: μή-, ἐμ-, or μέ-. This phrase is also emphasised by the line’s tonic stress on ‘me’. In this way, the self-referentiality of the poem, which lacks any explicit addressee and whose lyric apostrophe is intended, is heightened.

The term monody (or *monodia*, in Italian) refers to a song sung by ‘one’ person, it has the implication of ‘singing alone’. Characteristically, most of the poems selected by Quasimodo for *Lirici* are constructed around a single narrator, and hardly ever include a dialogue or a second active persona in the poem. When they do, the persona is either non human (i.e. a divinity) as in ‘Ad Afrodite’, or unattainable, as in ‘Vorrei veramente esser morta’ and Erinna’s ‘Sul sepolcro di Bauci in Telos.’ In the former, a pupil of Sappho is abandoning her, in the latter Bauci speaks from the dead. Moreover, even though the anthology presents fragments by several poets writing in different dialects and with dissimilar styles, all poems in *Lirici* speak through one poetic voice, Quasimodo’s. The poet, establishing the thematic patterns of solitude, memory, unrequited love, lost youth and exile throughout the compendium succeeds in building a cohesive whole.

The theme of solitude and exclusion of the poet from society is a continuous undercurrent in Quasimodo’s critical writings. The poet is depicted as a lonely creature, a gifted human ostracized by society who lives in perpetual exile.<sup>51</sup> The classics represent the poet’s cultural, geographic and linguistic origins, which still live

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<sup>51</sup> Cfr. Salvatore Quasimodo, ‘L’uomo e la poesia’ (1946), ‘Il poeta e il politico’ (1959) and ‘Petraeca e il sentimento della solitudine’, in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 19-22; 47-58; 77-83.

through literature and his memory. Issues of origins and original voice developed through poetic song ('canto'), intermingle in Quasimodo's *oeuvre* and are a constant of his poetic research. Francesco Flora's study on Quasimodo's diction lists the word 'voce' as one of the main occurrences in the poet's work.<sup>52</sup> This is an undercurrent of *Lirici*, too. From Sappho's section: 'Non un canto di coro, | [...] si levava senza le nostre voci' ('Vorrei veramente esser morta', l. 26), a supplement to the Greek text; 'e questa voce non ignota | a noi per sillabe risuona' ('Ad Attide', ll. 20-21); from Alcaeus' section: 'la dolce cicala di sotto le ali | fitto vibra il suo canto' ('Solo il cardo è in fiore', ll. 7-8), 'Già nelle valli risuonano | canti di primavera.' ('Già sulle rive dello Xanto', ll. 6-7); from Erinna's section: 'la madre cantando più non reca | il filo sulla rocca' ('Lamento a Bauci', ll. 10-11), the lyric 'Sul sepolcro di Bauci in Telos' is divided in two parts: 'I. Voce dell'urna' and 'II. Voce di Bauci'; from Anacreon: 'Voglio cantare il molle Eros'; 'canto amore alla mia tenera fanciulla' ('L'amata cetra', l. 4); from Alcman: 'ora io canto | la luce di Agido', 'invano ho vociato come nottola', 'quando canta Agesicora | non uguaglia le sirene', 'la sua voce è del cigno' ('Partenio', ll. 4-5; 48; 59); 'Il canto delle pernici'; 'O fanciulle che il dolce suono seguite con soave | voce' ('Il cerilo', ll. 1-2); from the only fragment by Stesichoros: 'a me non dà quiete il dolce | sonante flauto dalle molte voci | quando comincia soavissimi canti' ('A me non dà quiete', ll. 5-6); from Simonides: 'Se tu sapessi ciò che è da temere | il tuo piccolo orecchio svegliaresti alla mia voce' ('Lamento di Danae', ll. 14-15); from the Anonymous section and last poem in *Lirici greci*: 'Canto mattutino'.

'E di te nel tempo' (translation of fr. 27 Diehl / 55 Voigt), a poem dedicated to a woman who does not honour the Muses, establishes the pivotal role of memory as

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<sup>52</sup> Francesco Flora, 'Scrittori italiani contemporanei: Salvatore Quasimodo, prelude sul lessico della poesia d'oggi', *Letterature Moderne*, 2 (1951), 121-148.

vehicle of poetry in *Lirici*: ‘Tu morta, finirai lì. Né mai di te | si avrà memoria; [...] poi che non curi le rose della Pieria’. Anne Carson in a note to her translation of the fragments of Sappho glosses: ‘The works of the Muses are also the substance of memory. Sappho’s poem threatens the woman with an obliteration which it enacts by not naming her’.<sup>53</sup> Although in this poem there is an addressee, the ‘you’ of this lyric is a non-entity, it is denied an identity and has no correlation with the poetic ‘I’ of the poem. As mentioned above, this is characteristic of the hermetic poetics of absence, which sustains Quasimodo’s monodic voice, providing a referent, only to deny it.

This poetics of memory channelling poetry and the re-connection with one’s own origins, one’s own past, and above all with the lost time of ‘fanciullezza’ or ‘giovinezza’, shape ‘Lamento a Bauci’:

[...] il suono della cetra  
batteva in eco sotto il portico vasto della corte.  
O Bauci infelice, io gemendo piango al ricordo.  
Queste cose della fanciullezza hanno ancora calore  
nel mio cuore [...].  
E presso il mattino la madre più non reca  
Il filo sulla rocca [...]  
E quando, O Bauci amata, salisti sul letto dell’uomo  
senza memoria di quello che giovinetta ancora  
avevi udito da tua madre, Afrodite  
Non fu pietosa della tua dimenticanza.  
Per questo io ora piangendoti non ti abbandono.  
(ll. 3-19)

The memory of youth is painful (‘piango al ricordo’), because lost forever. Yet it is the source of inspiration of poetic songs. Not remembering one’s own origins, what ‘giovinetta ancora | avevi udito da tua madre’ leads to negative outcomes and punishment (‘Afrodite non fu pietosa’). The poet therefore must not relinquish her / his song (‘piangendoti [...] non ti abbandono’).

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<sup>53</sup> Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p. 368.

The theme of lost youth is another thread emerging from *Lirici*. In Saffo: ‘giovinezza già dilegua’; ‘Fanciullezza, fanciullezza, mi lasci, dove vai? | Non tornerò più da te, mai più ritornerò’ (‘Fanciullezza’); Alcaeus: ‘Breve il tempo. | O Amato fanciullo’ in ‘Perché aspettare le lucerne’; Anacreon: ‘la cara giovinezza non è più’ in ‘Timore dell’Ade’; Mimnermo: ‘E le dolcissime offerte’ and ‘Fulmineo | precipita il frutto di giovinezza’ in ‘Al modo delle foglie’.

‘Fanciullezza’ is the translation of fr. 131 Diehl (114 Voigt), the same fragment translated by Pascoli in his autograph (fol. 8<sup>v</sup>). Quasimodo translates ‘παρθενία’ (literally: ‘virginity’) with the toned down ‘fanciullezza’, attenuating the sexual connotation of the word. While Pascoli constructs a symbolic analogy of defloration substituting the word ‘virginity’ with the image of a fading rose bud, Quasimodo emphasizes the supposed innocence of the poetic voice. The reference to the epithalamia setting is maintained through the association with the word ‘fanciulla’, which in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century denoted also an unmarried woman.<sup>54</sup> Yet by employing the abstract word ‘fanciullezza’ the poet inserts the fragment into a distant realm, which is privileged over the rendition of its immediate ritualistic context. The poem appears as a self-reflection on the passing of time.

Yet since the time of *Acque e terre* (1930) and ‘Vento a Tindari’, remembering youth for Quasimodo is equivalent to remembering his time in Sicily. The indispensable element tying the past and the present, his own individual experience and ancient Greece is Quasimodo’s native country—the former Magna Grecia and abandoned land of the poet, who as a solitary exile can only remember it through memories of childhood. Salibra has pointed out that in Quasimodo’s poetry: ‘L’estraniamento da se stesso avviene attraverso l’esilio, mitica rappresentazione del

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<sup>54</sup> See *GDLI*: ‘fanciulla’.

pellegrino itinerante [...] e si stempera nella forza comunicativa del ricordo, dei “nomi di memoria”.<sup>55</sup> In the art and toponymy mythology of the southern island,<sup>56</sup> Quasimodo, who called himself ‘siculo-greco’,<sup>57</sup> could find physical debris of his identity.<sup>58</sup>

After the self-imposed exile in the north of Italy, the ‘lost’ island becomes a mythical land of the golden age, a paradigm of cultural origins where the ancient Greek first flourished, but it is also ‘l’emblema dell’uomo solo che non è capace di comunicare col mondo’.<sup>59</sup> ‘La mia siepe è la Sicilia’ the poet affirms in ‘Una poetica’ (1950), placing himself in Leopardi’s legacy and establishing the link between Sicily and poetic inspiration.<sup>60</sup> Most of Quasimodo’s translations from Greek and Latin are a blueprint of the established bond between the exiled lonely poet, Sicily, classical antiquity and poetry.<sup>61</sup>

Translation of foreign and ancient texts in the interwar period for Quasimodo had taken the form of an aesthetic enquiry into the absolutes of poetry and language. It represented a movement toward a new contemporary actualisation of the irreducible quality of the individual poetic word. This highly appropriative lyric mode of translation during the post-war period evolved into a more prosaic ‘stile da traduzione’, influenced by the development of prose-poetry and an overall rejection of

<sup>55</sup> Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, pp. 49-50; cfr. Capra, pp. 13-18.

<sup>56</sup> Bart Van De Bossche, ‘Quasimodo e il mito’, in *Quasimodo e gli altri: atti del Convegno Internazionale Lovanio, 27-28 Aprile 2001* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), pp. 21-32.

<sup>57</sup> Gilberto Finzi, ‘Introduzione’, in *Tutte le poesie di Salvatore Quasimodo*, ed. by Gilberto Finzi, pp. v-xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Marcello Gigante, *L’ultimo Quasimodo e la poesia greca* (Napoli: Guida Editori, 1970), p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Salibra, *Salvatore Quasimodo*, p. 159.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Una poetica’, p. 23. On the presence of Leopardi in Quasimodo’s critical essays see Elena Candela, ‘La tradizione e la poetica del Leopardi’, in *Il sentimento della terra perduta* (Naples: L’Orientale Editrice, 2004), pp. 141-163.

<sup>61</sup> Several episodes in the two anthologies collecting extracts from Homer’s *Odyssey* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are set in Sicily. From *Dall’Odissea*: ‘Nell’isola dei Ciclopi’; ‘Le Sirene, Scilla e Cariddi’, pp. 656-658; ‘Verso l’isola del Sole’, pp. 659-660; from *Dalle Metamorfosi di Ovidio*: ‘Proserpina e Ciane’, pp. 795-799; ‘Galatea, Aci, Polifemo’.

*metrica barbara* for the translation of the classics. Franco Fortini contrasts these new translations with those of the 30s: ‘testi livellati da un comune intento comunicativo, transitivo, prosastico, in quello che fu allora chiamato ‘verso da traduzione’, ampiamente esorbitante l’endecasillabo, tendente al versetto biblico e alla cadenza liturgica.’<sup>62</sup> As the hermetic dictum on the self-sufficiency and autonomy of poetry was losing ground after the experience of the world conflict, the Resistance, and the development of socially and politically engaged forms of art, the numerous translations of the time from ancient and modern authors posited poetry as a positive engagement with reality and their audience.

The only other translation from ancient non-dialogic poetry after *Lirici* is *Canti di Catullo* (1955). This version, which is considerably more faithful to the Latin text than *Lirici greci* is to the Greek, confirms Quasimodo’s interest in monody and poetry as expression of the self.<sup>63</sup> Ernesto Arrigoni has pointed out that the selection of texts, except six, follows Pascoli’s choice in *Lyra*.<sup>64</sup> Yet Quasimodo remarks that he was primarily interested in Catullus’ elegies—a dramatic shift from the pure lyricism that dictated the choices of *Lirici greci*. According to Quasimodo, in these poems Catullus’ ‘poesia d’uomo raggiunge l’accento più eterno’.<sup>65</sup> Carmen 65 to 116 of Catullus’ *liber* are in elegiac verse. The poems selected by Quasimodo for the anthology from this section of Catullus’ body of work are mainly poems of unrequited love or mourning, typical of Latin elegy. Carmen 65, ‘Benché un dolore assiduo mi

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<sup>62</sup> Franco Fortini, ‘Montale e la poesia dell’esistenzialismo storico’, in *La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, 10 vols (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1976), X, 2, pp. 347-430 (p. 390); cfr. Quasimodo, ‘Discorso sulla poesia’, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> Alberto Giordano, ‘Introduzione’, in Catullo, *Canti*, trans. by Salvatore Quasimodo (Milan: Mondadori, 1981), pp. xxiv-xlvi (p. xxx).

<sup>64</sup> Luigi Ernesto Arrigoni, ‘Il Carme 31: da Quasimodo a Catullo sotto il segno di “Vento a Tindari”’, in *Uso, riuso ed abuso dei testi classici*, ed. by Massimo Gioseffi (Milan: LED, 2010), pp. 357-386.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Traduzioni dai classici’, p. 73.

consumi', carmen 68 'Che tu nella sventura e nella sorte avversa', carmen 101 'Dopo aver traversato terre e mari' are all laments for the death of Catullus' brother.

Notwithstanding Quasimodo's theoretical interest in elegy, he translated all of Catullus' poems with a tight set of *endecasillabi*, losing the genre and metrical specificity of the Latin. The same line expansion / reduction characterising *Lirici*'s translation method is employed in *Canti*. Finzi notes that this tendency to respect 'non [...] altra metrica che quella italiana e la sua propria voce poetica' was a 'regola aurea' of Quasimodo's translating method.<sup>66</sup> In *Canti* 'l'endecasillabo è apparso come lo strumento più idoneo per descrivere il sentimento della solitudine del poeta veronese'.<sup>67</sup> Once again, as was the case for the Sappho of *Lirici*, the shared spirituality of the ancient and modern is founded on loneliness. Once again, Quasimodo inserts an ancient poet in 'un programma di adeguamento del patrimonio del passato antico alla sensibilità moderna'.<sup>68</sup> Sappho and Catullus become emblematic of the lyric poet's solitude.

It has been often argued that the translations of the Greek lyrics and the Latin of Catullus and Virgil determined the stylistic shift from the hermetic *Erato e Apollion* (1936) to *Nuove poesie* (1942) to the realist stance of *Giorno dopo giorno* (1947).<sup>69</sup> While Quasimodo may have indeed drawn from the poetic style of the classics to move away from the analogic and dense language of the early collections, the shift in trajectory was also a response to the post-war developments of Hermeticism, the broad anti-hermetic stances at the end of WWII.

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<sup>66</sup> Gilberto Finzi, 'Catullo-Quasimodo', in *Salvatore Quasimodo nel vento del Mediterraneo*, ed. by Pietro Frassica (Novara: Interlinea, 2002), pp. 13-20 (p. 18).

<sup>67</sup> Arrigoni, p. 385.

<sup>68</sup> Della Corte, p. 166.

<sup>69</sup> Natale Tedesco, *L'isola impareggiabile: significati e forme del mito di Quasimodo* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 2002), pp. 118-119; Arrigoni, 'Il carme 31'; Zagarrio, pp. 82-83; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Il linguaggio della poesia ermetica', in *Tradizione del Novecento: terza serie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), pp. 132-157 (p. 133).

Quasimodo himself in the 1950s speaks of ‘stile da traduzione’, a definition often applied to his own poetic style; he defines it as ‘un “modo”, un linguaggio che si ricava immediatamente traducendo un testo poetico di lingua straniera’. If *Lirici greci* paved the way towards a first opening to an actual communicative dialogue with ‘the other’ (of the kind described by Fortini), the hermetic ideology behind the anthology is clear. It is only with the following translations starting from the Catullan versions in *endecasillabi* that Quasimodo’s verse breaks with the hermetic operation and settles into a more narrative lyricism.

The non-linear path of Quasimodo’s classical lyricism in fact appears to be the symptom of a very turbulent cultural period in which the figure of the poet and critic, as Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo notes, came to correspond:

Il diffondersi delle traduzioni poetiche d’autore è inscindibile dal formarsi di una figura di poeta in cui il mestiere lirico si dirama in una più complessa attività di intellettuale militante ed è quasi costituzionalmente accompagnato e doppiato dal continuo esercizio della funzione ‘metapoetica’ in tutte le sue forme. Non è in causa semplicemente, in breve, la contiguità di poeta e traduttore, ma l’affermarsi di un tipo d’operatore che è insieme poeta, traduttore e critico.<sup>70</sup>

Quasimodo’s poetry passes from the solipsism and Hermeticism prior to WWII to a more civil and accessible kind of versification, which had to account for the historical and social evolutions after the end of the war, the experience of Resistance, and the poetics of Neo-Realism. It is now generally accepted to view the two nuclei of Quasimodo’s work before and after 1945 in unitary terms; as the evolution from an idea of poetry first grounded on ‘poesia pura’ to a form of lyric allowing for a positive affirmation of human experience and social engagement.<sup>71</sup> While the shift in style and language is evident after the neo-realist experiences, Quasimodo’s poetry nevertheless

<sup>70</sup> Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, ‘Introduzione’, in *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), pp. xiii-lxxv (p. xxxii).

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Bo, ‘Introduzione’, in Salvatore Quasimodo, *Giorno dopo giorno* (Milan: Mondadori, 1947), pp. 9-37. Cfr. E.F. Acrocca, ‘I due “tempi” di Quasimodo’ and Gioachino Paparelli, ‘Quasimodo e la Critica’, in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 358-363 and pp. 249-269 (pp. 256-260).

returns to the classical tradition with *La terra impareggiabile* (1958). He invariably employs the monologic lyric form until the last collection *Dare e avere* (1966).

In fact, in 'Una poetica' (1950) Quasimodo denies that the stylistic shift in *Giorno dopo giorno* was influenced by his translations:

Può sembrare che un avvicinamento a poeti di varia natura, che il passaggio da un lirico greco a Virgilio, a Omero, a un elegiaco latino, abbia spostato un centro lirico ben definito verso una periferia 'discorsiva'. Può sembrare, ma non è; perché traducendo i greci o i latini io non potevo dar loro che la mia sintassi, il mio linguaggio, la mia chiarezza infine.<sup>72</sup>

The lyric core of his poetry is clearly defined and the appropriative tendencies of hermetic translations re-affirmed.

While his critical statements after the war are often contradictory and would take the distance from 'poesia pura' to accommodate the social and political turn advocated by neo-realist poetics,<sup>73</sup> as his Catullan work shows, Quasimodo's approach to translation as poetic affirmation did not change. Despite his terms of comparison ever changing (different languages, nations, periods and authors), Quasimodo's lyric 'I' is unitary: he is a Greek-Sicilian bard whose songs aim at 'rifare l'uomo' 'sul piano morale e su quello estetico'.<sup>74</sup> His style is influenced by the hermetic notion of art for art's sake. Quasimodo's approach to tradition works on a top down aesthetic, which imposes a unitary form to his poetry that aimed at 'inaugur[are] un neo-umanesimo; [...] un segno indistruttibile della nostra presenza nel mondo.'<sup>75</sup> This form of 'neo-humanism' finds a parallel in the contemporary theorisations of Werner Jaeger in Germany with *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*

<sup>72</sup> 'Una poetica' (1950), in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 23-25 (p. 25).

<sup>73</sup> 'Discorso sulla poesia', pp. 32-36.

<sup>74</sup> See 'Poesia contemporanea' (1946) in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 9-17 (p. 17) and 'Una poetica', p. 24.

<sup>75</sup> Salvatore Quasimodo, 'Lettera a Susini, (4 maggio '39)', in *I poeti devono soffrire: lettere a Giuseppe Susini (1934-1950)*, ed. by Giovanna Musolino (Trento: Nicolodi, 2003), p. 58.

(1939-1945).<sup>76</sup> Both authors share an a-political approach to the Classics and literature.

Mitigating the hermetic stance, in the 1950s his views of poetry as ethical mission emphasise a purposeful idea of art and trust in the figure of the poet as social agent. Yet as I will discuss in the following section, critics of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to link Quasimodo's figure with *Lirici greci* and a (mostly negative) notion of hermetic and solipsistic lyricism.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. The Negative Effects of Success: *Lirici greci*'s Reception

*Lirici greci* is the first of a long string of translations, produced by Quasimodo between the 1940s and the 1960s. Of these, more than half are from either Greek or Latin authors, yet the attention of hermetic and anti-hermetic critics alike has mainly focused on *Lirici*—at times more extensively than on Quasimodo's own poetry.<sup>78</sup> From the 70s onwards scholars and militant critics have considered *Lirici greci* Quasimodo's greatest achievement and his most influential work. Niva Lorenzini's account of the critical reception of *Lirici greci* between the '40s and the '70s shows that Quasimodo's free standing translation of the Greek lyric fragments was his most discussed work, at the expense of his poetry and other translations. Critics today generally acknowledge *Lirici greci* as one of the most emblematic documents and successful experiments of Hermeticism.

As the very first translation published by Quasimodo, *Lirici* does indeed hold a nodal place in the Sicilian poet's *oeuvre*: it cannot be denied that the following collections, *Nuove poesie* (1942) and *Giorno dopo giorno* (1947), present a dramatic

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<sup>76</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. by Gilbert Highet, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1939-1945).

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. 'L'uomo e la poesia' and 'Il poeta e il politico'.

<sup>78</sup> Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', pp. 216-217.

change in versification, style and language, moving away from the hermetic style of *Ed è subito sera*. Several studies point out that the everyday tone of archaic lyric and the cultural perception emphasising the exactness of the Greek language left considerable traces in Quasimodo's later writings.<sup>79</sup> Lorenzini examines this matter in relation to the last section of *Ed è subito sera*, written immediately after the publication of *Lirici*: 'Le Nuove poesie [...]: non ci fu critico, nel decennio del dopoguerra, che non mosse di lì, tanto parvero congiunte l'esperienza del tradurre con l'esigenza di avviare una nuova sperimentazione espressiva, in attesa di contenuti diversi'.<sup>80</sup> Some hermetic critics, such as Bo, tried to mediate this idea, denying that the translations of the lyrics had influenced Quasimodo's deviation from Hermeticism in favour of narrative and socially engaged poetry.<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, throughout the *Novecento*, *Lirici greci* has been considered not only a programmatic work of Hermeticism, but also as *the* event that determined the shift in Quasimodo's style.<sup>82</sup>

Yet, except *Lirici* and *Il fiore delle Georgiche* (1942), all of Quasimodo's translations, including ancient authors— Catullus (1945), Homer (1945), St. John (1946), Sophocles (1946, 1954), Aeschylus (1949), Ovid (1959), Euripides (1966), Greek Anthology (1958)—as well as modern ones— Ruskin (1946), Shakespeare (1948; 1952; 1956; 1959, 1966), Neruda (1952), Molière (1956), Cummings (1958), Pound (1958), Aiken (1963), Arghezi (1966), Lecomte (1968)<sup>83</sup>—were published at the end of the War or after. This list shows that after the 1945 version of Catullus, Quasimodo's classical translations are from non-lyric genres: drama and narrative

<sup>79</sup> Cfr. Gianfranco Vigorelli, 'Precisazioni per Quasimodo' and Roberto Sanesi, 'La poesia di Quasimodo' in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 124-137 and pp. 199-233.

<sup>80</sup> Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', p. 237.

<sup>81</sup> Carlo Bo, 'Sulle Nuove poesie di Quasimodo', in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 302-307.

<sup>82</sup> Alberto Frattini, 'Salvatore Quasimodo a un ventennio dal Nobel', in *Avventure di Parnaso nell'Italia del Novecento*, 5 vols (Viareggio: Baroni, 2002), IV, 1001-1008.

<sup>83</sup> And posthumous: *Iliade-episodi scelti*, with illustrations by Giorgio De Chirico; Paul Éluard, *Donner à voir*. All translations in *Poesie e discorsi sulla poesia*, ed. by Finzi, except St John, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Ruskin, Shakespeare, Lecomte, Molière. I give the complete references to these texts in the Bibliography.

poem. His translations from modern languages also reflect this tendency (only five out of twelve are from lyrical poets). Therefore, the critical preoccupation with the impact of Quasimodo's first version on his poetic style seems excessive, not least because, as was shown above, *Lirici* perfectly inserts itself into Quasimodo's early hermetic agenda. The critical misplacement was the result of a process of canonization of *Lirici greci* started by leading hermetic critics in the '40s and then perpetuated by later criticism well into the '80s, which Quasimodo's own attempts at decentralising his poetry from the hermetic discourse could not buffer.

The poet himself discusses *Lirici greci* and its reception in his critical writings: 'fu il principio di una più vera lettura dei classici in tutta l'Europa, entrarono nuovi nella generazione di quel tempo.' ('Il poeta e il politico', p. 48) But with the advent of Neo-Realism, launched by Elio Vittorini's militancy, Hermeticism after the war was accused of a careless disengagement from political activism, and thus to have been indirectly supporting the regime.<sup>84</sup> The negative judgment of the influential critic Benedetto Croce on the hermetic movement added fuel to the controversy.<sup>85</sup> Quasimodo responded to the accusations by actively taking part in the post-war debate, progressively abandoning the most radical purist positions on lyric poetry opening the dialogue with the realist stance.<sup>86</sup> In his essays 'Poesia contemporanea' and in his 'Discorso sulla poesia', the poet emphasises the repercussions of war on the history of literature and calls for an ethical commitment of poetry and poets as symbols of the human struggle.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See Barberi Squarotti and Golfieri, pp. 5-42; Elio Vittorini, 'Cultura, potere e automatismo' (1947), 'Lo sdanovismo non è che oscurantismo' (1947), 'La poesia è verità', in *Diario in pubblico* (Milan: Bompiani, 1957), pp. 260-263; 265-267; 267-269.

<sup>85</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'La "poesia pura"', in *Letture di poeti* (Bari: Laterza, 1950), pp. 260-267.

<sup>86</sup> See Barberi Squarotti and Golfieri, pp. 11-16.

<sup>87</sup> See 'Poesia contemporanea', p. 17; 'Discorso sulla poesia', pp. 27-29.

*Lirici* was a crucial event in Quasimodo's oeuvre, but the experience of WWII, the Resistance and the rhetoric of Realism developing after 1945 seems to have been equally transformative.<sup>88</sup> Silvio Ramat explains Quasimodo's attempt to reform his poetry toward social engagement as the expression of the generalised sense of guilt that had befallen hermetic poets and critics after the war. While sharing the sense of guilt, Quasimodo never completely rejected his faith in the autonomy of poetry as expression of the heart of man.<sup>89</sup>

The misrepresentation of *Lirici* and Quasimodo's oeuvre overall was centred on a critical discourse that used Quasimodo's poetry up to *Ed è subito sera* as a receptacle of exempla for the development of hermetic poetic formulas to describe the history of Italian literature before and after the war as divided between the hermetic and anti-hermetic movements. In the decades following the end of WWII, the poetry of Quasimodo 'veniva a farsi modulo definitivo e formula esemplare di un mito, dal quale le sarebbe stato da ora in poi assai difficile sciogliersi per ritrovare la propria nudità, e in essa la vicenda della propria medesima errabilità'.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, despite the international recognition, a negative reception of Quasimodo's poetry after *Ed è subito sera*, which reached its highest peak in the 1960s,<sup>91</sup> did not allow the poet to become a reference figure for the following generations. While, as Alberto Frattini notes, after the Nobel the attention to Quasimodo's oeuvre increased with the study by Contini in *Letteratura dell'Italia Unita*, and the publication of the Meridiani edition of Quasimodo's work in 1974,<sup>92</sup> the overall critical acclaim focused mostly on

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<sup>88</sup> See Bevilacqua, *passim*.

<sup>89</sup> Silvio Ramat, *Storia della poesia italiana del novecento* (Milan: Mursia, 1976), p. 632, and Barberi Squarotti and Golfieri, pp. 11-14.

<sup>90</sup> Zagarrìo, pp. 117.

<sup>91</sup> Paparelli, pp. 253-56; Zagarrìo, pp. 8-9. Carlo Bo, 'Quasimodo: fu proprio vera gloria' (1985), in *Salvatore Quasimodo: la poesia nel mito e oltre*, ed. by Gilberto Finzi and Giuseppe Amoroso (Bari: Laterza, 1986), pp. 509-512.

<sup>92</sup> Frattini, pp. 1001-1008.

his hermetic period. Yet after the 1950s Hermeticism was considered a finished and mostly negative experience by the leading cultural Italian intelligentsia. Eugenio Montale's poetic trajectory is similar to Quasimodo's. As the Sicilian poet, Montale also shifted from the hermeticist collections such as *Le occasioni (1928-1938)* to the more prosaic tones of *La bufera e altro (1956)* and *Xenia (1964-1966)*.<sup>93</sup>

The hermetic critic and philosopher Luciano Anceschi supported the trend in Quasimodo's criticism between the 1950s and the 1970s emphasising the affiliation of his translations of the Greek lyrics with Hermeticism and 'poesia pura'. His controversial, yet influential take on Quasimodo's *Lirici* as outlined in his three prefaces to the 1940, 1951 and 1978 editions contributed to the diffusion of Quasimodo's *oeuvre* as a whole to propagate an idea of poetry as autonomous entity.

Anceschi's introductory remarks to *Lirici* are fundamental, but problematic, critical manifestos. The three prefaces are tokens of the critic's militant approach to literature and stand as documents of the critical Italian *Zeitgeist* between the '40s and the '70s. Throughout the years Quasimodo and his translation of ancient Greek lyric poetry were subjected to a process of intentional canonisation, which sprang from Anceschi's continuous tendency towards a top-down application of his aesthetic views as first outlined in *Autonomia ed eteronomia dell'arte (1936)* and subsequently developed in *Idea della lirica (1945)* and *Le poetiche del novecento in Italia (1972)*.<sup>94</sup>

Anceschi played a key role in the literary discourse of the '30s and '40s as a militant critic and the editor of *Corrente*, the literary journal and publishing house that delivered the first edition of *Lirici greci*. The critic's project involved an all-encompassing view of the arts that proceeded from a particular notion of art's

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<sup>93</sup> Eugenio Montale, *Le occasioni (1928-1938)*, ed. by Dante Isella (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), *La bufera e altro (Venice: Pozza, 1956)* and *Xenia (1964-1966)* (San Severino Marche: Bellabarba, 1966).

<sup>94</sup> De Angelis, pp. 90-96.

autonomy.<sup>95</sup> He promoted poetry's renewal, freestanding translations and a re-evaluation of the classics.<sup>96</sup> As I showed above, Anceschi's 1940 'Introduction' to *Lirici*, promulgating poetry as absolute lyric song, took the anthology under his patronage and championed it as a staple of the renewal of poetry and classicism. A similar preoccupation with setting new standards within the Italian literary discourse was at the basis of *Lirici nuovi* (1943), which included also Quasimodo's and some of his translations from Greek and Latin.<sup>97</sup>

The absolutisation of the concept of lyric and the view of tradition that emerges from Anceschi's interpretation of *Lirici* in his 1940 piece is structured on a few programmatic assumptions grounded into hermetic poetics. First, a conception of literature that buys into the paradigm of the classics as the original nucleus of the absolute lyric. Secondly, a hierarchical binary opposition between lyric and non-lyric genres, which sets the lyric voice against more dialogic modes (such as the epic and the dramatic), proclaiming the lyric genre the highest form of poetry. Thirdly, a notion of literary humanism built around the figure of the poet as the agent of the renewal of civilization. The poet, in the person of Quasimodo, would appropriate the universal spirit of the past into his own individual language and would make it relevant to his contemporaries.

Quasimodo appeared to be the most suitable poet to redeem the classical tradition from a form of sterile Classicism because of his ability to reposition the relationship between translation and tradition. To Anceschi, Quasimodo's translations and poetry represent the highest lyric accomplishment since his language embodies the *new* spiritual consonance between the past and the contemporary. The critic read

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<sup>95</sup> Cfr. Luciano Anceschi, *Autonomia ed eteronomia dell'arte* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936).

<sup>96</sup> Stefano Verdino, *Luciano Anceschi: esperienza della poesia e metodo* (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 1987), pp. 17-19.

<sup>97</sup> Verdino, pp. 16-17.

in the poetry of Quasimodo a correspondence between poetry and poetics that was akin to the hermetic motto of ‘letteratura come vita’<sup>98</sup> and of the *new* as primary constituent of art. In *Lirici* he could see Quasimodo conflating lyricism with the brevity of the fragment.

Quasimodo’s and Anceschi’s views on poetry and classicism at the time of *Lirici* corresponded. Both traced the origin of poetry back to ancient Greece, establishing a kinship between past and present. Both considered the exploration of the classical legacy foundational to the development of art. Thus for Quasimodo ‘il greco [è] un destino a cui i poeti non possono sottrarsi’. Similarly, according to Anceschi, the encounter with classical civilisation is necessary to the development of cultural life.

The correspondence between Anceschi’s and Quasimodo’s views on the classical legacy, lyric and the poetics of the fragment suggests that the writing and compilation of *Lirici greci* was a collaborative project. The critic and the poet exchanged several letters in the years leading to the publication of *Lirici*. Quasimodo would send Anceschi the drafts of his translations, asking for advice and for translations by Anceschi. A 1938 unpublished letter from Quasimodo to Anceschi runs:

Ti ringrazio della traduzione dell’Ode ad Afrodite; per ora la metto insieme ad altre due che già possiedo e al mio primo tentativo di risolvere poeticamente questo testo, invero assai duro nel suo numero geometrico.

Fui quasi tentato di aggiungere questa traduzione nel mio libro; ma quel senso di legittimo rigore che è stato norma costante di moralità e di costume letterario me lo impedì.

[...]

Attendo da te altre traduzioni, da Saffo, da Alceo (quella dell’Estate per esempio). Di Saffo deside-

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<sup>98</sup> Verdino, pp. 77-78.

rerei che ti procurassi il testo dell'ode che comincia all'incirca così: "bello è vedere un campo con armati.... ma più bello è l'amore della donna, ecc.". Questa poesia è poco nota e, credo, non tradotta in versi italiani.<sup>99</sup>

A comment by Anceschi in an unpublished 1937 postcard to Enrico Falqui confirms his role as guide of Quasimodo's enterprise: 'Con Quasimodo stiamo traducendo Saffo: anzi Quasimodo traduce Saffo, ed io lo aiuto'.<sup>100</sup> These letters reveal that Anceschi actively contributed not only to the theoretical framing of the anthology, but also to the translations. Anceschi's 1940 programmatic introduction to the volume may therefore be considered an integral part of *Lirici*, testifying to the crucial role of militant criticism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Carlo Bo's essay *Letteratura come vita* (1938) proposes, hermetic critics saw their writing as a creative enterprise with equal status to the poetry they were promoting. In this sense, *Lirici*, with the introduction by Anceschi, is inherently an hermetic collection.

The discussion on Quasimodo's translation of the lyric poets was heated when the anthology was first released. Both the supporters of Hermeticism and its detractors, spurring the debate, put Anceschi's take on Quasimodo into question.<sup>101</sup> Lorenzini remarks that: 'il discorso critico di Anceschi, [fu] assunto in blocco [...] da certi oppositori come difesa a oltranza, da parte di un 'ermetico', delle ragioni più speciose dell'ermetismo'.<sup>102</sup> Anceschi's 1951 preface to *Lirici* opens with a justification of his 1940 interpretation of *Lirici*. Stressing the collaborative nature of

<sup>99</sup> 'Salvatore Quasimodo a Luciano Anceschi', Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna, Fondo Speciale Luciano Anceschi, Fascicolo: Carteggio, Sottofascicolo: Salvatore Quasimodo, Folio 16. I here follow the classification of the Archiginnasio. See the complete letter in Appendix 6, with two other unpublished letters documenting this exchange (fols. 1 and 17). In the correspondence held at Archiginnasio are also included two typescripts with autograph corrections of 'A Afrodite' and 'Come uno degli dei' (fol. 14<sup>a-b</sup>).

<sup>100</sup> Luciano Anceschi, 'Cartolina Postale 20 luglio 193[??]', Archivio del Novecento, Università La Sapienza, Roma, Fondo Enrico Falqui, Serie 'Corrispondenza', Sottoserie 'Corrispondenza con Personalità', Fascicolo 'A. F. Anceschi, Luciano (1937-1963)', Sottofascicolo 'Datate'. I here follow the classification of Archivio del Novecento. See transcription in Appendix 5.

<sup>101</sup> Oreste Macrí, 'Saffo e Omero' (1954) in *Caratteri e figure della poesia italiana contemporanea* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1956), pp. 127-139; Lorenzini 'Postfazione'.

<sup>102</sup> Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', p. 226.

the project, the critic affirms that the idea of the link between ‘l’idea della prima lirica greca, e quella della poesia italiana contemporanea’ (‘Introduzione’ (1951), p. 321) occurred to him during a conversation with Quasimodo. In a retrospective study on Hermeticism published in 1972 in Treccani’s *Enciclopedia del Novecento*, Anceschi finally settled his definition of the movement into three phases, the second of which had Quasimodo and the anthology at its fulcrum.<sup>103</sup>

In his third 1978 introduction to the anthology, almost forty years after the first publication of *Lirici greci*, Anceschi reiterates the canonical status reached by Quasimodo’s translations:

Si tratta veramente di un molto discusso libro canonico proprio di un movimento della poesia italiana del novecento [...] l’opera [...] più [...] sorprendente, e, per certi aspetti, fortunata di un segreto faber della seconda generazione poetica di un lungo momento della letteratura che continuiamo a dire ermetismo. (‘Altre circostanze, per il libro’, pp. 335-336)

Certainly the critic succeeded in upholding *Lirici*’s reputation as the groundbreaking work of Hermeticism even after the literary movement had lost its central role in the Italian cultural landscape. The bad press received by Hermeticism and its poetics, accused of solipsism and obscurity, after WWII, complicates the reception of *Lirici greci* and ancient lyrics at large. Despite the fact that many contemporaries had criticised Anceschi’s approach to *Lirici*, later criticism has been unanimously favourable to the translation.<sup>104</sup>

Undoubtedly *Lirici* was one of the most fortunate works in the history of the Italian *Novecento*. Yet the book did not start a new fashion in poetic translations of ancient lyrics, as Anceschi leisurely remarks:

La traduzione dei lirici greci fu in ogni caso il segno sicuro di una stagione singolare, se si bada anche alla moda che ne venne, a quanti si diedero a

<sup>103</sup> Anceschi, ‘Ermetismo’, pp. 29-31.

<sup>104</sup> Cfr. Valgimigli, ‘Poeti greci e *Lirici nuovi*’, pp. 314-315; Macrí, ‘Saffo e Omero’, p. 131 and Michele Tondo, *Salvatore Quasimodo* (Milan: Mursia, 1976), p. 54.

tradurre i lirici greci, fino alle prove di un misterioso John R. W. Slinger che lavorava a Napoli. ('Altre circostanze, per il libro', p. 340)

These two statements are controversial. First of all, the canonization of *Lirici greci* was mainly the result of the extended literature produced by militant critics, Anceschi *in primis*, during and after the War. Secondly, no other canonical poet had attempted a complete translation of the Greek lyrics after Quasimodo. In this context, a puzzling element of Anceschi's account of the history of poetic translation in the *Novecento* is the reference to a 'mysterious John R.W. Slinger working in Naples'—a minor, unknown and self-published poet. One wonders why Anceschi could not find other examples to support his statement.

The critic, who, by 1978 had played a major role as promoter of the Neo Avant-Garde and the *Novissimi*, refrains from speaking again about the supremacy of the lyric mode. Departing from his previous pieces of 1940 and 1951, at this time, he seems unable to devise the same affinities between the lyric voices of the past and those of the present: the spiritual consonance appears to have stopped. Classical lyricism was exclusive to Quasimodo's experience, rather than a consistent trait of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Significantly, Quasimodo in 1953 with his essay 'Discorso sulla poesia' (1953) distances himself from Hermeticism and Anceschi's view of literature:

La critica ermetica, di cui anche Luciano Anceschi ha legato i primi nastri rosa di nascita, iniziò, mi pare, i suoi esercizi di lettura intorno al 1936 con uno studio di Oreste Macrí sulla poetica della parola nella mia poesia. [...] Anceschi, facendo risalire prima al Campana nei *Lirici nuovi* e poi ai crepuscolari il tempo delle prime conversioni antidannunziane e le timide sillabazioni d'una nuova *ars poetica*, per avvicinare le 'rotture' di Ungaretti (dell'*Allegria*, per intenderci, che non è ermetica) a una probabile linea tradizionale, ha seguito gli insegnamenti del suo maestro Giuseppe de Robertis. Una prospettiva di lettura sfocata e barocca, conduce il critico, su quelle premesse, a determinazioni incerte, a documenti allarmanti sulla validità (la scelta, appunto, è un atto critico) d'un periodo poetico della storia letteraria italiana, concreto e positivo. Chi attendeva, con ambizione, all'indagine dei novatori, anziché esemplificare una 'semantica dei costrutti'

(delle immagini, chiariamo) per stabilire le origini d'una scuola ermetica (e scuola c'è stata, non si può negare), è risalito, per ragioni particolaristiche, alle geometrie astratte dell'arte pura, all'arcadia o spiritualistica o stilistico-evocativa, secondo la tollerata provincia dell'autonomia formale. (p. 28)

Quasimodo thus stops upholding the aesthetic values that had dictated his 'ricerca equilibrata di canto'.

Refuting Hermeticism and the solipsistic monologic character of 'poesia pura', he then advocates the social and choral qualities of Italian poetry after 1945:

Drammatica o epica (in senso moderno), forse potrà essere la nuova poesia. Non gnomica o sociologica. [...] Il poeta sa, oggi, che non può scrivere idilli o oroscopi lirici. [...] Ma la poesia della nuova generazione, che chiameremo sociale, nel senso che s'è detto, aspira al dialogo più che al monologo. [...] La poesia italiana, dopo il '45, è di natura corale, nella sua specie; scorre per larghi ritmi, parla del mondo reale con parole comuni; talvolta presume all'epica. (pp. 32-36)

This concept is reiterated in 1957, two years before receiving the Nobel prize for literature: 'Il discorso privato (lirico) ha avuto uno sviluppo inconsueto [...] s'è fatto corale: la poesia lirica s'è contaminata con l'elegia e l'epica.'<sup>105</sup>

While he abandoned the absolutes of pure poetry, and turned to more narrative poetic structures, nevertheless Quasimodo's poetry maintains a lyric, unitary voice. Critics such as Sergio Antonielli, Natale Tedesco and Gilberto Finzi,<sup>106</sup> who more recently have pointed out Quasimodo's epic-lyric mode in the second half of his production, have also tried to highlight the impact of Latin tradition on the Sicilian poet's verse. Marcello Gigante in *L'ultimo Quasimodo e la poesia greca* (1970) is one of the few to have discussed the influence exercised by the rest of his Greek translations, *Lirici* aside, on Quasimodo's style.

Despite these attempts at redefining Quasimodo's *oeuvre*, the Sicilian poet continues to be associated mostly with *Lirici*. As Lorenzini notes, his poetic

<sup>105</sup> 'Poesia del dopoguerra' in *Il poeta e il politico*, pp. 37-45 (p. 39).

<sup>106</sup> Sergio Antonielli, 'Salvatore Quasimodo', in *Quasimodo e la critica*, ed. by Finzi, pp. 160-175 (pp.174-175); Tedesco, pp. 118-120.

production after the wars and the rest of his translations are mainly disregarded by the stars of Italian criticism of the '70s and '80s: Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, Romano Luperini, Franco Fortini, Edoardo Sanguineti.<sup>107</sup> These critics decentralise the figure of Quasimodo from the history of Italian literature, dismissing his value as a poet and stressing his value as a translator. At the same time they sustain the dialectic started by Anceschi, which brought *Lirici greci* to the status of canonical work. Emblematic of this phenomenon is Edoardo Sanguineti's choice to include thirteen translations from *Lirici* and only a couple of poems from Quasimodo's corpus in his 1969 anthology *Poesia italiana del Novecento*. Normatively, he glosses: 'Il suo più vero contributo originale alla poesia del nostro secolo non è da riconoscersi nella produzione creativa, ma nelle traduzioni dai *Lirici greci*.'<sup>108</sup>

Acknowledging Quasimodo's negative reception, in *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (1978) Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo includes three poems from *Lirici greci* and only one lyric taken from each collection up to *La terra impareggiabile* (1958), and excluding *Dare e avere* (1966). Mengaldo points at the indifference of the contemporary poetic and literary world to Quasimodo's work: 'Il mito di Quasimodo è in sostanza cosa del dopoguerra. [...] Oggi alla stima che generalmente resiste nei critici formati fra le due guerre [...] si contrappongono indifferenza o rifiuto nei più giovani.'<sup>109</sup> He also indicates that *Lirici* is Quasimodo's highest achievement; the iconic work of hermeticism and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century model for absolute lyricism.<sup>110</sup>

Romano Luperini three years later in *Il Novecento* reduces Quasimodo to 'a descrittore splendido e un po' decorativo', but includes *Lirici* once again in the Sicilian poet's best work:

<sup>107</sup> Lorenzini, 'Postfazione', p. 243.

<sup>108</sup> Edoardo Sanguineti, *Poesia italiana del Novecento*, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), II, 984.

<sup>109</sup> Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978), pp. 586-588.

<sup>110</sup> Mengaldo, *Poeti italiani del Novecento*, p. 586.

Tale aspirazione all'atemporalità, a un classicismo non greve ma lieve e stilizzato, alla parola assoluta (e cioè, nel nostro caso, anche sciolta dal peso della storia degli uomini e di quella del soggetto) si realizza al livello più alto nella traduzione dei *Lirici greci* (1940) che rappresenta il risultato più duraturo di tutta l'attività letteraria di Quasimodo.<sup>111</sup>

All three critics describe *Lirici* as the exemplary work of Quasimodo, disregarding completely every other translation that came after the anthology and deeming Quasimodo's own poetry a mediocre achievement.

Whether or not *Lirici greci* is Quasimodo's masterpiece, his established fame as Ur-translator of the Greek Melics in the Italian 20<sup>th</sup> century has bound Sappho and the Greek lyric to a hermetic idea of poetry as absolute lyric, disengagement, and solipsism. Another translation anthology that made history at the end of the '40s, for instance, is Eugenio Montale's *Quaderno di traduzioni* (1948), which, nevertheless, does not include any classical author, and defines a completely different canon. The several *Quaderni di traduzione* signed by different lyric poets, which became customary practice in the '50s and the '60s, as Fortini remarks, never included translations from the ancient lyrics. In fact, Quasimodo's classical lyricism is an isolated phenomenon in the Italian literary panorama of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The post WWII reaction to Hermeticism, the socio-political turn of the cultural environment, the Marxist activism of the 1970s rejected the absolute value of lyricism as an obsolete form of poetry. This suggests that the fortune of Sappho, Catullus and monodic lyric in general is entangled with the complex reception of Quasimodo's *Lirici greci*, the history and development of the different poetics in the aftermath of WWII up to the 1980s and the critical debate around poetry and engagement in Italy in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>111</sup> Romano Luperini, *Il Novecento*, 2 vols (Turin: Loescher, 1981), II, 603.

### Chapter 3

#### **Ezra Pound and Classical Lyricism: Sappho and Catullus Playing in a Choral Performance**

*Ed eran due in uno, ed uno in due*  
(Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII, l. 125)

In February 1912, Ezra Pound's essay 'Prologomena' appeared in the second issue of the newly born *Poetry Review*. The staple journal of the Poetry Society dedicated the entire instalment to contemporary lyric poetry and theory. In the 'Credo' section of the essay Pound developed a poetic theory tackling issues of rhythm, symbols, technique, and form. The essay was followed by six poems by Pound. 'Oboes', 'Sub Mare', 'L'invitation', 'Salve Pontifex', 'Dieu! Qu'il la fait', and 'ΔΩΡΙΑ' were included demonstrating his theories.<sup>1</sup> A five-page discussion by Darrell Figgis, who programmatically attempts a definition of 'The Lyric', contextualized the contribution by Pound.<sup>2</sup> The journal, despite its limited circulation, provided a rhetorical platform for Pound's theories, while placing his poetry at the centre of the growing underground experimentalism in London.

'Prologomena' and its corollary poems reveal that Pound's discourse on the lyric, since its early stages, is characterised by a peculiar take on tradition and translation, as well as a fascination with the musicality of poetry:

I begin on the chord thus querulous, for I would much rather lie on what is left of Catullus' parlour floor and speculate the azure beneath it and the hills off to Salo [sic] and Riva with their forgotten gods moving unhindered amongst them, than discuss any processes and theories of art whatsoever. I would rather play tennis. ('Prologomena', pp. 72-73)

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Prologomena', *The Poetry Review*, 2.1 (1912), 72-81; reprinted in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), pp. 8-12.

<sup>2</sup> Darrell Figgis, 'The Lyric', *The Poetry Review*, 2.1 (1912), 61-65 (p. 61).

The querulous and polemical chords of this incipit, deliberately setting Pound's speculations apart from the rest of the critical establishment, are echoed by the musical subject of 'Oboes', the first lyric in the group. The subtitle of 'Dieu! Qu'il la Fait': '*For Music* (a translation from Charles D'Orleans)' sets this poem also in the semantic field of music. The hymn-like 'Salve Pontifex' explicitly establishes a connection with the archaic Greek Dionysian rituals (Iacchus is the epithet of Dionysus), while the Hellenic alphabet title gives 'ΔΩΡΙΑ' the allure of an ancient fragment. The stress on the musical aspect of poetry, paired with the references to Greek archaic culture, establishes a dialogue with the tradition of Greek monodic lyric, which was sung to the sound of the lyre. The earliest extant lyric of this tradition, Sappho's fr. 1, is also presented as a poetic ideal:

No man ever writes very much poetry that 'matters'. In bulk, that is, no one produces much that is final, and when a man is not doing this highest thing, this saying the thing once for all and perfectly. When he is not matching Ποικιλόθρο' ἄθᾶνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα, or 'Hist—said Kate the Queen,' he had much better be making the sort of experiments which may be of use to him in his later work, or his successors. ('Prologomena', p. 74)

Pound indicates the first line of Sappho's 'Ode to Aphrodite' (together with a reference to a line by Robert Browning's drama *Pippa Passes* (1841), II, l. 258) as a model of poetic achievement and lasting perfection, to which all contemporary poets should aspire.<sup>3</sup> As most of Pound's work, the lyrics following 'Prologomena' are the poetic enactment of his critical attitude towards art and the literary tradition:

My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. ('Prologomena', p. 75)

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Browning, *Pippa Passes*, in *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, ed. by Ian Jack and Rowena Fowler, 15 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), III, 17-92 (p. 59).

The critical enquiry into the history of literature carried out by Pound to individuate for each literary genre its archetypal authors prefigured the formation of a re-interpreted literary Canon, and served as a solid foundation on which to ground new experiments in art. According to Pound, men of different ages share a common emotional basis, which is also the source of artistic inspiration for all men. The reflection on lyric poetry in ‘Prologomena’ uncoils from these premises, which were first exposed in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910-1929).<sup>4</sup>

‘Prologomena’ ’s musings on the roots of lyric poetry paved the way to Pound’s Imagist enterprise between 1912 and 1920, with *Ripostes* and *Lustra*. At the time of the publication of the essay, the poet was submitting the typescript of *Ripostes* to the London publisher Stephen Swift and Co.; the book was released the following October. The six *Poetry Review* poems, apart from the uncollected ‘L’invitation’, were included in the volume—the first testimony of Pound’s Imagist poetics.<sup>5</sup> By the beginning of 1913 Pound had further developed the premises of ‘Prologomena’ into his Imagist manifesto ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’, published in the American magazine *Poetry*. In ‘A Few Don’ts’ Pound clarifies ‘Prologomena’s theories on the importance of music for free verse, rhythm, and the natural object as poetic image and programmatically exposes them as guidelines for Imagist poets. The lyric of Sappho and Catullus and medieval lyric are maintained as examples of poetic perfections.<sup>6</sup> Pound was operating within an international literary discourse preoccupied with the definition of poetry and its future orientation, and his lyrics were being publicised as some of the more progressive.

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<sup>4</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance*, ed. by Richard Sieburth (New York: New Directions, 2005). Hereafter I will refer to this text with the abbreviation *SR*.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Sieburth, ‘Notes’, in *Ezra Pound: Poems and Translations*, ed. by Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003), pp. 1235-1341 (p. 1239). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to Pound’s short poetry and translations are from this edition.

<sup>6</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste’, *Poetry*, 1.6 (1913), 200-206, reprinted in *Literary Essays*, pp. 4-8.

In his 1913 essay 'The Tradition', Pound makes clear that:

The two great lyric traditions which most concern us are that of the Melic poets and that of Provence. From the first arose practically all the poetry of the 'ancient world', from the second practically that of the modern.<sup>7</sup>

The Ancient Greek lyric and the medieval troubadour school are signalled as the two original sources of the tradition. Gradually integrated into the subsequent poetics of the American poet, this preoccupation with lyric origins remained a fundamental issue all the way through the *Cantos*—the long epic poem Pound continued to write (and rewrite) from the late 1910s until the very end of his life.<sup>8</sup> Blurring the boundaries between genres, his innovative combination of lyric and dramatic modes in the poetic personae of his short poetry collections, and the integration of lyric fragments in the epic of the *Cantos*, reformulated the notion of lyric.<sup>9</sup>

While he only translated a handful of poems of each poet, direct and indirect references to the fragments of Sappho and the Catullan *liber* are frequently deployed in his criticism, his short poetry and the *Cantos*. Sappho and Catullus may appear as archetypal examples of different types of lyricism, as poetic personae and as elements of the Eros mythical cluster—a group of images, analogies and mythical representations of erotic desire recurring in the *Cantos*.<sup>10</sup>

After introducing Pound's theories on tradition and translation in section 1, I analyse the Sapphic and Catullan presence across Pound's oeuvre in relation to his criticism and literary speculations. Section 2 individuates the patterns and topical elements characterizing Pound's translations and appropriations of Sappho and

<sup>7</sup> 'The Tradition', in *Literary Essays*, pp. 91-93 (p. 91).

<sup>8</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (London: Faber, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Ira Nadel, 'Understanding Pound', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. by Ira Nadel (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), pp. 1-21 (p. 8).

<sup>10</sup> On the mythical cluster of Eros in the *Cantos*, George Dekker, 'The Theme of Eros in the *Cantos*', in *Sailing After Knowledge: the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. 1-85.

Catullus, tracing the evolutions in Pound's classical lyricism up to the late 1930s. Sappho and Catullus, who are often paired in Pound's work, function as two distinct yet inter-dependent poetic masks, representing different qualities of his lyricism. The two masks are a constantly evolving dialectic pair. By analysing the short poetry, the *Cantos* and the unpublished opera *Collis O Heliconii* (1932-1934), it emerges that the dyadic relationship between the Sapphic and Catullan masks develops in three phases.

The first phase exploits the ancient poets' masks as opposite metonymic representations of idealised love and physical desire. The second sheds light on one of the mythical clusters in the *Cantos* engaging with the ritualistic and mythical origins of the lyric. In the third phase the Sapphic and Catullan masks respectively represent private and public poetry. I here show how Pound's penchant for interspersing lyric elements into dialogic genres such as the epic of the *Cantos* or the opera *Collis O Heliconii* provided the groundwork for a new outlook on ancient monodic lyric.

### **1.1 The Timeless Erotica of Tradition**

Pound's conception of tradition is deeply bound with his perspective on language and translation. The poet sets the two terms apart from their commonly accepted meanings. He conceives the first as a living and interacting force and the second as one of its creative functions.

Pound's notion of tradition is found *in nuce* in his work on troubadour poetry *The Spirit of Romance*, published in 1910 directly after his travels in Provence. Boasting that '[a]ll ages are contemporaneous', and that '[t]his is especially true of literature, where the real time is independent of the apparent' in his 'Prefatio ad Lectorem Electum' (1910), Pound endeavours to define the synchronic quality of

literary tradition.<sup>11</sup> From this point onwards, tradition, particularly in relation to the ancient classics and medieval lyric, stands out as an almost obsessive theme in Pound's writings.

Demystifying the supremacy of the past over the present sphere implied in a Classicist linear conception of literature, Pound re-instates the primacy of the present by envisaging the interrelations between ('genius') authors from different eras on a horizontal plane, where '[t]he value of old work is constantly affected by the value of the new'.<sup>12</sup> The coexistence of past and present is explained as a consonance founded on what Pound defines an emotional 'permanent basis in humanity', which emerges in literature through a series of 'luminous detail[s]'<sup>13</sup> – particular *loci* of diverse literary works from different ages manifesting a common emotional paradigm.<sup>14</sup>

I believe in a sort of permanent basis in humanity [...]. Speaking aesthetically, the myths are explication of mood: you may stop here, or you may probe deeper. Certain it is that these myths are only intelligible in a vivid and glittering sense to those people to whom they occur. I know, I mean, one man who understands Persephone and Demeter, and one who understands the Laurel, and another who has, I should say, met Artemis. [...] These things are for them real. (*SR*, p. 92)

Highlighting the necessary exchange between art and life in the creative process, the permanent and common basis, which creates a consonance among humans across the ages, is grounded by Pound in real experience. If myth is the repository of the truthful essence of emotional experience, authors are to a certain extent limited to re-use these

<sup>11</sup> *SR*, p. 7. In 1929 the essay 'Psychology and the Troubadours' (first issued in 1916 in *The Quest*) was added to *SR*. Cfr. Richard Sieburth, 'Introduction', in *SR*, pp. vii-xii (p. xii).

<sup>12</sup> Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 76. Hereafter I will refer to this book with the abbreviation *ABCR*. The coexistence of the present and the past was also affirmed by T.S. Eliot in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), pp. 37-44 (pp. 38-39). On Eliot and tradition, Frank Kermode, 'Canon and Period', in *History and Value: the Clarendon lectures and the Northcliffe lectures 1987* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 108-127 (pp. 116-117); cfr. Hugh Wittemeyer, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound: 1908-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Pound develops the notion of 'luminous detail' in 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', in *Selected Prose of Ezra Pound*, ed. by William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), pp. 19-44. On 'luminous detail', Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), pp. 168-170.

<sup>14</sup> Pound's method of luminous detail is akin to T.S. Eliot's 'mythical method' in 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' (1923), in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, pp. 175-178 (p. 178).

primordial expressions or to repeat un-replaceable myths in their works as in a ritual re-enactment.<sup>15</sup>

From the premise that '[w]e do NOT know the past in chronological sequence, [...] but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time',<sup>16</sup> Pound attempts to supersede a diachronic linear conception of literature in favour of a synchronic and circular one. A new literary work that ignored tradition or its relations with the contextual present would be in fact inconceivable for Pound, whose famous slogan urges the contemporary author to 'Make it New' (the 'it' of the injunction standing for tradition itself).

On the one hand, by underlining the repetitive character inherent in the mythical method, Pound partly divests the figures of the authors of their individual agency.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he champions the genius of the authors who manage to convey their personal 'explication of mood[s]' based in real experience in a visionary and metaphorical language, as Catullus, Propertius and later the Provençal poets did for love lyric:

In Catullus' superb epithalamium 'Collis o Heliconii', we find the affair is strictly on one plane; the bride is what she is in Morocco today, and the function is 'normal', and eugenic. It is the sacrificial concept. Yet Catullus, recording his own emotion, could say: 'More as a father than a lover'. Propertius writes: 'Ingenium nobis ipsa puella fecit.' (SR, p. 96)

The content of Catullus' poem 'Collis O Heliconii' is transposed onto a universal plane, the bride is a 'type', which is not necessarily bound to the context or is circumstantial to Catullus' life and poetry. It rather functions as a paradigm, and so finds an analogue in a contemporary wife in Morocco. Pound's conception of poetry

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<sup>15</sup> On 'traditional patterns of ritual symbolism' in European Modernism, Yatromanolakis, *Towards a Ritual Poetics*, pp. 81-98 and J. Korg, *Ritual and Experiment in Modern Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Owen, 1952), p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 63.

is ‘impersonal’ only insofar as the intrinsic function of poetry as a manifestation of the universal paradigm of existence finds its expression in the individual authors’ words. The language of ‘impersonal’ poetry therefore must be ‘free from emotional slither’.<sup>18</sup> Pound’s striving with tradition is a serious and committed attempt at finding the original and the new at different stages of the paradigm. This emerges in his militant essays on the work of Henry James, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, who were also engaging with similar issues.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, Pound does not forget the greatness of Catullus in making the matter of love and marriage more urgent through his own personal lens by ‘recording his own emotions’.

As for Pascoli, Pound’s interest in wedding rituals and lovemaking, exemplified in his choice to write about Catullus’ epithalamium 61, involves a large part of his appropriations of Sappho’s and Catullus’ poetry. Hymenaic poetry is the expression of the vital universe, and its fluid force Eros (or sex), which drives both life and artistic creation in those who are disposed toward it:

And with certain others their consciousness is ‘germinal’. Their thoughts are in them as the thought of the tree is in the seed, or in the grass, or the grain, or the blossom. And these minds are the more poetic [...]. And this latter sort of mind is close on the vital universe; and the strength of the Greek beauty rests in this, that it is ever at the interpretation of this vital universe, by its signs of gods and godly attendants and oreads. [...] Line after line of Arnaut will repeat from Sappho, but the whole seems curiously barren if we turn suddenly from the Greek to it. [...] At any rate, when we do get into contemplation of the flowing we find sex, or some correspondence to it, ‘positive and negative’, ‘North and South’, ‘sun and moon’, or whatever terms of whatever cult or science you prefer to substitute.  
(*SR*, pp. 92-93)

The fluid force of Eros—the mythical equivalent of sexual desire—flows from two polarised ends, which visually grow into archetypal pairs of opposites: positive and negative, north and south, sun and moon. Sex seals the relationship between the two

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Prologomena’, p. 76. On impersonality in Pound see Ellmann, pp. 114-160.

<sup>19</sup> All in *Literary Essays*: ‘Henry James’, pp. 295-338; ‘D.H. Lawrence’, pp. 387-388; ‘Joyce’, pp. 410-417.

ends as in a scientific representation of an electric current established between opposite charges. In this view, desire appears to be not only the essence of poetry, but also of ritual, language and nature, permitting their co-existence and intercommunication on a real and fictional level.<sup>20</sup> The boundary between life, myth and art is thus blurred.

According to Pound, artistic originality always develops from the common basis of tradition conceived through a set of myths. A paradigm shift may occur, but the matter of art is constant and ever present. In order to determine the direction which leads toward an original literary work that is '[n]ews that stays news' (*ABCR*, p. 29), Pound analyses archetypes in Homer, Sappho, Catullus, the poet of 'The Seafarer', Dante and the troubadours. He seeks to position them in the contemporary. He draws parallels between the Hellenic conception of beauty, the poetic faculty of 'germinal consciousness' and the Provençal interest in love and desire. Connecting patterns of death and rebirth to the pair *eros* and *thanatos*, Pound's mythical method inserts poetic consciousness and creation into an anthropological framework.

This account of literature and history which traces the mythical patterns and their ritual enactments across time and space was strongly influenced by the comparative anthropological study on mysticism, religious and folkloric rituals exposed in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890).<sup>21</sup> Writing itself is presented as a ritual re-enactment of the natural cycle of death and rebirth. Speaking of the intentions behind *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, Pound said he wanted 'to bring a dead man to life, to present a living figure'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On ritualised forms of eroticism in Pound's oeuvre see Kevin Oderman, *Ezra Pound and the Erotic Medium* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Gremercy, 1981); Beasley, pp. 69-71.

<sup>22</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Letter to A.R. Orage, London, [?April]', in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D.D. Paige (New York: Hartcourt, 1950), pp. 148-150 (p. 149).

Like for Pascoli, Pound's enquiry into literature and tradition is an attempt at understanding the human. Literature, the product of man and the place where its eternal qualities find expression, is for both poets the privileged field of enquiry. Pascoli and Pound trace the origins and development of literature, and lyric poetry in particular, to anthropological archetypes and the history of their manifestations. Yet while Pascoli's approach insists on a systematic linguistic and philological analysis, Pound's speculations are unsystematic and his theories based on a spiritual conception of literature as emanation of a 'vital universe'. If for both Pascoli and Pound poetic faculty takes the form of a heightened self-consciousness and is prefigured as the 'blooming of a poet's mind' (or 'germinal'), for Pascoli the poet is the privileged being who discovers the primitive, inherent universal quality of man in the surrounding reality through a heightened self-awareness of its past condition, and shapes these particulars into poetry; for Pound poetry takes the form of an emanation of consciousness of the vital universe from the individual subject(s) to the world, and is always shaped by the present. Witemeyer remarks:

Tradition complements the ecstasy of poetry. A poet's metaphors may come from personal experience ('Petals on a wet, black bough'), but they may also come from a traditional or literary context, replete with relevant associations (Sappho's Pierian roses in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*). This is to say that Pound's poetry must be viewed as a continuous dialectic between tradition and the individual talent, between criticism and lyricism.<sup>23</sup>

As will emerge in the following discussion, Pound's poetry allows for a pluralism of forms and voices, and develops as an opening to the world, almost opposite to Pascoli's inward-looking solipsistic lyricism. These two views of poetry are formulated in two similar descriptions of the poetic: 'Eterno che è sempre nuovo' (Pascoli) and 'News that stays news' (Pound). For Pascoli, the starting point is the eternal past, which is hierarchically viewed as the most valuable and truthful

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<sup>23</sup> Witemeyer, p. 43.

dimension, emerging periodically in the work of the poet as memory. Reality is tinged with subjective aspects in the poet's work. For Pound, the present is the only dimension of the poetic, which appropriates the past to make it new. Since it is only possible to know the past as a present projection, Pound's view of renewal looks at the future. An emanation of the individual poet living in the present, the new, when it is poetic, is so forever. Poetry is the objective result of subjective experience.<sup>24</sup>

Anthony Mellors has argued that Pound's lyricism and mythical method should be taken as a fact:

[Pound] treats the mythic method not as metaphor but as fact, and that understanding how this is the case entails a fundamental reassessment of the role played by mythic and esoteric thought in the poetics of obscurity and the political ideology of modernism and its offshoots. [...] The *Cantos* [...] are filled with mystical, pagan, Neoplatonic and alchemical references, and Pound's 'mythic method' inaugurated a modernist tradition which presents the poet as a shamanic figure spelling out the archetypal, spiritual values allegedly lost to rational technocratic society.<sup>25</sup>

In this sense Pound's mysticism takes the form of an hermetic stance based on similar aesthetic premises to Quasimodo's and Anceschi's speculations. Yet Pound rejects any poetic divorce from reality, a centrepiece in Italian Hermeticism's ideas of 'pure poetry' and absolute lyric. He is rather concerned with mystery cults and their intellectual expressions in literature: 'For Pound, Hermeticism is a religious principle of light and love heralding the rise of Renaissance *intelletto* and justifying his own erotic theory of male vitality. The hermetic intellect combines reason and aesthetic intuition to form symbols of illumination against the 'tyranny of the syllogism, blinding and obscurantist'.<sup>26</sup> Pound's poetics situates itself between the

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<sup>24</sup> On the motif of poetry as objective representation of a subjective experience in the *Cantos* and beyond, see Carrol F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 13 and Ellmann, pp. 114-160.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: from Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 2; 4.

<sup>26</sup> Mellors, pp. 4-5.

anthropological primitivism of Pascoli and the aestheticism of Quasimodo's hermetic stance.

In the years immediately preceding WWI, with the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1912) and Carl Jung's *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912), topics such as primitivism, eroticism and mysticism were being explored in relation to creativity.<sup>27</sup> Martin Kayman notes that:

The modernist quest for a revitalisation of poetic discourse commonly included a recuperation of 'primitive' or 'Old World' energies perceived as primal, original powers of language, in many cases expressed in the discourses of the new sciences (among which we should include anthropology as much as physics). In this pursuit, the unconscious has been much used as an explicit or implicit resource for such powers—in the field of dreams, automatic writing or painting, myth, the naïve or primitive, or in Pound's case, the 'complex'.<sup>28</sup>

While Pound never engages with the category of the 'unconscious' in his work, his reflections on the creative power of eros as archetypal quality of human beings emerge during a lively contemporary cultural debate on similar issues.

In different ways Pascoli, Pound and Quasimodo envisage literature and translation as a form of re-embodiment of the past in the present. Matthew Reynolds points out an internal contradiction in Pound's view of translation as revivification:

The explicit metaphors of 'presenting' and 'bringing to life' will do as rough summing up, or as labels for what was perhaps an initial intention. But when they are brought into contact with the texture of Pound's poetry of translation, they stretch, proliferate, and turn back on themselves. The sin to make 'present' brings with it an awareness of loss. The desire to bring 'a dead man to life' spreads into an enjoyment of kinds of textual 'liveliness' which go beyond and even contradict the personality that was meant to be resurrected.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1912), trans. by James Strachey (London: Routledge, 2001); Carl Jung, *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912), trans. by Beatrice M. Hinkle (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1946).

<sup>28</sup> Martin A. Kayman, "'The Gorilla and the Bird': Modernism and the Pathology of Language", in *The Modernism of Ezra Pound: the Science of Poetry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 138-163 (p. 143).

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Reynolds, *The Poetry of Translation: from Chaucer and Petrarch to Homer and Logue* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp. 266-267.

With the two notions of synchronicity and renewal Pound puts into question the blind worship of antiquity that characterises an outmoded form of classicism.<sup>30</sup> This frees poets as much as students from the daunting authorial heftiness of the classics and allows them to discriminate authors, assess their quality and treat ancestors as their equal interlocutors: ‘the Greeks might be hard put to it to find a better poet among themselves than is their disciple Catullus. Is not Sappho, in comparison, just a little Swinburnian?’<sup>31</sup> Pound questions the traditional supremacy of Greek literature over the Latin. He also defiantly argues for the superiority of Catullus over Sappho by integrating Swinburne’s appropriations and Sappho’s fragments.

The implicit premise behind this view of the classical tradition is that all languages, regardless of time and space, coexist in the literature of the present. The hierarchical relationship that privileged the past over the present dimension, and which characterised Pascoli’s view of tradition, is necessarily undermined. The present is the only dimension of knowledge, since the poet can only know the past from his own point of view. In this way, the so-called ‘dead’ languages such as ancient Greek, Latin or Old English, are kept alive by the poets who engage with them through translation: ‘We are governed by words, the laws are graven in words, and literature is the sole means of keeping these words living and accurate’.<sup>32</sup>

This coexistence of life and literature makes poetry an ethical matter for Pound. He was convinced that a writer’s social function is to keep language and literature alive since ‘If a nation’s literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays’ (*ABCR*, p. 32). These views on language and nation find their roots in the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century conception of ‘the genius of language’ as expression of national

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<sup>30</sup> ‘On outmoded classicism’, Eliot, ‘*Ulysses*’, pp. 176-177.

<sup>31</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Notes on Elizabethan Classicists’, in *Literary Essays*, pp. 227-248 (p. 240).

<sup>32</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘*Ulysses*’, in *Literary Essays*, pp. 403-409 (p. 409).

identity.<sup>33</sup> Pascoli's ethical commitment to poetry sprang from a similar belief that literature keeps language alive. Pound brought these ideas onto the Modernist stage, aiming all his life to fulfil a self-assigned role of poet-*vate*.

## 1.2 The Creative Potential of Untranslatability

The re-definition of the classical tradition, which places present and past literatures on a par, was crucial for finding a path towards a *new* kind of writing with contemporary relevance. The instrumental role of translation in this comparative endeavour is relentlessly stressed by the poet who used translation to negotiate meaning across different ages and cultures and was certain that '[a] great age of literature is a great age of translations' ('Notes on Elizabethan classicists', p. 232). Translation can be considered one of the deepest and most analytical forms of comparison. Taking inspiration from Walter Pater's comparativism,<sup>34</sup> Pound argued that '[t]he proper method for studying poetry and good letters is the method of contemporary biologists [...] [the] comparison of one 'slide' or specimen with another' (*ABCR*, p. 17). Translation proved the most effective means for establishing an intimacy between tradition, language and poetry. By eliminating the conceptual differences between literature, appropriation, rewriting and translation, Pound marked a fundamental shift in the approach to literary sources and language, which became the flagship trait of Modernist poetics. Translation ultimately became a form of poetic creation.

The number of translations produced by Pound was unprecedented (and to this day is still unsurpassed). His creative translation method employed in *Cathay* (1915)

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<sup>33</sup> See Gianfranco Folena, 'Il rinnovamento linguistico del Settecento italiano', in *L'italiano in Europa: esperienze linguistiche del Settecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), pp. 5-66. Paola Gambarota, *Irresistible Signs: the Genius of Language and Italian National Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Witemeyer, p. 9.

and *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) required a theoretical reconsideration of the notion of translation itself, opening up a new poetic field altogether. One of Pound's early reviewers, F.S. Flint, comments on his *Canzoni* (1911):<sup>35</sup>

If Mr. Pound can translate a poem, he will do so, rather than make one. He translates from Heine, Propertius, Dante, Pico della Mirandola, Joachim du Bellay, Leopardi; the bulk of the work in this book is not ostensibly translated, but it reads as though it were.<sup>36</sup>

In his slightly insolent remark, Flint grasps one of the most original and enduring elements of Pound's writings, his language of translation. The 'stile da traduzione' that became characteristic of Quasimodo's work after the 1940s, and was described by Fortini as one of the main traits of Italian poetry in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, echoes Poundian experiments in its cosmopolitanism and formulations.<sup>37</sup> This attitude toward translation persisted for the rest of Pound's literary career; the *Cantos* can, in fact, be read as a cento. As Matthew Reynolds suggests, with Pound it became necessary to elide the hierarchical division between original poetry and translation as a secondary practice, and rather start thinking in terms of 'poetry of translation'.<sup>38</sup>

Pound writes in canto 86: 'it can't be all in one language' (p. 563) following their author's belief that '[n]o single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension' (*ABCR*, p. 34). The added notion of literary synchronicity made the association of apparently anachronistic languages in poetry and translation not only possible, but necessary. Pound's poetic plurilingualism becomes a requirement rather than a gratuitous form of obscurity.

The supposed inability of any given language to convey the whole truth of human experience means that specific languages can only convey specific truths; any

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<sup>35</sup> *Cathay*, *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and *Canzoni* are all collected in *Poems and Translations*.

<sup>36</sup> F.S. Flint, 'Canzoni by Ezra Pound', *The Poetry Review*, 1.1 (1912), p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Fortini, 'Montale e la poesia', p. 390.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Reynolds, pp. 266-267.

language, this suggests, is essentially untranslatable. This notion follows the longstanding theories on the ‘genius of language’, understood as the untranslatable core of an idiom or its cultural matrix. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Italian philosophers Melchiorre Cesarotti (1730-1808) and Galeani Napione (1748-1830), with the German philosophers Joan Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) were first bringing these theories to the fore.<sup>39</sup> Pound notes Homer’s untranslatability:

Of Homer two qualities remain untranslated: the magnificent onomatopoeia, as of the rush of the waves on the sea-bank and their recession in:

παρὰ θῆνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης

untranslated and untranslatable; and, secondly, the authentic cadence of speech; the absolute conviction that the words used, let us say by Achilles to the ‘dog-faced’ chicken-hearted Agamemnon, are in the actual swing of words spoken. This quality of actual speaking is *not* untranslatable.<sup>40</sup>

The Homeric onomatopoeias are an example of linguistic as well as stylistic untranslatability. The untranslatability deriving from the linguistic gap between source and target language is widened by the individual style of each author, which adds a further layer of meaning.

Susan Bassnett and Lawrence Venuti demonstrate in their studies how Pound in his translations manages to draw attention to foreignness and time-distance separating 20<sup>th</sup>-century English from any source language taken into consideration (be it Ancient Greek, Latin or Old English). This trait is a natural consequence of Pound’s language theory. It emphasizes that for Pound there are certain qualities of any language or author that can indeed be translated, and others that are utterly impossible

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<sup>39</sup> See Folena, p. 6 and Gambarota, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘Early Translators of Greek: Early Translators of Homer’, in *Literary Essays*, pp. 249-275 (p. 250).

to translate— especially if one infers, as he does, the paramount importance of maintaining the spirit of the target language (in his case, English).<sup>41</sup>

Pound complicates the notion of untranslatability even further by lingering on the univocal relationship between any two given languages. Certain languages are more suitable to translate other ones. For instance, in Pound's mind Greek can only be translated satisfactorily into Latin; any other language appears to be insufficient for the task.<sup>42</sup> Pound's approach to creative translation orbited around this very notion of partial untranslatability.

The translator should always allow for a degree of linguistic freedom in order to respect the nature of the source, but also of the target language. By disembodimenting the source text from its context and allowing for a degree of linguistic freedom in the target language, it is possible to convey the same 'emotional intensity' as the original.<sup>43</sup> Pound's creation of 'Masks' and 'Personae'— independent poetic voices speaking in the first person— is the epitome of this endeavour. Shifting the focus from linguistic fidelity to emotional effect, translation becomes first and foremost an interpretative and a creative act.<sup>44</sup>

A theoretical separation between translation and original poetry is denied:

In the long run the translator is in all probability impotent to do all of the work for the linguistically lazy reader. [...]

This refers to 'interpretative translation'. The 'other sort', I mean in cases where the 'translator' [sic] is definitely making a new poem, falls simply in the domain of original writing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 76-100; Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, pp. 35-36; 187-188.

<sup>42</sup> 'Notes on Elizabethan Classicists', pp. 238-239. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Giacomo Leopardi affirmed that no single language has sufficient words to express all the infinite particulars of thought. See Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, pp. 94-95; 2126-7.

<sup>43</sup> 'Early Translators of Greek', p. 268.

<sup>44</sup> On translation as criticism, 'Date Line' (1934), in *Literary Essays*, pp. 74-87 (p. 74).

<sup>45</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Cavalcanti', in *Literary Essays*, pp. 149-200 (p. 200). On Pound's translation method, Hugh Kenner, 'Introduction', in *The Translations of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1953), pp. 9-14 and John W. Maerhofer, 'Towards an Esthetic of Translation: an Examination of Ezra Pound's Translation Theory', *Paideuma*, 29.3 (2000), 85-109.

Analogously, in an introductory note to his *Cavalcanti*, he states:

The translation of a poem having any depth ends by being one of two things: either it is the expression of the translator, virtually a new poem, or it is as it were a photograph, as exact as possible, of one side of the statue.<sup>46</sup>

When a translation is not merely a ‘service’ crib, conceived to be an aid to the student of foreign languages and literature, it necessarily presupposes a measure of creativity.<sup>47</sup>

By moving away from the notion of ‘fidelity’ and linguistic accuracy, Pound’s theory of translation, language and tradition, strikes a blow against the cult of the author: ‘It is tremendously important that great poetry be written, it makes no jot of difference who writes it’ (‘Prologomena’, p. 74). As Matthew Reynolds remarks, Pound’s translations abandon the reproduction of authorial intentionality, favouring the rendition of ‘that which [the author] has which no other man, god, creature has’.<sup>48</sup> This, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was completely innovative. It caused Pound’s translations to be rejected by the academy, which could not conceive of a translation that disregarded linguistic accuracy<sup>49</sup> or was not subordinated to its source text. Pound affirms the autonomy of his translations ‘based on [his] interpretation of the original and on [his] shaping of that interpretation’<sup>50</sup> and thus puts into question what Venuti calls ‘the dominance of transparent discourse’. This challenged the idea that the translator should be absent from the target text.<sup>51</sup> Pound’s theories on linguistic untranslatability granted the translator an active role and opened the way to creative translation.

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<sup>46</sup> David Anderson, *Pound’s Cavalcanti: an Edition of the Translations, Notes and Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Notes on Elizabethan Classicists’, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew Reynolds, pp. 262-263. I.A. Richards in the ’20s also questions authorial intention as a principle of criticism in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, 1924), especially chapter 4.

<sup>49</sup> Bassnett, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> Bassnett, p. 99.

<sup>51</sup> Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*, p. 177.

## 2.1 Ezra Pound and Ancient Lyric: a Performance in Three Acts

Pound's classical lyricism dialogues constantly with his ideas on tradition, language(s) and the dialectical tension between translation and linguistic untranslatability. Untranslatability is one of Pound's main concerns when establishing his relationship with the monodic lyric of Sappho and Catullus; the American poet argued for the impossibility of rendering the unique odes of the Lesbian and the Latin poet into English. Yet the poetry of Sappho and Catullus inhabit Pound's work from its early stages.

Of the two poets, Catullus, and particularly *carmen* 61, is the most referenced: 'There is the POIKILOTHRON and then Catullus, *Collis O Heliconii*'.<sup>52</sup> The epithalamion is mentioned in cantos 3, 4, 5 and 28 and set to music for his third opera *Collis O Heliconii* (1932-1934).<sup>53</sup> Pound translated only three minor *carmina* by Catullus as self-standing texts— that is, as texts not intended to be included in a larger poem or canto.<sup>54</sup> These are *carmen* 43, 26, 85. The translation of Catullus 43 was first published as 'To Formianus' Young Lady Friend' in *Poetry and Drama* (March 1914) and subsequently collected in *Lustra*. Catullus 26 and 85 belong to a much later creative nucleus. They were respectively published in 1957 and in 1964 and collected in *Translations* (1964). Catullus 85 was especially translated for the anthology.<sup>55</sup>

Pound left the canonical *carmina* and those that proved influential on his poetics mostly untranslated. Sifting through the poet's oeuvre, Catullan translations and references are commonly inserted within larger poems: a version of *carmen* 31

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<sup>52</sup> 'Letter to Iris Barry, London, August 1916', in *Letters*, pp. 91-92 (p. 91).

<sup>53</sup> Fisher, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Davidson, 'Pound and Catullus', in *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry: a Preliminary Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 51-82.

<sup>55</sup> Sieburth, 'Notes', p. 1251.

features half-way through Ur-canto I, first published in *Lustra* with Ur-canto II and III under the umbrella title ‘Three Cantos of a Poem of Some length’ (1915). A partial version of Catullus 51 appears in Ur-canto II followed by a series of single lines from Catullus 3, 72, 80 and a translation of carmen 58. A previous, freer translation of carmen 58 constitutes one of the four epigrams in ‘Lesbia’. It also contains a passing reference to carmen 3, which is used in ‘ΔΩΠΙΑ’, too. It is remarkable that excerpts from Catullus 61 and 34 are the only consistent allusions to Catullus in the *Cantos*.<sup>56</sup> Margaret Fisher’s edition of Pound’s third unfinished opera, *Collis O Heliconii*, uncovered a draft of a translation of Catullus 61, dated around 1917, which the poet never published during his life.<sup>57</sup>

The Poundian appropriations of Sappho also focus on minor poems. The poet, with his characteristic fondness of rankings, declared Sappho’s fr. 1 the best lyric ode in the history of literature. Yet he never translated the ode and only translated sections of fr. 95 and 96 (in the Voigt numbering). He published the versions under the titles ‘Papyrus’ and ‘Ἰμέρω’ in *Lustra*.<sup>58</sup> After canto 4 in 1919, canto 5 in 1921 and (a passing reference) in 28, both poets disappear from the *Cantos*, until twenty years later with the *Pisan Cantos*.<sup>59</sup>

As far as Sappho is concerned, Pound’s shying away from the translation of odes 1 and 31 (the only two fully extant odes at this time) is not surprising. In agreement with his theory on the univocal relationship between languages, he would unflinchingly state that Latin, over English, was the most effective language to translate Greek. This is evident not only in his essays, as pointed out in section 1, but also from

<sup>56</sup> Ron Thomas, *The Latin Masks of Ezra Pound* (Epping: Bowker, 1983), p. 27; and Peter Davidson, ‘Appendix I’, in *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry*, pp. 141-151 (pp. 141-142).

<sup>57</sup> Fisher, pp. 102-111.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Ἰμέρω’ was first published as ‘O Atthis’, *Poetry*, 8 (1916), 276, see also Sieburth, ‘Notes’, p. 1242 and Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Pimlico, 1991), pp. 54-75.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, p. 26. On the genesis of the early cantos see, Daniel Albright, ‘Early Cantos: I-XLI’, in *The Cambridge Companion to E.P.*, ed. by Nadel, pp. 59-91.

his poetry. The opening canto 1 is a translation of the *nekylia* section of *Odyssey* XI, whose source text Pound took from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Latin translation of the passage by Andreas Divus: ‘Lie Quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus, | In officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer’ (p. 5). Similarly, in Ur-canto II, Pound gives his English translation of Catullus 51, itself a version of the Sapphic ode 31. By offering the translation of a translation Pound meta-poetically draws attention to the dynamics of literary transmission.

The poet also admitted to W.H.D Rouse that his linguistic knowledge was insufficient to compose a satisfying translation of the *Odyssey*: ‘too god damn iggurunt [sic] of Greek’.<sup>60</sup> The poet’s linguistic lacunae may have also constituted another obstacle, preventing Pound from attempting to translate the Aeolic dialect of the Sapphic odes. Yet Sappho, as poetic mask and intertextual presence, recurrently appears in his work until the 1920s. The Greek poet is often paired with Catullus, whom he considered her equal and at times her superior. In his *ABC of Reading* he affirms:

I know of no better ode than the POIKILOTHRON. So far as I know, Catullus is the only man who has ever mastered the lady’s metre.

For the sake of the student’s mental clarity, and for the maintenance of order in his ideas, he will, I think, find it always advantageous to read the oldest poem of a given kind that he can get hold of.

[...]

I took my critical life in my hand, some years ago, when I suggested that Catullus was in some ways a better writer than Sappho, not for melopoeia, but for economy of words, I don’t in the least know whether this is true. One should start with an open mind. (pp. 47-48)

The first and most calling reason for Pound to confront the poetry of Sappho and Catullus is their archetypal identity; the second is their status as yet unsurpassed authors in their own domain: the lyric.<sup>61</sup> Catullus is hailed as the first and only poet

<sup>60</sup> ‘Letter to W.H.D. Rouse, Rapallo, 23 May’, in *Letters*, pp. 274-5 (p. 274).

<sup>61</sup> *ABCR*, p. 48.

ever capable of translating Sappho successfully and the only one to have written satisfactory Sapphic stanzas in Latin. Sappho and Catullus embody two key moments in the history of poetry, foundational to later evolutions and still asserting their presence in contemporary poetry. For Pound, engaging with them means taking on a re-definition of lyric poetry itself.

Pound confessed his inability to translate Catullus:

The grand bogies for young men who want really to learn strophe writing are Catullus and Villon. I personally have been reduced to setting them to music as I cannot translate them. (*ABCR*, p. 105)

This is only a partial truth. As mentioned above, Pound never translated the Catullan *libellus* in full, but he did translate some of the carmina. Kenner in ‘The Muse in Tatters’, Davidson in ‘Pound and Catullus’ and Thomas in ‘Catullus as Lyric Mask’ list the most relevant excerpts of translations and allusions to Sappho and Catullus found in Pound’s oeuvre. These overviews provide the starting point for further reflections. While the appropriations of Sappho and Catullus shape his idea of the lyric and author, Pound’s choice to focus on specific fragments from each of the two poets derives from his wider theories on tradition and mythical conception of reality.<sup>62</sup> Sappho and Catullus stand out not only as archetypal lyric masks, but are also elements of the mythical cluster in Pound’s poetry dealing with Eros / desire as vital force.

In the poet’s perspective this almost divine form of eroticism represents the fuelling force of creation, which finds expression in art as well as in myth and its ritual manifestations. For instance, Pound references the syncretic character of the Eleusinian cults in honour of Demeter and Persephone, explaining the alternation of the seasons. His work mentions the archaic cults alongside the May Day Festivities as

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas, pp. 21-37; on Pound’s mythical method, Dekker, *passim*.

described in the *Pervigilium Veneris* or the Mariolatry rituals of contemporary Italian Catholicism. The myths and rituals of folkloric culture are for Pound the meeting point of the divine force of Eros at different times and through different individuals.<sup>63</sup>

Pound also explores the lyric's connections with myth and ritual in different cultures and different contexts. His syncretism was explicated in his series of essays 'I Gather The Limbs of Osiris'. Already in this 1911 essay he had drawn a parallelism between the poetry of Arnaut, the Greek lyric of Sappho and the Latin lyric of Catullus. The miscellaneous collection of essays and translations *Guide to Kulchur* also shows Pound's syncretic approach.<sup>64</sup>

Both his short poetry and the *Cantos* display this syncretism. For example, in the last stanza of 'A Virginal', a poem on the purity of love, the act of defloration itself is put in relation to the passing of seasons and the coming of spring:

No, No! Go from me. I have still the flavour,  
Soft as spring wind that's come from birchen bowers.  
Green come the shoots, aye April in the branches,  
As winter's wound with her sleight hand she staunches.  
(ll. 9-12)

The male voice exhorts other people to keep at a distance, reserving his attention for the memory of his beloved. Moreover, the title 'A Virginal' presents these lines as a hymenaic poem, bearing musical connotations.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in 'Coitus', the ritual elements of the May Day festivities celebrated in the *Pervigilium Veneris* are poetically staged through a sexually-charged vocabulary:

The gilded phaloi of the crocuses  
are thrusting at the spring air.  
Here is there naught of dead gods  
But a procession of festival,  
A procession, O Giulio Romano,

<sup>63</sup> Dekker, p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> He also translated Chinese and Egyptian love poetry in *Cathay* (1915) and *Love Poems of Ancient Egypt*, trans. by Ezra Pound and Noel Stock (New York: New Directions, 1962). Cfr. Donald Gallup, *Ezra Pound: a Bibliography* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1983), pp. 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> A 'virginal' is also a 17th-century musical instrument. Cfr. *OED*: 'virginal'.

Fit for your spirit to dwell in.  
(ll. 1-6)

Witemeyer outlined the relationship between aube, dawn, ecstasy and rebirth in Pound's short poetry.<sup>66</sup> In *The Spirit of Romance* Pound found these great themes in the medieval courtly love tradition. He is in fact keen to form a link between the ancient Greek and Latin traditions and medieval lyric. Fisher argues that the close relationship between Pound's poetry and the Greek and Latin lyric of Sappho and Catullus, particularly the Latin poet's epithalamium 61, is to be traced back to the high value Pound conferred to the concept of sexual union. Pound's unpublished essay entitled 'Coition the sacrament' actually argues that 'the Christian sacrament of the marriage bond, in Pound's view, masked the true mystery and sacrament which was coition itself', establishing a continuity with the highly erotic ritual representations of ancient Greek and Latin wedding songs, pagan cults, Christian religion and eroticism.<sup>67</sup>

These interwoven themes inform Pound's appropriations of Sappho and Catullus. More specifically, these recurrent topical elements can be grouped within the larger themes of the alternation of light and darkness, day's death and rebirth, the cycle of the seasons, erotic desire, wedding rituals and defloration. The same topical elements have emerged from the analysis of Pascoli's translations and poetic appropriations of Sappho and Catullus in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Despite the fact that Pound never read Pascoli, who was writing some thirty years earlier and died in 1912, the two poet's appropriations develop from a similar theoretical approach. Metaphors of defloration, a focus on hymenaic poetry and folklore, the solar myth of Sappho and

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<sup>66</sup> Witemeyer, pp. 56-57.

<sup>67</sup> Fisher, p. 5.



Speaking of the trope of dawn in Pound's poetry, Sieburth remarks that 'the focus [...] fall[s] on those moments of inception or transition (night into day, Latin into Provençal, Ancient into Modern) when things can be seen (or heard) to arise for the first time'.<sup>70</sup> The aubade becomes the meeting place of different lyric traditions: the archaic Greek, the Japanese and the Medieval French.

The two-sided interest in ancient lyric as archetype and symbol of cultural transition exemplifying the shared creative heritage of humanity across the centuries brought the poet, in the second stage of his writing career, to engage exclusively with Sapphic and Catullan hymenaic poetry. As mentioned above, in the later *Cantos*, Pound focuses on Catullus 31 and 61— the latter being an epithalamion characterised by its refraining invocation to Hymen, the god of marriage and virginity: 'o Hymenae Hymen | o Hymen Hymenae' (ll. 4-5) and later in the carmen: 'io Hymen Hymenae io, | io Hymen Hymenae' (ll. 116-117).<sup>71</sup> For Pound, in fact, the ancient epithalamia represent *loci* where representations of desire, the divine and ritual meet.

Terrell remarks, in his notes to canto 5, that 'Pound repeatedly associates the poetic techniques of Sappho and Catullus so that their names often crop up together'.<sup>72</sup> Yet, while Sappho and Catullus may stand together as representatives of lyric poetry in the *Cantos*, in Pound's short-poetry collections and in the 1930s opera *Colliis O Heliconii*, the Sapphic and Catullan masks are much more distinct. The relationship between the Sapphic and the Catullan masks evolves in three phases, which I discuss in the following subsections.

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<sup>70</sup> Sieburth, 'Introduction', p. vii.

<sup>71</sup> The two refrains are repeated throughout the carmen. Mynors, pp. 40-50.

<sup>72</sup> Terrell, p. 18.

## 2.2 The First Phase: Angels and Drabs

Pound's two self-standing translations from Sappho, which were inspired by the discovery of papyri material and published by Edmonds in *The Classical Review* between June and August 1909, read:

‘Papyrus’

Spring...  
Too long...  
Gongula...

‘Ἰμέρω’

The soul  
Grown delicate with satieties,  
Atthis.

O Atthis,  
I long for thy lips.  
I long for thy narrow breasts,  
Thou restless, ungathered.

The first one is a translation of lines 2-4 of the fragment now numbered 95 Voigt:

του  
ἦρ' ἄ  
δῆρα το  
Γονγγύλα τ<sup>73</sup>

while the second is a translation of ll. 16-18 of the fragment now numbered 96 Voigt:

πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ' ἀγόνας ἐπι-  
μνάσθεις' Ἄτθιδος, ἰμέρω  
λέπταν φοι φρένα κῆρ ἄσαι βόρεται.

Pound came to these fragments through Aldington's translations of fr. 96 Voigt. The second Poundian version owes several debts to the linguistic choices of the Imagist poet, in particular his use of ‘satieties’, recalling Aldington's ‘I yearn to behold thy delicate soul | To satiate my desire’, translation of: ‘ἰμέρω | λέπταν οι φρένα κῆρ ἄσαι

<sup>73</sup> Edmonds, ‘More fragments of Sappho’, p. 156.

βόρεται'.<sup>74</sup> Pound adds a coda to the poem which has no relation to the Greek text: 'thou restless, ungathered', increasing the sense of distance and unreachability of the beloved Atthis.

'Papyrus' is completely Pound's initiative. His translation follows Edmond's edition only formally. The text is so corrupted that it is impossible to reconstruct the Greek words with any certainty; Pound could therefore stretch the Greek language to fit his own agenda. He appears to read the Greek phonically. The scanty words of the source text are translated by means of phonic associations with homophonic ones. So, ignoring the first του, ἦρ', the truncated form of the aorist of αἶρω is translated as the contracted form of ἔαρ, 'spring' (ἦρ). Similarly he makes δῆρα derive from δηρός, 'too long'.<sup>75</sup> The English of the translation conveys the syllabic increase in the three Greek lines, which present two syllables in l. 2, three in l. 3 and three and a half (if the τ is counted) in l. 4. The progression from the one-syllable 'Spring', to the two-syllable phrase 'too long' and the three syllable name Gongula matches the Greek structure.

The two poems fit into Pound's interest in Eros as a vital force within the seasonal cycle of natural rebirth in springtime. 'Papyrus', with its three-line appropriation, plays on the concept of lack. By means of verbal and formal allusion, Pound's translation exploits the notion of desire as force propelled by absence, in this particular case the absence of Gongula, the girl addressee of the poem. The corrupted text's lacunae, which are deliberately reproduced in the poem with ellipses, represent a material lack. The title 'Papyrus' meta-poetically draws attention to the poem as a document. The mythical emotional paradigm embodied in the Sapphic fragment is

<sup>74</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 55-58.

<sup>75</sup> On this derivation, Hugh Kenner, 'The Muse in Tatters', *Arion*, 7.2 (1968), 212-233 (p. 212).

thus rooted in historical facts, foregrounding its relevance to the present and justifying its translation.

The elliptical language increases the elusiveness of the poem, as in a form of courtship. The mask of the Poundian poem addresses Gongula and seems to state that spring, separating the *persona loquens* from the girl, is too long to be endured. Simultaneously, the mention of spring draws the poem into a discourse with the pagan ritual of mating in spring. The use of ‘too long’ as a temporal expression also contributes to create the overall suggestive tone of the poem, given that ‘too long’ is homophonic to the equivalent English verb of longing and desire. The verb ‘to long’ is employed in ‘Ἰμέρω’, which more overtly gives a glimpse of the paradigm of Eros as lack, this time developed around the character of Atthis. The title of the poem is a direct quotation from Sappho 96 (l. 17), whose translation is anaphorically repeated in the body of the poem: ‘I long for thy lips | I long for thy narrow breasts’.

On the one hand, the two fragments visually and materially represent the disrupted papyri and exploit it as signifier. On the other hand, the elegiac tone of the poems, whose speaking voices pine first for the absence of the lost Atthis and then for Gongula, concentrates the sense of loss into the idealised and absent lyric addressee, just as in the Greek fragments.<sup>76</sup> This is not ‘ontological’ absence, which underpins the hermetic poetry of Quasimodo. Noticeably, Quasimodo translated the same excerpt from fr. 96 Voigt as:

Solitaria vagando, esita  
 A volte se pensa ad Attide:  
 Di desiderio l’anima trasale  
 Il cuore è aspro.  
 (‘Ad Attide, ricordando l’amica lontana’, ll. 15-18)

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<sup>76</sup> On Pound’s poetics of loss, Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 56.

Attis (Attide) is not directly invoked by the *persona loquens* as in Pound's fragment ('O Atthis'); turned into an abstract entity, she can only be remembered in a distant past. Attis is an event that provided the occasion of the poem. The sense of solitude and loneliness in Quasimodo's poem is heightened by the adjective 'solitaria' at the beginning of the line, which is one of Quasimodo's additions to the Greek original, contributing to the hermetic operation toward the asbolutisation of the lyric form.<sup>77</sup>

Kenner exemplarily shows that 'Papyrus' and 'Ἰμέρω' are part of a Sapphic cluster made of five poems positioned in the middle of *Lustra*. 'Papyrus' opens the sequence, followed by 'Ione, Dead the Long Year', 'Ἰμέρω', 'Shop Girl' and 'To Formianus'.<sup>78</sup> This Sapphic presence in the collection is to be read against the Catullan appropriations: the two masks are constructed by reciprocal opposition. In the following section I show how the relationship between Sappho and Catullus is built on the masks' distinctive traits and the dialectical tension occurring between them. This represents the first moment of the Sappho / Catullus polarity.

*Lustra* is inherently a Catullan collection. The debt to the Latin poet is acknowledged by Pound from the beginning; the epigraph to this collection runs: 'Vail del Lencour | Cui dono lepidum novum libellum'. Vail del Lencour is the pseudonym of Brigit Patmore (1882-1905), English writer and literary hostess. The Latin sentence is a direct quotation from the first line of the opening carmen of Catullus' *liber*, in itself a dedicatory poem and a statement of poetics addressed to Cornelius: 'Cui dono lepidum novum libellum | arido modo pumice expoliturum? |

<sup>77</sup> Pound employed Edmond's edition of the fragment, Quasimodo employed Diehl's. The variants between the two editions are substantive but do not alter the overall meaning of the fragment: 'πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ' ἀγάνας ἐπι- | μνάσθεισ' Ἄτθιδος ἰμέρωι | λέπταν ποι φρένα, κῆρ δ' ἄσα βόρηται' (Diehl).

<sup>78</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 62-63.

Corneli, tibi' (ll. 1-3).<sup>79</sup> The intermingling of the English and Latin realms is made into a prologue in typical Poundian fashion.

Once the two Sapphic translations are read within the context of *Lustra*, the relationship between them and the Catullan persona forms in oppositional terms. Kenner notes: 'From a scrap of parchment with Gongula's name on it, the sequence has traced modes of passion declining to this. For coda it paraphrases Catullus' estimate of a comparable decline. [...] Pound has fitted Sappho, as he fits everything that interests him, into an historical process, complicating the ancient tradition of poetic *aemulatio* with his own concern for cultural gradations'.<sup>80</sup> Pound portrays Catullus in these terms. The catullan mask appropriates the idealised women of the Sapphic fragments into new portraits that are more consonant with Catullus' own reality. This development leads to the disillusioned view of 'Formianus', the last of the five poems.

The Sapphic cluster identified by Kenner is a meta-poetic re-enactment of Pound's view of tradition and literature as the repetition of archetypal patterns through literary metamorphoses. In this cluster Pound engages with the different literary representations of the paradigm of the woman as object of desire. First he develops the idealised Sapphic mask in 'Papyrus' and 'Ἰμέρω', then he shifts the attention on the images of Ione and finally in 'Shop Girl' he lists a series of literary representations of women:

For a moment she rested against me  
Like a swallow half blown to the wall,  
And they talk of Swinburne's women,  
And the shepherdess meeting with Guido  
And the harlots of Baudelaire.

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<sup>79</sup> 'To whom am I to present my pretty new book, freshly smoothed off with dry pumice-stone? To you, Cornelius', in *Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris*, trans. by J.W. Mackail, F.W. Cornish J.P. Postgate (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 3. cfr. Sieburth, 'Notes', p. 1277.

<sup>80</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 63-64.

The description of the moment the *persona loquens* of the poem met with the shop girl emerges from one of the poet's memories. The image of the Sapphic girl ('she rested against me') is transposed into a 'real life' experience. She is contrasted with a series of literary representations of women, which are dismissed as inferior, including Guido Cavalcanti's shepherdess in Ballata IX, Baudelaire's depictions of harlots, and also the ideal of Swinburne's Sapphic aestheticism.<sup>81</sup>

The Sapphic cycle ends with yet another representation of a woman in 'To Formianus' Young Lady Friend', the bitter and sarcastic translation of Catullus 43 which concludes with a direct address to the woman in question:

You are the friend of Formianus, the vendor of cosmetics,  
And they call you beautiful in the province,  
And you are even compared to Lesbia.

O most unfortunate age!  
(ll. 7-10)

The progression from the idealised woman of the Sapphic mask to debased love is evident and heightened by the use of irony.

Within the poetic of loss typical of Pound's Sapphic fragments, women are idealised as the lyric absent addressee. They are the source of poetic inspiration, functioning like the women-angels of medieval lyric. Conversely, in the Catullan appropriations women are accessible, and at times even debased people; the characters are inserted in real-life situations, towards the more concrete Imagist stance in which the natural symbol and the object are the best poetic source.<sup>82</sup> The idealised woman is lowered to the contingent, and in virtue of this 'fall', she is also liable to ridicule and typically portrayed as a mischievous prostitute. In both representations,

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<sup>81</sup> On the reference to Cavalcanti, see Sieburth, 'Notes', p. 1281; on 'Shop girl', see Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho Companion*, pp. 311-315.

<sup>82</sup> 'I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object' ('Prologomena', p. 73).

Pound portrays a typified image of ‘woman’. Women are more often depicted as poetic occasions than round characters.

The idealisation of purity does not emerge from the Catullan mask or the characters of the Catullan appropriations (such as Lesbia and Aurunculeia), but rather from the Greek and Troubadouric framework. As Kenner points out: ‘the flowers and the absence are from Sappho’<sup>83</sup> and with them comes the idealization of the object of desire and the medieval representations of the woman-angel. This is the practical enactment of the theories put forward in the *Spirit of Romance* linking the Greek and Troubadouric experience of beauty and poetry by way of Eros’ vital spirit.

In *Lustra* we find Sapphic overtones in ‘Near Perigord’. The poem was written in 1915, at the same time as the three Ur-cantos, and is centred on a textual problem afflicting one of Bertrand de Born’s poems, featuring also in *The Spirit of Romance*.<sup>84</sup> Significantly Pound worked on Sappho between 1913 and 1916, coinciding with the workshop of ‘Near Perigord’, whose subject matter is chiefly Medieval.

The third section of the poem begins:

*Ed eran due in uno, ed uno in due*  
Inferno, XXVIII, 125

‘Bewildering spring, and by the Auvezere  
Poppies and day’s-eyes in the green émail  
Rose over us; and we knew all that stream,  
[...]

And great wings beat above us in the twilight,  
And the great wheels in heaven  
Bore us together ... surging ... and apart ...  
Believing we should meet with lips and hands.

High, high and sure ... and then the counter-thrust:  
“Why do you love me? Will you always love me?  
But I am like the grass, I can not love you.”  
[...]

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<sup>83</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> Sieburth, ‘Notes’, pp. 1282; 1284.

There shut up in his castle, Tairiran's,  
 She who had nor ears nor tongue save in her hands,  
 Gone—ah, gone—untouched, unreachable!  
 She who could never live save through one person,  
 She who could never speak save to one person,  
 And all the rest of her a shifting change,  
 A broken bundle of mirrors...!’  
 (III, pp. 307-308)

While the Sapphic references are not overt, this poem brings together elements of Sappho 1 and 31 with the Provençal theme of love and womanhood. The speech is reported within quotation marks, therefore a second narrative voice should be assumed. The theme of love is developed by the usual Poundian signals, which originates in Sappho's and Catullus' poetry: spring (l. 1), poppies (l. 2), the twilight at dusk (l. 7). Edmond's edition of fr. 96 by Sappho contains all these images, the red Sapphic roses and Sapphic flowers ('βρόδα κάπαλ' ἄν- | θρυσκευα καὶ μελλιωτος ἀνθεμώδης'), the rosy-fingered moon of Homeric descent ('βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα', 'πολύανθεμοις ἀρούραις'),<sup>85</sup> while the birds' beating wings of Pound's poem remind one of the whirring wings of the sparrows (the birds sacred to Aphrodite) in fr. 1 by Sappho ('πύκνα δινεῦντες').<sup>86</sup>

Catullus 61 may constitute the primary source of the Sapphic references to spring and poppies; the Latin carmen itself is in fact a literary appropriation of Sapphic floral images. The unpublished translation of Catullus 61 has been tentatively dated by Fisher at around 1917, proving slightly later than the composition of 'Near Perigord', but as the Ur-cantos show Pound was already quoting heavily from Catullus' at the time, and a reference to Catullus 61 in a 1916 letter to Iris Barry demonstrates Pound's earlier interest in the carmen. The manuscript translation of Catullus 61 transcribed by Fisher runs: 'her flowery mouth ablaze | as a scarlet poppy

<sup>85</sup> Cfr. fr. 105b Voigt ('πόρφορον ἄνθος') and 55 Voigt ('βρόδον | τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας').

<sup>86</sup> Sparrows are birds sacred to Aphrodite. Denys L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: an Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), p.18.

on marble | cut white from Parthenios’ (ll. 193-195). The floral reference to ‘poppies’ within a context of love is present both in the Catullan translation and in ‘Near Perigord’.<sup>87</sup>

The ellipses in ‘Near Perigord’ suggest lacunae similar to the papyri whose transcriptions Pound may have found in the Edmonds edition of the recently found Sapphic fragments. At the time the poet was consulting also Wharton’s volume of translations from Sappho.<sup>88</sup> In the third edition of the anthology published in 1895 a few extra pages with the transcription of some of the newly found Sapphic fragments from the Favum Papyrus are appended.<sup>89</sup>

A line of continuity between ‘Near Perigord’ and Sapphic imagery is established by other expressions, which, in the courtship setting, could be traced back to fr. 31, the famous ode translated also by Catullus in carmen 51: ‘green’ and ‘But I am like the grass, I can not love you’, recall the Sapphic expression ‘χλωροτέρα δὲ ποιας | ἔμμι’ (ll. 14-15). Sappho speaks of ‘a broken tongue’ and ‘drumming ears’ in the previous stanza: ‘ἀλλὰ καμὲν γλῶσσο ἔαγε, [...] ἐπιβρό- | μεισι δ’ ἄκουαι’. A reference to tongue appears in the line ‘She who had nor ears nor tongue save in her hands’. The idealization of love happens through the Sapphic imagery, yet the poem acquires Catullan overtones in its ironic unfolding: ‘For every lady a castle, | Each place strong’ (ll. 13-14). These lines set the scene for the last stanzas on love. In the opening line of section II, the meta-textual setting of the recounted love stories strengthens the ironic effect: ‘End Fact. Try Fiction’. Finally, the quotation marks

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<sup>87</sup> Fisher, p. 109. Fisher transcribed a more polished version of these lines from an autograph (cfr. Appendix 7): ‘Spread doors. She comes, | See how her poppy mouth | Gleams as on marble, white.’ (Fisher, p. 111).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Letter to Iris Barry, London, [?]20] July’, in *Letters*, pp. 86-88 (p.87). Margaret Reynolds, ‘Modernist Sappho’, in *The Sappho Companion*, pp. 309-314. On Pound and Wharton: Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 56; 71.

<sup>89</sup> Wharton, pp. 181-186.

framing the last section of the poem emphasise the second-handedness of the poem, which is presented as a reported speech.

Several critics have pointed out the Roman epigrammatic tone of many of the poems in *Lustra*, typical of the Catullan ironic discourse. Witemeyer traces this satirical mode to the earlier experiments in *Ripostes*.<sup>90</sup> Thomas opens his discussion of the Catullan mask arguing that:

Valuing his lyric and satiric intensity, Pound claimed Catullus as his first love among the Roman poets. His Catullan translations isolate Lesbia as an image either of divine love or of base desire; in this dual role she represents Pound's personal ambivalence about his own poetic program to resuscitate the past.<sup>91</sup>

This interpretation gives the figure of Lesbia in Pound's work too much prominence. The Catullan voice in his poetry never quite portrays Lesbia as the ultimate end of divine love. In its rare instances, idealization is either counterbalanced by a sudden shift in perspective, bringing ideal purity down to real baseness, or features in a dialogue with the Sapphic portrayal of love and desire. It is true that 'as Pound saw Homer behind Virgil, so he saw Sappho behind Catullus, though to Sappho's disadvantage'.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, the later re-appropriations of Swinburne, Landor, Symonds and Aldington colour the Sapphic portrayal of desire in Pound's poetry.<sup>93</sup> The 'Divine' love identified by Thomas in the early Catullan mask and in reference to Lesbia is actually Sapphic in character.

Thomas affirms that the highest moment of divine and idealised womanhood is found in Catullus 51. This is the translation from Sappho 31, which Pound himself singled out for its effective 'economy of words'. The poet was certain that Catullus should never be translated as an emphatic love poet: 'The most hard-edged and intense of the Latin poets should not be cluttered with wedding-cake cupids and

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<sup>90</sup> Witemeyer, p. 63

<sup>91</sup> Thomas, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> Wharton's anthology gathers several appropriations by these authors.

clichés.’<sup>94</sup> Pound’s interest in the translation by Catullus is justified when carmen 51 is conceived as an alternative representation of the emotional paradigm first put forward in Sappho 31. Even in Catullus’ carmen the idealization of Lesbia seems to bear ironic features: ‘it would be ingenuous not to read a note of irony into this very literary, very exaggerated description of passionate feeling.’<sup>95</sup> Lesbia represents one of the several Catullan characters populating Pound’s poems. She is not given any more prominence than other women in *Lustra*, or in the *Cantos*. In fact, in the second version of Ur-canto II, modified for *Lustra*, any reference to Lesbia is excised.

*Lustra* is practically a mirror image of the Catullan *liber* in terms of variety of speaking voices, poetic forms and tone. The Catullan mixture of lyricism and satire that pervades the book is exemplified in ‘Ladies’, a four-part poem preceding the Sapphic cluster. The poem, which includes the epigrams ‘Agathas’, ‘Young Lady’, ‘Lesbia Illa’ and ‘Passing’, is a Catullan collage. While only ‘Lesbia Illa’ contains direct references to Catullus’ carmina, namely 58 and 3, the whole poem is built around the rhetorical and structural devices typical of the most poignant Catullan invectives, of which carmen 58 is an example.

‘Ladies’ exploits ironic reversal, using the same appositive language of Catullus’ 58, especially the adverb ‘nunc’ which the Latin poet employs to contrast two opposite situations. The word ‘now’ is used in the first three epigrams as an appositive adverb. In Latin the word ‘nunc’ (*Lewis and Short*: ‘now, at present, at this time, contrasted with past time’) is used as a structural element to contrast the first part of the poem with the last two lines. It provides a temporal framework to the epigram, whose discourse is focalised on the speaker’s perspective. Pound employs the same device. In ‘Agathas’: ‘Four and forty lovers had Agathas in the old days |

<sup>94</sup> ‘Letter To Harriet Monroe, Coleman’s Hatch, [February] (1916)’, in *Letters*, pp. 69-70 (p. 69).

<sup>95</sup> Kenneth Quinn, *Latin Explorations: Critical Studies in Roman Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 57.

[...] And now she turns to me seeking love'. From 'Your Lady': '[...] And now you grumble [...] | And because I happen to say so'. And 'Lesbia Illa':

Memnon, Memnon that lady  
 Who used to walk about amongst us  
 Is now wedded  
 To a British householder.  
*Lugete, Venere! Lugete, Cupidinesque!*

As C.J. Fordyce notes in the Latin 'magnanimi Remi nepotes', the irony of the 'quasi-epic grandiose phrase [...] is enhanced by the contrast with the offensive verb: the heirs of Rome's greatness are the associates of Lesbia's degradation.'<sup>96</sup> Pound plays on this same theme by translating the reference to Roman society with: 'To a British householder'. Similarly, 'Lugete, Venere! Lugete, Cupidinesque!' is a variation of the original carmen 3: 'Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque!' The poem sardonically and emphatically mourns the loss of Lesbia's pet sparrow, disproportionately invoking the divinities for sympathy. The same deflating effect is used in Pound's poem and is increased by the reference to Carmen 3.

The fourth and last epigram, 'Passing', exploits Catullan rhetoric to increase the sardonic tone of the poem: 'the technique of presenting a situation and then crowning it with a dismissive final line thus revealing a system of false logic in the preceding lines' is an element of Catullan stylistics.<sup>97</sup> After a portrait of a woman passing by as 'Flawless as Aphrodite', in the last two lines the poem suddenly reverses: 'Faint, almost, as the lines of cruelty about your chin, | Assails me, and concerns me almost as little.' The 'lines' can refer to a profile's traits, but also to lines of a poem addressed to the woman herself. She is nevertheless called brainless and 'faint', bringing the poet to express his final disinterest in the bitter line of the coda.

<sup>96</sup> C.J. Fordyce, *Catullus: a Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), pp. 231-232.

<sup>97</sup> Davidson, p. 50.

The *persona loquens* of the four epigrams changes every time, conveying a bustling atmosphere in which voices overlap in various layers of communication. The voices contribute to create the overall conversational buzz characterising the collection as in the busy *fora*. With its sarcastic title ‘Ladies’, the banter of *Lustra* infiltrates this poem from the beginning, for the poem contains a series of invectives against women portrayed as prostitutes or ‘drabs’.

‘Ladies’ seems to take on the wider Catullan mask of *Lustra*. Its stylistic elements, tone and diction establish a connection with the quotidian dimension of Catullus’ *carmina*. Pound makes the Catullan public sphere contemporary. Emblematic of the method of luminous detail, the different interactions of the male voice with each of the ladies of these four epigrams can be read as a version of the same emotional pattern. A series of metamorphoses, which take place also in the Sapphic cluster that immediately follows, foretells the treatment of myth structuring the *Cantos*.<sup>98</sup> The monodic lyric voice is disseminated into the different personae of Pound’s translations which, when read in a sequence as a collected body of work, form a choral performance. The multifarious voices shining through various masks keep returning to speak about the same themes. This defining sense of return and repetition is achieved by the recurrent use of a handful of selected poems of the Sapphic and Catullan corpus, within *Lustra* and in Pound’s oeuvre overall.

For instance, both poems 58 and 3 are taken up again in Ur-canto II establishing an internal pattern to the collection. In the same poem, extracts of translations from Catullus 72, 80 and 31 are also exploited:

Society, her sparrow, Venus’ sparrows. [See **Catullus 3**  
 Catullus hung on the phrase (played with it as Mallarmé  
 Played for a fan: ‘Rêveuse pour que je plonge.’);  
 Wrote out his crib from Sappho:

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<sup>98</sup> On metamorphoses, Dekker, pp. 73-82.

God's peer, yea and the very gods are under him [See Catullus 51]  
 Facing thee, near thee; and my tongue is heavy,  
 And along my veins the fire; and the night is  
 Thrust down upon me.  
 That was one way of love, *flamma demanat*,  
 And in a year: 'I love her as a father,' [See Catullus 72]  
 And scarce a year, 'Your words are written in water,' [See Catullus 80]  
 And in ten moons: 'O Caelius, Lesbia illa,  
 Caelius, Lesbia, our Lesbia, that Lesbia  
 Whom Catullus once loved more  
 Than his own soul and all his friends,  
 Is now the drab of every lousy Roman'; [See Catullus 58]  
 So much for him who puts his trust in woman.  
 ('Three Cantos of a Poem of Some length', II, p. 323)

Pound opts to remove any direct reference to Lesbia from his translation of Catullus 51 ('God's peer [...] [...] upon me'), which in the first version of the poem published in *Poetry* (1917) still included the name of the beloved.<sup>99</sup> The passionate, idealised form of love explicated as fire flowing in the veins of the lover and pinpointed by Catullus' phrase '*flamma demanat*' is not an absolute in Pound's view: 'that was one way of love'. Once again the dynamic of erotic attraction and love is a descending progression from idealized emotions to matter of fact reality. Neither form of love is pronounced superior to the other.

Pound seems to be taking issue with absolute ideals by developing the trope of Eros and its mythical cluster further. The small Catullan cento ends with the *sententia* 'So much for him who puts his trust in woman'. The absence of the article before 'woman' creates a universalization of the concept of 'woman' itself, referring to a larger semantic context, but also to 'woman' as signifier, stressing the instability of language meaning. The delusion of love and language, and the consequent life disillusionment fuels the poetic drive.

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<sup>99</sup> On the revisions and variants of the poem, Sieburth, 'Notes', pp. 1284-1293.

A translation of Catullus 31 precedes this excerpt from Ur-canto II. The version is inserted within a discussion on lyric poetry, for which the ghosts ('ghosts move about me patched with histories') of Browning ('Sordello'), Arnaut and Dante are invoked in a Provençal environment. The Provençal landscape mixes with the *locus amoenus* of Sirmio and Lake Garda. Here the light of dawn, sung by Arnaut 'Le Soleils plovil', surges in the morning and gives life. In Ur-canto I and II the Catullan and Sapphic references are explicitly placed within the wider mythopoeic cluster of Eros and sexual drive as a vivifying source of artistic inspiration. The discussion on the lyric continues with a reference to the May rituals in spring and blooming flowers:

All that I know of one, Joios, Tolosan,  
 Is that in middle May, going along  
 [...]
 In 'level poplar lands,' he found a flower, and wept;  
 'Y a la primera flor,' he wrote,  
 'Qu'ieu trobei, tornei em plor.' (II, p. 322)

Arnaut's (Sapphic) flowers, his songs, are subsequently juxtaposed to the musical world of Dolmetsch, thus stressing the relationship between lyric metres, musical performances and poetry:

Out of the night comes troubling lute music,  
 And we cry out, asking the singer's name,  
 and get this answer:  
 [...]
 And my slashed skirts were drenched in the secret dyes,  
 Well dipped in crimson, and sprinkled with rare wines;  
 I was well taught my arts at Ga-ma-rio  
 And then one year I faded out and married.'  
 (II, p. 323)

Echoing the medieval motif of the knight recalling his beloved at the sight of blood drops in the snow, the topic of defloration is evoked by the image of the crimson skirt and the marriage. The hymenaic theme emerges from the translation of the Chinese 'Song of the Lute' ('And my slashed skirts [...] And then one year I faded out and married'), increasing the syncretism of these lines. Kenner remarks that *Cathay's*

poems are in the same elegiac tone as the Sapphic translations, with their poetics of loss; *Lustra*'s first edition contained a section reproducing the complete anthology of translations from Chinese poetry. Not only does the elegiac tone emerge from this passage, but the mythical cluster of Eros finds its first illustration in the overarching motifs of eroticism, marriage ritual, and hymenaic representations. The same tropes characterise Pascoli's 'Solon', whose Sapphic songs of love and death were also built on a pastiche of Sapphic fragments included within the larger narrative of the *poema conviviale*. The tension between lyric and elegy implicit in Pound's poem were explicit in Pascoli's poem, which recounted the legend of the king Solon who proclaimed the Lesbian poet's verse superior to his own elegies.

The second section of Ur-canto II (quoted above) opens in medias res with a reference to Catullus 3's sparrow, 'Society, her sparrow, Venus' sparrows', resonant of Aphrodite's sparrows in Sappho 1. Pound foregrounds the theme of erotic desire in relation to femininity and death. The sparrow of Catullus has traditionally been read as a sexual symbol;<sup>100</sup> the presence of Venus makes a direct reference to love and desire (her spheres of influence); at the same time, the word 'Society' positioned at the beginning of the line situates the poem and the entire collection within the public sphere. The satirical element of the lyrics of *Lustra* does in fact require a public environment to be successful in its intent. Here the poet is implying that the entourage of his female subject is a group of wooing sparrows, as the sparrow in Catullus 3 hops around his lady and lies in her lap:

nec sese a gremio illius mouebat,  
sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc  
ad solam dominam usque pipiabat.  
(ll. 8-10)

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<sup>100</sup> Richard W. Hooper, 'In Defense of Catullus' Dirty Sparrow', *G&R*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 32.2 (1985), 162-178.

The translation of Catullus 58 ensues in a much more linguistically accurate version than in ‘Lesbia Illa’, then followed by the excerpt of translation from Catullus 51 discussed above. The first three lines ‘[...] O Caelius, Lesbia Illa, | Caelius, Lesbia, our Lesbia, that Lesbia’ are more adherent to the Latin word order: ‘Caeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa, | Illa Lesbia,’ adding a second vocative of Caelius. In the second half of the poem, the translation of ‘nunc in quadriuiis et angiportis | glubit magnanimi Remi nepotes’ with ‘Is now the drab of every lousy Roman’ attaches a further linguistic layer to the Latin. Lesbia is qualified as a ‘drab’, a rare word of obscure etymology, connected with Gaelic and German, meaning a dirty and untidy woman, or a slut, but also a harlot or a prostitute.<sup>101</sup> Pound’s use of the Germanic linguistic group, imposed on the Latin one, adds foreign elements to the Roman context. The ‘British householder’ of ‘Ladies’ is removed, and thus the reference to the Latin world is preserved in the line ‘every lousy Roman’. Line 3 is completely excised.

In the Ur-cantos Pound had begun developing the poetics of the *Cantos*. The poetic masks of Sappho and Catullus form a pair and a specific lyric cluster, which is part of the wider mythical cluster of Eros as vital force, representing the second phase of the Sappho / Catullus polarity. Moreover, the dialectic between idealised and real forms of love is at the time of the Ur-cantos and *Lustra* already enriched by an initial second dialectic between private and public spheres, which Pound would develop further in the third phase of the Sappho / Catullus polarity.

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<sup>101</sup> *OED*, ‘Drab’.

### 2.3 The Second Phase: the two Masks of Eros

After *Lustra*, Pound would privilege epithalamia and hymenaic poetry. Alongside Sappho 95 and 96, the repetition of excerpts from fr. 105b Voigt, 109 Voigt and Catullus 61 and 62 exemplifies the emotional truths behind art and life, as in liturgy; these excerpts display brief epiphanies ('luminous details') of the erotic flow that, according to the poet, drives life and art, and is the fuel of the 'vital universe'. This signals the transition from Pound's early poetry to the mature poetics of the *Cantos* in which the mythical method finds its wider expression. The relationship between the Sapphic and Catullan masks thus shifts into a second phase.

Many of the myths recounted by Pound in the *Cantos* are interested in sexual taboos or representations of erotic desire in relation to light and creativity. Discussing this topic, Dekker notes that the image of creative light illustrated in canto 4 gives way to the image of human love.<sup>102</sup> As I discussed in Chapter 1 with regard to Pascoli, who also engages with this myth, the elements of creative light, erotic desire and love, representing the conflict between *eros* and *thanatos*, intersect in the solar version of the myth of Sappho and her passion for the shepherd Phaon. Sappho (mythical allegory of the light at dusk) dies following her beloved Phaon (mythical allegory of the sun) down the Rock of Leukas (mythical allegory of the line of the horizon). The solar and love motifs function also as mythical allegories of sexual climax, represented by the light of dusk following the sun behind the horizon and Sappho's jump down the Rock of Leukas.<sup>103</sup> The myth of Sappho and Phaon therefore depicts the alternation of day and night as the natural enactment of erotic desire—significantly, in several versions of the myth, Aphrodite, the goddess of desire and

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<sup>102</sup> Dekker, p. 58.

<sup>103</sup> Nagy, p. 175. On the trope of lovers meeting at dawn: *Eos: an Enquiry into the Theme of Lovers' Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry*, ed. by A.T. Hatto (London: Mouton, 1965)

love who is intimately connected with Sapphic poetry, also loves Phaon. Sappho's fragments suggest the poet's privileged relationship with Aphrodite and her cult, which is punctuated by Nagy in his interpretation of the myth of the Rock of Leukas.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike Pascoli, Pound does not reference the myth of Sappho and Phaon explicitly; yet the lexical choices in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1926) link the figure of Sappho to one of the main textual sources for the myth, namely, Ovid's *Heroides*. In a polemical passage in which *Mauberley* denounces the decay of contemporary poetry in London, Pound refers not only to the lost inspiration of Sappho's Pierian roses ('The sale of half-hose has | Long since superseded the cultivation | Of Pierian roses', XII, ll. 26-28), but also to 'Sappho's barbitos':

The tea-rose tea gown, etc.  
Supplants the mousseline of Cos,  
The pianola 'replace'  
Sappho's barbitos.  
(*Mauberley*, III, ll. 1-4)

The Latin word *barbitos* is found in the opening lines of Ovid's *Epistula* 15 (l. 8). In the few occurrences of the word in the rest of the Latin canon, *barbitos* is always employed in relation to Sappho or Lesbian poetry.<sup>105</sup> Ovid's fictional letter gives a powerful description of Sappho's carnal desire for Phaon. Sappho reminisces about her moments of passion with the shepherd, with whom she slept and who afterwards abandoned her. The *Epistula* also makes an explicit reference to the myth of Philomela and Itys—an unrequited love myth which parallels the myth of Sappho and Phaon. One of the Sapphic loci in canto 5 by Pound also exploits the Philomela and Itys myth, suggesting a further parallelism between Ovid and Pound. Moreover, in Greek mythology Phaon shares several features with Adonis, and is often identified

<sup>104</sup> Nagy, p. 148.

<sup>105</sup> *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and *Lewis and Short*, 'barbitos'.

with the god, who is regularly recalled in his different manifestations in Pound's poetry.<sup>106</sup>

In the Wharton anthology, which collected the Sapphic fragments available at the time, Pound would have had access to Ovid's 'Epistula XV' in the translation by Pope (1707), included in the last pages of the book.<sup>107</sup> Already in his early twenties the poet had signalled Ovid's *Heroides* as the first example of 'that particular sort of subjective personality analysis [...]'. He suggestively qualified his judgment drawing a link between Ovid's dramatic monologues and Robert Browning's: 'Browning is after 2000 years about the first person to do anything more with it. I follow—humbly of course – doing by far the best job of any of them? not quite.'<sup>108</sup> Pound thus shows a fondness for Ovid's monologues as the sites of the first analytical treatment of poetic subjectivity and literary staging. Receiving them through Browning's 19<sup>th</sup>-century appropriations of the form, Pound would exploit Ovid's dramatic monologues to develop his own poetic personae. In Ovid's Epistula Sappho has the same function as Pound's lyric masks. As is the case with Catullus, Pound reconstructs the Lesbian poet's archetypal status by reference to her work as the first manifestations of the lyric as poetic genre, but also to her legendary figure as original poetic mask, this time through another Latin filter: Ovid.

In cantos 4 and 5, the different functions of the Sapphic and Catullan polarity are fully exploited; and with the poetic voices of the characters which populate the ancient poets' lines, such as Lesbia (in Ur-canto II), Formianus, Aurunculeia and Atthis, they eventually form a choral performance. Even though the *Cantos* open with a translation of the *Odyssey*, in cantos 4 and 5 Pound discusses the birth of other

<sup>106</sup> See for instance the refrain of 'Tempora': 'Io! Io! Tamuz!', an invocation to the Babylonian god Tamuz, an equivalent of the Greek Adonis.

<sup>107</sup> Wharton, pp. 187-197.

<sup>108</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Letter to Viola Baxter, 12 October 1907', in 'Letters to Viola Baxter Jordan: Edited with Commentary by Donald Gallup', *Paideuma*, 1.1 (1972), 107-111 (p. 107).

genres beyond the epic. These two cantos describe the birth of the lyric of Pindar and Catullus among the cothurnoi of drama:

Palace in smoky light,  
 Troy but a heap of smouldering boundary stones,  
 ANAXIFORMINGES! Aurunculeia! **[See Catullus 61]**  
 Hear me. Cadmus of Golden Prows!  
 The silver mirrors catch the bright stones and flare,  
 Dawn, to our waking, drifts in the green cool light;  
 Dew-haze blurs, in the grass, pale ankles moving.  
 Beat, beat, whirr, thud, in the soft turf  
     under the apple trees,  
 Choros nympharum, goat-foot, with the pale foot alternate;  
 Crescent of blue-shot waters, green-gold in the shallows,  
 A black cock crows in sea-foam.  
 (Canto 4, p. 13)

The poet invokes the lyric of Pindar's Olympian Ode II (Anaxiforminges) and Catullus (Aurunculeia), but he seems to be favouring Catullus' hymenaic song 61, which contains several echoes of Sappho's epithalamia.<sup>109</sup> The lyric as genre is evoked by the invocation to Aurunculeia—one of the characters of Catullus' carmen, and through starkly Sapphic images, set against the cothurnoi of the dramatic performance: the green light, the grass (fr. 31 Voigt), the pale ankles moving nearby an altar (fr. 2 Voigt), the apple tree (fr. 2 and 105a Voigt), the whirring which recalls the beating wings of the Sapphic sparrows pulling Aphrodite's chariot (fr. 1 Voigt). These lines mirror Pound's earlier proclamation of Sappho 1, Catullus 61, and the elegies of Propertius as exemplary rhythmical achievements in the history of literature.<sup>110</sup>

Canto 4 holds similarities with Ur-cantos I-II, but most of the early translations are excised in the final version, so that we are left with an aesthetic reflection on the lyric in relation to Eros' mythical cluster: 'soleil plovil', flowers in 'white petals', torches and light and finally the reference to Catullus 61—the dearest

<sup>109</sup> Cfr. 'Letter to Iris Barry, London, August 1916'; on the Pindar reference, Kenner, p. 61; Terrell, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> 'Letter to Iris Barry, London, August 1916'.

carmen to the later Pound. Reference to Catullus' wedding song 61 are everywhere in Pound's work: it appears in his criticism ('Prologomena', *The Spirit of Romance* and *ABC of Reading*), in his letters ('To Iris Barry, London 1916'), in canto 2: 'voce tinula', in canto 4 'Aurunculeia' and 'saffron sandal ... ὕμηναι ὦ', in canto 20: 'voce carmina tinnula',<sup>111</sup> in canto 28: 'voce tinula'. Fisher argues that the rhythmical experiments of Pound's musical rendition of Catullus 61 strongly influence canto 45. Pound's fascination with this carmen appears to be similar to Pascoli's. The wedding song's juxtaposition of Greek hymenaic song form and the Italic verse of the *fescennina iocatio*, the Sapphic floral imagery mixed with Asian references, along with the direct address to the divinity Hymenaeus, who presides over erotic desire, are perfect samples of syncretic literature and Catullus' literary appropriation. It is also a locus of the manifestation of Eros' mythical cluster. Thomsen argues that the invocation to Hymen in the Latin poem should in fact be interpreted as 'the ritual of the bride's desire, directed not toward the bridegroom but toward hymenaeus'.<sup>112</sup> If Thomsen's alternative interpretation undermines the theory that Catullus 61 was an epithalamion in the strict sense of the word, it nevertheless maintains the carmen's literary expression of erotic desire, one of the topical elements of the mythical cluster of Eros in the *Cantos*.

Canto 4 is Pound's wider appropriation of the carmen:

Torches melt in the glare  
     set flame of the corner cook-stall,  
 Blue agate casing the sky (as the Gourdon that time)  
     the sputter of resin,  
 Saffron sandal so petals the narrow foot: ὕμην,  
 ὕμηναι ὦ, Aurunculeia! ὕμην, ὕμηναι ὦ, [See **Catullus 61**]  
 One scarlet flower is cast on the blanch-white stone. [See **Sappho 105 b**  
**Voigt**] (p. 15)

<sup>111</sup> Kenner analyses the Catullan presence in relation to Provençal poetry in canto 20, in *The Pound Era*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>112</sup> Ole Thomsen, *Ritual and Desire: Catullus 61 and 62, and Other Ancient Documents on Wedding and Marriage* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1992), p. 12.

Here the refrain invocation to Hymen is transliterated into Greek alphabet, connoting a Greek environ. The Greek alphabet is employed only from the second edition of the Cantos onwards. In a 1950 letter to James Laughling of the publishing house New Directions and friends of the poet, Pound explains that:

The other chance is in p / 15 yr / edtn / Canto IV. Takin the Catullus back to HarryStopHerKnees, whaar Cat / mebbe got it any.

Anyhow the greek shows the real way Cat/ wd / hv tookd it fer graunted the Epithalamium wd / be sung.<sup>113</sup>

The letter illuminates another intertextual element behind the invocation to Hymen: Aristophanes' ('HarryStopHerKnees') comedy *Pax*, which includes a choral epithalamion.<sup>114</sup>

The hymenaic quotation is accompanied by a reference to Sappho 105b Voigt evoked in 'one scarlet flower is cast on the blanch-white stone', included also in the epithalamia section of Wharton's anthology as fr. 94. The redness of the flower is suggestive of images of defloration:

Οἶαν τὰν ὑάκινθον ἐν οὔρεσι ποιμένες ἄνδρες  
πόσσι καταστείβοισι, γάμαι δέ τε πόρφυρον ἄνθος...

As on the hills the shepherds trample the hyacinth  
under foot and the purple flower [is pressed] to  
earth.  
(Wharton, p. 121)

Terrell points out that Pound's reference to the 'image of the virgin's loss of maidenhood on her wedding night is paralleled by the much used topos of Provençal and other medieval poetry of the knight being reminded of his beloved by blood drops in the snow'.<sup>115</sup> In the Wharton volume this fragment is accompanied by its later re-appropriations in Catullus 11, Virgil, as well as by a collage of Sapphic fragments

<sup>113</sup> 'Letter from EP to JL, n.d. St. Elizabeth's Hospital', in *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin: Selected Letters*, ed. by David M. Gordon (New York: Norton, 1994), pp. 206-207 (p. 206).

<sup>114</sup> *Ezra Pound and James Laughlin*, p. 207.

<sup>115</sup> Terrell, p. 14.

entitled 'One Girl' by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which was subsequently renamed 'Beauty: A Combination from Sappho'.<sup>116</sup> Pound himself had entitled one of the poems in *Ripostes* 'A Girl'. The references to hymenaic poetry in the Sappho / Catullus cluster of the *Cantos* thus enact the connection between archaic, medieval and modern lyric, which Pound first expounded in *The Spirit of Romance*.

Canto 5 expands the same cento of canto 4 and brings back Catullus 61 among a much stronger Sapphic presence:

The fire? always, and the vision always,  
 Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting  
 And fading at will. Weaving with points of gold,  
 Gold-yellow, saffron... The roman show, Aurunculeia's [See Catullus 61]  
 And come shuffling feet, and cries 'Da nuces!  
 'Nuces' praise, and Hymenaeus 'brings the girl to her man'  
 Or 'here Sextus had seen her'.  
 Titter of sound about me, always.  
     and from 'Hesperus...' [See Catullus 62]  
 Hush of the older song: 'Fades light from sea-crest,  
 'And in Lydia walks with pair'd women  
 'Peerless among the pairs, that once in Sardis  
 'In satieties...  
     Fades the light from the sea, and many things  
 Are set abroad and brought to mind of thee,' [See Sappho 95 Voigt]  
 And the vinestocks lie untended, new leaves come to the shoots,  
 North wind nips on the bough, and seas in heart  
 Toss up chill crests,  
     And the vine stocks lie untended  
 So many things are set abroad and brought to mind  
 Of thee, Atthis, unfruitful. [See Sappho 96 Voigt]  
 (pp. 17-18)

As Kenner remarks: 'a Roman wedding party emerged, Aurunculeia's the one celebrated by Catullus (Carmen 61). [...] From this marriage we are carried to Sapphic love via two other poems, Catullus' other epithalamion (Carmen 62) which begins 'Vesper adest' and proceeds under the sign of that star, and the distych of Sappho's that begins 'Hespere panta pherōn' and has left its impress on work of

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<sup>116</sup> Wharton, pp. 121-122.

Byron's, Tennyson's, Eliot's'.<sup>117</sup> The wedding ritual, coinciding with the poetic ritual, is repeated and Pound's poem almost assumes a performative function. References to the same Sapphic fragments translated in *Lustra* are woven in this cento of excerpts from Catullus 61, 62 and Sappho 95 and 96 Voigt.<sup>118</sup> Kenner notes that in his Sapphic translation of the Hesper fragment Pound refrains from translating the main Homeric simile of the fragment: '[He] denied himself even the splendid word *brododaktylos*, apparently because it bespoke Homer too insistently to be usable. Catullus and Sappho were his terms of reference, and later privations and troubadours, but nothing epic'.<sup>119</sup> Pound's reflection on the lyric thus indirectly emerges from its appropriations.

Pound's interest in Catullus 61 and 62 for their ritual invocation to the deity Hymenaeus is already found *in nuce* in a poem, which survives only in draft form. The manuscript (I included Fisher's transcription of the MS in Appendix 7) is a polished version of the 1917 draft translation of Catullus 61, interwoven with excerpts from Catullus 62.<sup>120</sup> It includes exactly the same passages of the two carmina forming the intertext of Canto 5: references Aurunculeia, the saffron sandal (carmen 61, ll. 9-16; 82-83), Hesper (carmen 62, l. 20; 26; 32; 35); and the invocation to Hymeneus, thus confirming Pound's recurrent engagement over time with ritualised forms celebrating eroticism and its syncretic manifestation in Catullus carmen.

After canto 4 and 5 there are no considerable direct references to the poetry of Sappho and Catullus in the *Cantos* until the *Pisan Cantos*.<sup>121</sup> In the later stages of his poetic career, Pound would return to the themes that preoccupied him throughout the

<sup>117</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 64.

<sup>118</sup> On the Sapphic translations in canto 5, Kenner, *The Pound Era*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>119</sup> Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 65.

<sup>120</sup> The MS is part of the holdings of the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library and kept in YCAL 43, Box 138, Folder 6074, see Fisher, p. 111.

<sup>121</sup> See a passing reference to Catullus 61, in canto 28, p. 137: '*voce tinnula*'.

1920's. Mingling Latin and Greek references with the voices of the convicts, Canto 74 hints at carmen 58 (p. 439); a few lines down, snippets of Sapphic lyrics are inserted into a satirical and bitter passage in which Pound takes a stance on academia, writing, teaching and the essence of beauty and poetry:

He said I protested too much he wanted to start a press  
 and print the greek classics...periplum  
                   and the very *very* aged Snow created considerable  
 hilarity quoting the φαίνε-τ-τ-τ-ττ-αί μοι  
 in reply to l'*aer tremare*  
                   beauty is difficult  
 But on the other hand the President of Magdalen  
 (rhyming dawdlin') said there were  
 too many words in 'The Hound of Heaven'  
 [...]  
 it was if I remember rightly the burn and freeze that the freshmen  
 had failed to follow  
 or else a mere desire to titter etc.  
 and it is (in parenthesis) doubtless  
                   easier to teach them to roar like gorillas  
 than to scan φαίνεται μοι  
                   inferior gorillas  
 of course, lacking the wind sack.  
 (Canto 74, pp. 444-445)

Pound's ethical commitment to poetry, culture and the affirmation of art and beauty in society emerges, with melancholic overtones. He reflects on aesthetics, beauty and the impossibility of contemporary young writers to write musically, according to the rhythm and beats of the musical measure, echoing the polemics of *Mauberley*.

Advocating once again the Sapphic odes' metrical perfection he accuses his contemporaries of having lost the musical sense of poetic rhythm: 'lacking the wind sack'. The short quotations in altered Greek from Sappho 31 are employed again in canto 76; in the same canto Sappho is called to speak through a passing reference to fr. 1: 'ΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΘΡΟΝΑ, ΑΘΑΝΑΤΑ | that butterfly has gone out through my smoke hole | ΑΘΑΝΑΤΑ' (p. 462). Pound confronts the decaying poetic environment, ultimately challenging the official channels that fail to teach the ancient

metres and see through the screen of social status and pre-conceived roles ('inferior gorillas').

The musical quality of poetic language and rhythm according to Pound found its greatest achievements in ancient Greek and medieval lyric, which were also sung to musical instruments:

In the languages known to me (which do not include Persian and Arabic) the maximum MELOPOEIA is reached in Greek, with certain developments in Provençal which are not in Greek and which are of a different kind than Greek. (*ABCR*, pp. 42-43)

Canto 75, mainly consisting of a musical score, and canto 81, containing an opera libretto, draw attention to the foundational relationship in Pound's poetics between poetry and music, as shown by the early lyrics in 'Prologomena' and by his essays.<sup>122</sup>

In the *Cantos* as well as in Pound's short poetry, the different voices of the numerous lyric masks employed by the poet create a choral performance. Moreover, in the Sapphic and Catullan appropriations and through juxtaposition of several ancient fragments (both in the original language and in translation) the poet affects a staging of lyric subjectivity into a dialogic genre. In this sense, the highly individualistic character of ancient monodic lyric, which is typical of Pascoli's and Quasimodo's lyricism, is depersonalised and detached from the figure of the author as an individual in history. Any intimate, solipsistic trait, which may have characterised the Italian poet's translations and appropriations of Sappho and Catullus, are not present in Pound's poetry. In *Lustra*, his translations and the *Cantos*, the subjectivity defining the lyric mode becomes a performative act through meta-poetic staging of masks / personae. Pound counters the single lyric voice of Pascoli and Quasimodo with a fragmentary representation of his own voice into several dramatic personae

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<sup>122</sup> *Cantos*, pp. 450-451, pp. 519-522; for Pound's musical criticism: 'I Gather the Limbs of Osiris', pp. 35-38 and *Pound and Music: the Complete Criticism*, ed. by Murray Shafer (London: Faber, 1978).

thus creating a diversity and multiplicity in his appropriations of the monodic lyric of Sappho and Catullus, which the unitary poetics of Pascoli and Quasimodo do not allow.

Pound's meta-poetic staging of lyric subjectivity and the creation of a choral ensemble is taken a step forward through the interspersing of classical lyric fragments in the performative context of musical representations. Later in his career, having renounced translating Catullus, the poet would set the text of Sappho 1 and Catullus 61 in their original language into music, as *Collis O Heliconii*'s librettos. The embryonic appropriations in Pound's opera represent the third phase of the Sappho / Catullus polarity.

#### 2.4 The Third Phase: Private vs Public

I prize the Greek more for the movement of the words, rhythm, perhaps than for anything else. There is the POIKILOTHRON and then Catullus, 'Collis O Heliconii,' and some Propertius, that one could do worse than know by heart for the sake of knowing what rhythm really is. And there is the gulph between TIS O SAPPHO ADIKEI, and Pindar's big rhetorical drum TINA THEON, TIN'EROA, TINA D'ANDREA KELADESOMEN, which one should get carefully fixed in the mind. ('Letter to Iris Barry, London, August 1916')

In this early letter written in 1916, Pound, fond of categorisation, advises Iris Barry (the young poet who had sought advice from him) to study the rhythm of Sappho's fr. 1, Catullus' wedding song 61 and the elegies of Propertius. He also evidently emphasises the contrast between the concision of Sappho in fr. 1 to the long-winded choral chanting of Pindar, in Olympian Ode II (ll. 1-2). The juxtaposition between the two kinds of ancient lyric metre and language, exemplified in the letters and the *Cantos* by Sappho's and Pindar's poetry, is present also in *Collis O Heliconii*, yet the dialectic is developed around the private poetry of Sappho 1 and the public poetry of Catullus' 61.

*Collis O Heliconii*, the third and unfinished opera written by Pound between 1932 and 1934 after *The Testament* and *Cavalcanti*, was meant ‘to be the final composition of a trilogy on sacred, ideal and profane love.’<sup>123</sup> Ever concerned with reproducing the ancient rhythms of Greek and Latin poetry in a new and contemporary form, and frustrated by what he thought being the inaptness of English to convey the cadence of the ancient languages (particularly Greek),<sup>124</sup> with *Collis* Pound originally wanted to create a musical module that translated the Sapphic and Catullan metres into music.<sup>125</sup> But of course ‘Pound’s musical experiments were a byproduct of his studies in poetic versification’.<sup>126</sup>

For his second opera *Cavalcanti*, he had ‘used melodic and rhythmic cells as a modular system to build toward an extended and expansive melodic line’. Having decided to employ the Latin text of Catullus 61, which also provides the title line for the composition, and the Greek of Sappho 1, Pound was facing the challenge of respecting quantitative metre and caesuras, as well as the ‘pitch or stress accent against the recurring ictus of the metrical rhythm’.<sup>127</sup> After few months, finding it too complicated, Pound abandoned the project. Nevertheless, *Collis*, with *The Testament* and *Cavalcanti*, remains one of his most visionary works.<sup>128</sup>

The manuscript material for the opera include a libretto (with a scenario for Catullus’ poem), three instrumental works, and two arias—one entitled *Collis O Heliconii* for a bass singer, based on Catullus 61, and the second *Poikilothron*, for

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<sup>123</sup> Fisher, p. xvi.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Letter to Iris Barry, London, [20?] July 1916’, p. 87; ‘Notes on Elizabethan Classicists’, pp. 238-239 and Fisher, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Fisher, pp. viii; p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Taruskin, ‘Ezra Pound, Musical Crackpot’, *The New York Times*, 27 July 2003 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/27/arts/music-ezra-pound-musical-crackpot.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>> [Accessed 2 June 2013].

<sup>127</sup> Fisher, p. viii.

<sup>128</sup> Taruskin, ‘Ezra Pound, Musical Crackpot’.

mezzo-soprano, based on Sappho 1.<sup>129</sup> Despite the fact that Pound did not translate either Catullus' or Sappho's texts and that the musical experiments remain in their embryonic forms, Margaret Fisher, in her edition of the unpublished opera manuscripts kept at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, shows how *Collis* should be considered Pound's attempt at criticism by music and an attempt at rewriting the lyric tradition.

In Fisher's analysis the poet's musical transpositions, when compared to Pound's creative translation technique, appear to be based on the same method of comparative poetics, aiming at translating poetry into music by finding an emotional equivalent between Sappho's and Catullus' texts and the melodic lines:

The unfinished sketches show Pound beginning not with strict metrics but with an interpretation of the melodic movement according to the entirety of the line 1) in relation to the emotion of the line and 2) conditioned by a comparative poetics carried out in the melodies of the two poems. There is little exact correspondence to the received metrical scansion in these first melodic and rhythmic studies, as might be expected in a work by a modernist poet who devoted a lifetime to rewriting the tradition.<sup>130</sup>

Catullus 61 and Sappho fr. 1 are employed as librettos one after the other in juxtaposition, emphasizing their opposed private and public spheres, which are portrayed as common aspects of both love and lyric poetry. According to Fisher *Collis*' engagement with Catullus' hymenaic song by way of contrast with the Sapphic ode reflects Pound's conviction of 'the necessity of Latin to salvage the Greek heritage for an English audience.' It finally displays the syncretism of the Catullan ode, pointing at 'the role of the gods in the ritual of the marriage bed, and the anthologizing reach across centuries and cultures to forge in music a love poetry that aspires to restore a love cult'.<sup>131</sup> The binary opposition of the public and private

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<sup>129</sup> Fisher, p. xix.

<sup>130</sup> Fisher, p. ix.

<sup>131</sup> Fisher, p. 7.

spheres of the two lyric poems plays with the elements of the Sapphic and Catullan masks, developed in the previous poetry, and takes it a step forward.

Fisher argues that ‘the culmination of the operatic love trilogy in Catullus and Sappho was to portend the creation of an earthly paradise in which coition would again be upheld as a sacrament and the gods in their plurality again would appear on the radar of human perception’.<sup>132</sup> In this sense the opera appropriations of Sappho and Catullus appear to be another literary manifestation of Eros as vital spirit, as well as Pound’s involvement in mysticism and ritual mysteries.

In *Collis*, Pound polarized his discourse by the staging of the two kinds of lyricism through the opera setting: the private dimension of Sappho’s address to Aphrodite and the public and performative nature of the wedding song by Catullus. Fisher points out that ‘A libretto mentions two groups, possibly girls and boys’ choruses’.<sup>133</sup> The dialogic aspect of *Collis* is emphasised by the alternation of arias and recitative passages. The literary staging is thus implemented by the insertion of the lyric into the performative context of the opera, but also in the prefiguration of an actual staging in the theatre, as the manuscript scenario for the staging of Catullus 61 shows (see Appendix 8).<sup>134</sup>

Moreover, the musicologist remarks that the drafts of the two melodies for Catullus’ and Sappho’s texts emphasise the two texts’ opposing mode (public / private), yet they put the two poets on the same level in terms of technical dexterity: ‘The melodies of the two poems [in *Collis*] realize their contrasts—Catullus’ public address to the god / Sappho’s intimate encounter with the goddess—through musical means that evidence technical parity.’<sup>135</sup> The two poets stand in the opera as equals

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<sup>132</sup> Fisher, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> Fisher, p. x.

<sup>134</sup> An excerpt of the scenario is transcribed by Fisher, p. xvii.

<sup>135</sup> Fisher, p. xii.

and paradigms of two different kinds of lyricism. He thus meta-poetically draws attention to Sappho's proto-confessionalism through the contrast with the official poetry of the Catullan poem. Yet one must note that Sappho's poem was in itself an ode, a prayer and invocation to the goddess Aphrodite, as Catullus 61 contained an invocation to Hymen. In both poems Sappho and Catullus are present, but while Catullus' poem stands out as a Latin literary variation on the Greek tradition of the wedding song, Sappho's poem is more intimate: the entire lyric is structured as a dialogue between Aphrodite and the poet. Indeed, the Greek's notion of private spheres was starkly different from the modern one; reading Sappho's voice within the ode as the expression of an individual-self would be an anachronism. Yet Gentili has shown that the Lesbian poet did, in fact, use a more personal language than the conventions of an archaic ode would usually allow. The direct address of Aphrodite to Sappho ('TIS O SAPPHO ADIKEI') broke the conventions of traditional prayers to the divinity by using colloquial forms of language, reducing the distance between the poet and the goddess herself, and standing out as a variation to the norm,<sup>136</sup> one of the shifts in the literary paradigm which Pound was so keen to trace. Fisher's conclusion supports the argument that Pound's interest in the Sapphic and Catullan ode at this point is based on his wider interest in tracing the roots of the Western lyric tradition, this time with a particular focus on rhythm:

The *Collis* and *Poikilothron* arias were to conclude a trilogy of operas that began with the tangible extremes of physicality in *Testament*. Cavalcanti's lyricism arose like steam from a nervous system responding to the physical irritants of a love denied the blossom of promise. Especially with the *Poikilothron* Pound found his footing by exploring performance in and between the words themselves, moving away from biographical detail and psychology to explore the roots of lyricism in Western poetry, melody and rhythm.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Gentili, 'La veneranda Saffo', pp. 57-58.

<sup>137</sup> Fisher, p. 81.

Pound's experimentations point to his attempt at a re-foundation of the lyric genre, opening the realm of private monodic lyric to non-lyric and dialogic genres, by drawing connections with both epic and drama (in the form of the opera setting).<sup>138</sup> Focusing on contrasting aspects of the lyric such as the ideal and the real, the private and the public, he first exploits the binary opposition between Sappho and Catullus in his short poetry, and consequently stages them in the *Cantos* and the opera. The staging, while drawing attention to the poetic form itself, as is typical of the Modernist enterprise, divests lyricism of its potential solipsistic trait by either the use of poetic masks, or by the dissemination of multiple lyric fragments within dialogic genres.

The crystallisation of the lyric as monodic song of the lonely poet, highest poetic genre, and absolute ideal of life and art, which grew strong in the Italian poetry of Pascoli and Hermeticism, is foreign to Pound's Modernist poetry and his re-appropriations of Sappho and Catullus. The diversity of Pound's lyric platform, characterised by the multiplicity of dramatic voices, his ability to create a choral performance out of the single monodies of tradition in contemporary poetry, and the variety of the Sappho / Catullus polarity in his oeuvre called into question the very notion of poetic genres. The questioning of the traditional subjectivity associated with the lyric started a new tradition in classical lyricism and a new chapter of the history of the ideas of Sappho and Catullus as lyric archetypes.

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<sup>138</sup> Fisher treats the influence of Noh Drama on Pound's opera settings in Chapter 7 of her book.

## Chapter 4

### **Anne Carson and Classical Lyricism: Floating amid Song Lyrics, Lecture Notes and Scraps of Meat**

*Then, for that moment,  
she had seen an illumination;  
a match burning in a crocus  
(Virginia Wolf, Mrs Dalloway)*

‘[G]enre confuses me’, Anne Carson (1950-) replied when asked about the centrality of the genre question in her poetry. Giving straight answers is not Carson’s style; she is notorious for her reticence. In the email interview I conducted with her in October 2010, she hastily dismissed most of my questions with very brief answers, like the one just quoted.<sup>1</sup> Yet is ‘genre’ a genuinely confusing notion for Anne Carson?

The manipulation of genre is a major aspect of Carson’s writing. Her books are mixtures of lyric fragments, essays, prose poetry, opera librettos and dramatic scripts. Some of her poems are even presented as demonstrative essays.<sup>2</sup> In her introduction to *Autobiography of Red* (1998)— a ‘novel in verse’ inspired by the *Geryoneis* of Stesichoros— she describes the fragments of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century B.C. poem ‘as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat.’<sup>3</sup> The same definition could be easily applied to Carson’s work as a whole,

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<sup>1</sup> I include a transcription of the entire interview in Appendix 9.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Clearing up the question of Stesichoros’ Blinding by Helen’, in *Autobiography of Red: a Novel in Verse* (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 18-20; ‘Essay about what I think about most’ and ‘Essay on Error’ in *Men in the Off Hours* (New York: Knopf, 2000), pp. 30-36; p. 37. Hereafter I will be referring to *Autobiography of Red* with the abbreviation *AR* and to *Men in the Off Hours* with *MOH*.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Carson, ‘Red Meat: What Difference did Stesichoros Make?’, in *AR*, pp. 3-7 (pp. 6-7).

apart from the meat. Her oeuvre's most prominent characteristics are the centrality of the classical tradition and the interplay of literary, visual and dramatic forms.

A quick look at her collections' titles and tables of content reveals a deliberately miscellaneous concern with both monologic and dialogic genres. *Glass, Irony and God* (1995) opens with 'The Glass Essay', a forty-five page poem in three-line stanzas in the style of a demonstrative essay. A poetic reflection on god 'The Truth about God' follows 'The Glass Essay', together with 'TV Men', a series of poems constructed as television scripts. The volume ends with a poem on 'The Book of Isaiah' and a creative essay, 'The Gender of Sound'. Her following book, *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry* (1995), begins with several translations from the archaic Greek poet Mimnermos and a series of short prose poems, which were originally accompanied by drawings made by Carson herself, entitled 'Short Talks'.<sup>4</sup> The same volume includes the series of poems 'Canicula di Anna', 'The Life of Towns', and finally the essay 'Anthropology of Water'. In *Autobiography of Red: a Novel in Verse*, Carson openly challenges genre definition(s). The subtitle 'a Novel in Verse' indicates the paradoxical formal construction of the work. In fact, the book's highly prosaic style brought some critics to question the poetic qualities of *Autobiography of Red*. Bernard Knox has depicted the book as a prose work with the addition of several line-breaks.<sup>5</sup> *Men in the Off Hours* (2000) (similarly to *Plainwater*) includes essays, lyrics, fifteen translations of Catullus' carmina, the second series of 'TV Men', as well as a handful of fictional poetic dialogues between anachronistic characters. *The Beauty of the Husband: a Fictional Essay in 29 tangos*

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Anne Carson, *Short Talks* (Brick, 1992). On the drawings inspiring the collection, see Will Aitken, 'Anne Carson: The Art of Poetry No. 88', *The Paris Review*, 177 (2004): <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5420/the-art-of-poetry-no-88-anne-carson>> [Accessed 9 February 2013].

<sup>5</sup> John D'Agata, 'Review of Men in the Off Hours', *Boston Review* (Summer 2000): <<http://bostonreview.net/BR25.3/dagata.html>> [Accessed 18 February 2013], and Bernard Knox, 'Under the Volcano', *NYRB*, 65.18 (1998), 57-60 (p. 60).

(2001) is another long poem telling a story. It is divided in 29 chapters, or Tangos, as Carson calls them: two to five page free-verse poems, arranged in a narrative sequence.

Carson also translated the entire Sapphic corpus in 2003 with *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. This text constitutes the script for her multimedia performance work 'Bracko' (2007). With *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (2005) she returned to the 'song lyrics, lecture notes and scraps of meat' format. It is one of her most experimental collections. She presents poems and experimental essays such as 'Foam (Essay with Rhapsody): On the Sublime in Longinus and Antonioni' and 'Decreation: How Women like Sappho, Marguerite Porete and Simone Weil Tell God'. The book also contains the script for an oratorio for five voices ('Lots of Guns'), a prose poetry commentary on Samuel Beckett's 'Quad', an opera libretto entitled 'Decreation (An Opera in Three Parts)' whose 'Cast' includes Hephaistos, Aphrodite, Ares, and a chorus of '7 female robots built by Hephaistos to Help him at the forge'.<sup>6</sup> The book ends with a piece in sixteen bullet points entitled 'Longing: a Documentary'. Between 2006 and 2009 she also published her translations of Euripides' *Alkestis*, *Herakles*, *Hekabe* and *Hippolytos* under the title *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides*, as well as Aeschylus' *An Oresteia*.

Her most recent output pushes the boundaries of genre even further. In 2010 she released *Nox*, an artefact in book form inspired by Catullus 101. *Nox* is the facsimile of Carson's handmade notebook including the reproduction of scraps of paper, photographs, lyrics and drawings all tied together and presented in a cardboard box (see Figure 1 in Appendix 10). Carson's translation of Sophocles' *Antigone* issued in 2012 under the comic strip title *Antigonick* dialogues closely with the

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<sup>6</sup> *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (New York: Knopf, 2005), p. 187.

accompanying illustrations by Bianca Stone and graphic design by Robert Currie (who also contributed to the graphic and material realization of *Nox*).<sup>7</sup> Graphics, layout and typeface are integral to her last book *Red Doc*, published in March 2013. At the end of the volume, Carson includes a ‘Note on the Type’, ironically drawing attention to the ready-made quality of the font: ‘This book was set in Minion, a typeface produced by the Adobe Corporation specifically for the Macintosh personal computer, and released in 1990’.<sup>8</sup> (see Figure 2 in Appendix 10)

This list reveals an enduring attention to ancient Greek and Latin literatures. It also shows that Carson’s writing exploits widely accepted classifications of genre in order to subvert them. Her diverse appropriations of literary traditions are often implemented through visual and graphic elements. Her books strike one as artefacts.<sup>9</sup>

In Carson’s interview with Will Aitken she comments on her relationship with the book as a visual object: ‘even when the thing I’m doing is just writing I try to make it into an object. Try to make it something to look at or experience as well as read, so I worry about the topography and spacing, and just the presentation of it.’<sup>10</sup> Challenging the functional stereotype of the book as a reading aid, the tradition of the book-object passes through the expressionist experiments with text and design of Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov, the Modernists at large, and the comic book tradition.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Glass, Irony and God* (New York: New Directions, 1995), *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry* (New York: Knopf, 1995), *Autobiography of Red: a Novel in Verse* (New York: Knopf, 1998), *The Beauty of the Husband: a Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos* (New York: Knopf, 2001), *Nox* (New York: New Directions, 2010), *Antigonick* (New York: New Directions, 2012). *Grief Lessons: Four Plays by Euripides* (New York: New York Review of Books Classics, 2006), *An Oresteia* (London: Faber, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Anne Carson, *Red Doc* (New York: Knopf, 2013), p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> On *Nox* as artefact, Dan Chiasson, ‘The Unfolding Elegy’, *NYRB*, 7 (2010), 63-64.

<sup>10</sup> Aitken, ‘Anne Carson’.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Compton, ‘Larionov et Gontcharova illustreurs, 1912-1929’, in *Natalie Gontcharova. Michel Larionov* (Paris: Édition du Centre Pompidou, 1995), pp. 205-212; Natalia Shtrimer, ‘Futurist Books’, in *Natalia Goncharova: the Russian Years* (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2002), pp. 189-220. George Steiner defines *Antigonick* as ‘an *objet trouvé*, a postmodern or Dada artefact’, in ‘Anne

Many writers before Carson have contested formal assumptions about genres (in the previous chapter I have engaged with Ezra Pound's use of lyric fragments in dialogic forms, for instance). Yet few writers are as explicit as Carson in their operation. One of her insights into this process is the continuous rewriting of the classical legacy, from which she extracts a complex poetics of the fragment.

In the introduction to the translation of Sappho's corpus, *If Not, Winter*, Carson engages with the visual quality of the fragments. She argues that the way fragments and empty spaces are arranged on the page affects the reader's experience.<sup>12</sup> As a scholar of Greek, she is also aware of the physical problems of textual transmission. Carson's application of graphics in the hardcover edition of the book, where the Greek text is printed in red, enhances the text's visual effects. With her graphic aids Carson foregrounds the material quality of texts. She ponders the fragment in its material and linguistic form: as material debris, a poem, or a linguistic manifestation. Her poetic speculation focuses on fragments that match these three descriptions.

The Romantic, Keatsian fascination with 'negative capability' informs this aesthetics (Keats is indeed the primary inter-textual presence in *Beauty of the Husband*):<sup>13</sup>

I love Greek and Latin and happen to know how to read them so I guess that means I am part of their legacy. the fact that the Greek and Latin poets come down to us as fragmentary traditions has perhaps influenced what you call my "aesthetic", or even justified it, but most poets find a way to justify their desire to create fragments don't they. all poems are fragments. That's why they're interesting. negative capability etc. [sic]  
(‘Interview’, 2010)

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Carson "translates" Antigone', *TLS* (1 August 2012) <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1093904.ece>> [Accessed 4 June 2013].

<sup>12</sup> *If Not, Winter*, p. xi.

<sup>13</sup> John Keats, 'Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 227 December 1817', in *The Major Works*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: OUP, 1990), pp. 369-370.

As I will show in this chapter, the fragmentary aspect of the classical tradition is foundational to Carson's poetics and it informs her classical lyricism. Carson is both drawn by the allure of the lyric fragment and (deeply) engaged in the Romantic poetics attached to it. As Guy Davenport notes:

Fragments, when they are but motes (the unfinished works of a Spenser or Michelangelo are a different matter), touch us as the baby glove of a pharaoh which moved William Carlos Williams to tears, or the lock of Lucrezia Borgia's hair which drew Byron back day after day to gaze (and to steal one strand for Landor); they 'brave time' with a mite's grip, missing by a rotten piece of linen or a grammarian's inadvertent immortality the empty fame of the siren's song. To exist in fragment and in Greek is doubly a perilous claim on the attention of our time.<sup>14</sup>

Her post-Romantic approach to the lyric was confirmed by another of Carson's short responses to my interview, where she equates the lyric fragment to translations: 'all translations are provisional (or, Homer would say, ephemeral: balanced on the day) I guess in that sense they are all "lyric" - arising out of a certain moment in time' (Interview, 2010). This underlines the close connection between translation and poetic faculty in Carson's work. The 'lyric' and translations, Carson seems to say, are both subjective responses to a particular feeling or 'moment in time'. Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', his 'spots of time', strike one as the Romantic formulation of a similar poetics.<sup>15</sup> As will emerge in this chapter, this subjective mode delineates Carson's horizon as a scholar, poet, and translator of the lyrics of Sappho and Catullus.

We will see that Carson's poetics of the fragment is accompanied by a relentless politics of quotation. Her appropriations juxtapose ancient authors to modern ones, who are often made to dialogue with each other. Following Pound's comparative approach, Carson's poetics presupposes a particular attention to the

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<sup>14</sup> Guy Davenport, *7 Greeks* (New York: New Directions, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> 'Preface' (1802), in William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 235-266 (p. 260).

dynamics of reception, the classical tradition and translation. As in the case of Pound, Carson's comparativism revels in the most daring associations, especially of poets, writers and thinkers who lived in very distant times.

Her two scholarly books use a comparative methodology to explore lyricism in antiquity. *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), taking its title from a line of Sappho (fr. 130 Voigt), is a reflection on desire as the driving force of knowledge in ancient poetry and philosophy; *Economy of the Unlost: Simonides of Ceos with Paul Celan* (1999) compares the poetics of the archaic Greek epigrams of Simonides with Paul Celan's Modernist lyrics.<sup>16</sup> Although Carson also translated tragic poets, their presence is significantly less pronounced in her books, when compared to the sheer number of references to archaic lyric.<sup>17</sup>

Carson juxtaposes the past and the modern in order to deconstruct the process of comparison itself. It will be shown that the two wide areas of enquiry in Carson's work, genre and the classics, are constantly redefined. Sappho's and Catullus' voices are not only two of the more persistent in Carson's lyricism, but the great themes of the ancient poets' works are crucial to her poetics. Translation stands out as the creative agent of this relationship.

In the first section I will show that Carson's view of literature and legacy develops horizontally, on a plane in which past and future coexist. This view stands out as a re-elaboration of the synchronic system developed by Pound at the turn of the century. Equally, the close-knit relationship of Carson with translation as a creative process shares the Poundian approach. In the second section I will discuss Carson's

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<sup>16</sup> Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and *Economy of the Unlost: Simonides of Ceos with Paul Celan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Carson writes on Sappho also in 'Sappho Shock', in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics of Poetry*, ed. by Yopie Prins and Maera Shreiber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 223-227 and 'The Beat Goes on', *LRB*, 52.15 (2005), 47.

classical lyricism by examining her relationship with the poetry of Sappho and Catullus, both in her translations and appropriations. In the third and final section of the chapter I will explore Carson's classical lyricism within her multimedia performance works. I will focus on Carson's adaptations of monodic lyric for the stage in 'Bracko' and 'Nox'. The pieces will be analysed with a particular consideration for her exploitation of dance as a vehicle of the lyric.

Carson's poetry falls perfectly into the categories defining the classical lyricism of the other three case studies. Her oeuvre is concerned with translation as enlightenment, erotic desire as a living force, an anthropological view of the lyric, poetic representations of defloration and ritual wedding songs. As for Pascoli, Pound and Quasimodo, her investment in translation as a ritual re-embodiment, and eroticism as a driving force are informed by her intimate relationship with ancient Greek lyric. It will emerge that the lyric of Sappho and Catullus is behind Carson's focus on rites of passage such as marriage and mourning. Her classical lyricism stands out as the most complex and layered of the four case studies considered.

### 1.1 Return to the Future: Bringing the Past to its Afterlife in a Glimpse of Light

As opposed to Pascoli and Pound, who made their theories on the classical legacy a central concern of their scholarly writing, Carson never embarks on a systematic discussion of tradition. Yet her treatment of the classics in her criticism and the rich politics of quotation in her poetry give an insight into Carson's views on literature and language. Similarly to Pound, Carson draws our attention to the synchronic quality of literature. Texts from the past, present (and future) coexist in a web of references that shapes the reader's understanding.

Translation is a bridging process, through which the relationship between the synchronic view of history and literature is made explicit. In her essay 'Cassandra Float Can', Carson explains that translation's role is to produce a text's afterlife. Translation is a ritual aimed at understanding. 'Cassandra' is the name the poet gives to the process of translation as an unveiling of meaning. In Greek myth Cassandra is also a prophet whose predictions are never believed despite being true. With a series of questions, the first section of the essay describes translation as a form of enlightenment:

Is there a crack of light under the door? How do you know to see it as light? Is there an edge of light all around the dark mass of your life up to this moment? Can you see the dark mass as a veil? Can you want it gone? Can you say: 'Flick flack, it's gone?' Cassandra can.<sup>18</sup>

Thinking of language as a veiled mass and translation as enlightenment, Carson connects the work of a translator to that of an etymologist: 'The etymologists make cuts that show being as it floats inside things and how it floats and how can it' (min. 20:39-20:48). She then carries the analogy further and compares 'Cassandra' to

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<sup>18</sup> 'Cassandra Float Can' has not been published. Carson has read several times the essay during her performances. There are several recordings of the reading dating back to 2006. I here quote from the recording of the performance at 92 Street Y, New York, 26 March 2008 <<https://soundcloud.com/92y/anne-carson>> [Accessed 20 July 2013], min. 4:00 – 4:28.

a philosopher and an artist. The three figures aim at unveiling being and reach a form of understanding. In the same way, the translator exposes the fragmentary quality of language:

Sometimes I feel I spend my whole life rewriting the same page. It is a page with 'Essay on Translation' at the top and then quite a few paragraphs of good strong prose. These begin to break down towards the middle of the page. Syntax decays, perforations appear. By the end, there is not much left but a few flakes of language roaming near the margins, looking as if they want to become an art of pure shape. Here is another fact about me: whenever I am engaged on a translation project I experience continually offside my vision a sensation of veils flying up, as brightness blows, the rising wide cold brush the skull. I have come to call this sensation Cassandra.  
(‘Cassandra Float Can’, min. 5:33-6:30)

[W]hat [...] [does] translation ha[ve] to do with the arts of prophesy[?] [...] In both cases there is some action of cutting through surfaces to a sight that has no business being underneath. What is the future doing underneath the past? Or Greek metrics inside a Trojan silence? And how does it alter it to see it there floating? And how can it float?  
(‘Cassandra Float Can’, min. 10:12-10:38)

Carson adds a further dimension to the Poundian synchronic view of reality and literature: the future, which interacts with the past and the present, thus shapes them. Paradoxically, Carson affirms that the future—the dimension of expectation, longing, absence—is in fact hidden by the past. This implies that the understanding of the past and the present informs the way we think of the future. Yet the future is a dimension only in potential, by definition not contingent and always unattainable, therefore impossible to be unveiled.

By drawing an analogy between translation and prophecy as unveiling, Carson tells us that translation is a process of enlightenment of meaning (or at least it should aim at it). It is also a way of bringing a past work into its afterlife—namely, its future—and to uphold its floating condition. Translation is a moment through which present and past coincide. The horizontal dissemination of works belonging to different times is made possible by translation. Yet the understanding is never

complete, it only occurs in glimpses, momentary unveilings. As Cassandra's prophecy is never believed or understood by her contemporaries, knowing through unveiling is an act that only makes sense in that it shapes the present. In her personal phenomenology of poetic language, the metaphor of 'floating' thus appears to define the unstable manifestations of meaning and being. This manifold ontological core, though, remains inaccessible.

Dismantling the paradoxes of a linear view of history, Carson points at the coexistence of present, past and future in literature. She underlines the subjective aspect of time, inherent both in a linear and a synchronic view: 'How people tell time is an intimate and local fact about them' (*MOH*, p. 3). In this framework, the classical legacy lives in the subjective present of the author. Carson goes as far as evoking Einstein's four-dimensional notion of 'spacetime'. She compares Cassandra (translation) to it: 'like spacetime she is not linear, non narrative' ('Cassandra Float Can', min. 4:29-4:33). In Carson's view both translation and the lyric fragment are non-linear and non-narrative. They are both 'balanced on the day'.

Synchronicity is crucial for both Carson the writer and the translator. In fact, it enables Carson to merge translation and writing into a single creative act. Indeed, her work shows a strong belief in ancient languages and authors as living presences. According to the poet-scholar, there are no dead languages: 'What on earth does "dead language" mean?' she briskly replied to the metaphor I employed to refer to Ancient Greek and Latin lost oral usage. Translation acts as the vehicle of Greek and Latin texts' afterlife, while her poetry provides a venue for ancient poets to become contemporary actors.

Rejecting a hierarchical linear conception of literature and languages, Carson translates archaic poetry with a freedom competing with the most daring Poundian

experiments. Through the multiple voices of her poetry she brings ancient and modern authors to the same stage: the personas of Carson's poetry include mythical figures, ancient and modern writers, her own family members, third and first person narrators interjecting in her verse. Voices and characters—often foreign and from the most disparate ages—mix in a contemporary timeframe. *Men in the Off Hours* and *Decreation* are collections most representative of this attitude.

The subjectivity of time, fragmentation, and error as existential conditions are at the centre of the 2000 collection. The book opens with a creative essay called 'Ordinary Time: Virginia Woolf and Thucydides on War', in which Carson contrasts the subjective and objective retelling of time in the 'The Mark on the Wall' by the Modernist author with the *History of the Peloponnesian War* by the 5<sup>th</sup>-century historian.<sup>19</sup> 'TV Men', a dialogue between Thucydides and Woolf, features further on in the book: 'TV Men: Thucydides in Conversation with Virginia Woolf on the Set of *The Peloponnesian War*'.<sup>20</sup> The meta-textual element in Carson's work displays the multi-layered and artificial quality of writing, speech acts and gesture. History, by token represented by Thucydides' text, is treated as a construction, a fiction in itself—to the point that in the world evoked by Carson, it is normal that Thucydides should live at the same time as Woolf and that he would direct Woolf in a television representation of his own historical treatise. The quotations uttered by Woolf's character, though, do not refer to the Peloponnesian War, but rather to the First World War, which is in the background of 'The Mark on the Wall'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *MOH*, pp. 3-8. Virginia Woolf, 'The Mark on the Wall', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1989), pp. 83-90; Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. by Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heineman, 1928-1935).

<sup>20</sup> *MOH*, pp. 115-117.

<sup>21</sup> The series 'TV Men' includes representations of Sappho (discussed below), Artaud, Tolstoy, Lazarus, Antigone and Akhmatova, *MOH*, pp. 61-118.

The ahistorical practice of using references to writers and events, which happened at a later time than the source text, underpins Carson's translation technique. The fifteen translations of Catullus' carmina in *Men in the Off Hours* display her method. Carson integrates the past dimension of the source text with a contemporary setting in 20<sup>th</sup>-century United States:

I LOVE YOU JOHNNY AND I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING  
(big white letters chalked on a rock in the Mojave Desert)

*Passer Deliciae Meae Puellae* (My Lady's Pet)

*Catullus observes his love and her pet at play*

On her lap one of the matted terriers.  
She was combing around its genitals.  
It grinned I grinned back.  
It's the one she calls Little Bottle after Deng Xiaoping.  
(*MOH*, p. 38)

The epigraph's reference to the Mojave Desert in California and the mention of Deng Xiaoping, who was in power between 1978 and 1992 in China, transpose Catullus into the modern world, both as the author of the poem and a character in Carson's collection. Similarly, *Antigonick*, opens:

[Enter Antigone and Ismene] **Antigone:** We  
begin in the dark and birth is the death of  
us **Ismene:** Who said that **Antigone:** Hegel  
**Ismene:** Sounds more like Beckett **Antigone:** He  
Was paraphrasing Hegel **Ismene:** I don't think so  
(p. 1)<sup>22</sup>

While Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher, wrote about Sophocles' *Antigone*, I could not find any texts where the 20<sup>th</sup>-century playwright Samuel Beckett engages with the ancient drama. Certainly, both are anachronistic references in the context of the 5<sup>th</sup>-century play.<sup>23</sup> The blending of time frames

<sup>22</sup> This is my page numbering since *Antigonick* does not indicate page numbers.

<sup>23</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. by T.M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II, 1158.

presupposes a subjective view of history, and focuses on the afterlife of the source. Thus reception contributes to the meaning of texts. By means of quotation, Carson constructs a web of fragments, which reflects her wider view of language, poetry and history.

In *Nox*, her elegiac work structured on Catullus 101, the relationship between these three elements is made explicit:

History and elegy are akin. The word ‘history’ comes from an ancient Greek verb ἵστορεῖν meaning ‘to ask’. One who asks about things—about their dimensions, weight, location, moods, names, holiness, smell—is an historian. But the asking is not idle. It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself. (*Nox*, 1.1)<sup>24</sup>

Performing the role of an historian, the poet faces the impossibility of reaching definite answers in either realm, whether historic or poetic. She is therefore much more concerned with questions. The enquiry itself is a loaded process (‘the asking is not idle’), under the influence of the individual who does the asking. The same subject, in turn, shapes his own self-awareness on the external objects of enquiry. By virtue of this dialectic the past lives in the present of the author, becoming a self-standing question: ‘and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself’. So the past floats inside the present.

Translation, the third great theme of *Nox* along with history and elegy, mirrors the same process of asking, seeking to understand and uncover meaning. At the same time, it contributes, creatively, to redefine Carson’s poetry. Translation takes on the role of a ritual shedding of light motivated by an unfulfilled desire for clarity:

But over the years of working at it, I came to think of translating as a room, not exactly an unknown room, where one gropes for the light switch. I guess it never ends. [...] Prowling the meanings of a word, prowling the history of a person, no use expecting a flood of light. Human words have no main switch.

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<sup>24</sup> All citations from *Nox* refer to the book’s internal division in chapters and sub-chapters in Arabic numerals. The first Arabic numeral refers to the chapter, the second numeral to the sub-section.

But all those little kidnaps in the dark. And then the luminous, big, shivering, discandied, unrepentant, barking web of them that hangs in your mind when you turn back to the page you were trying to translate. (*Nox*, 7.1)

This passage stands out as a declaration of poetics. Translation is an attempt to enlighten words, language, and the world. To reach understanding necessarily involves the creation of one's own web of references; it is a process of collecting and reshaping the entries of one's own personal dictionary.

Carson puts this into practice in *Nox*. Side by side to the main body of the text, she rewrites the dictionary entry for each Latin word of Catullus 101. For every Latin word she provides several usage examples and English definitions. But the desire to grasp a definite meaning is always frustrated ('No use expecting a flood of light'). Therefore translation evolves into a potentially never-ending process: 'In one sense it is a room I can never leave, perhaps dreadful for that. At the same time, a place composed entirely of entries.' (*Nox*, 7.1) Providing a defined space of reflection translation can only hope to steal brief glimpses of meaning. When translation is conceived as a creative process the manifestation of meaning by glimpses of illumination may be compared to the method of 'luminous detail' used by Pound to describe the original literary manifestation of the vital force of Eros.

Drawing an explicit link between elegy, translation and light ('I wanted to fill my elegy with light of all kinds', *Nox*, 1.0), the poet suggests that the translating process may be considered a ritualized form of life-giving illumination. The ancient performative aspect of the elegy, as an accompanying song for the dead passing into afterlife, is duplicated in Carson's treatment of the process of translation. For, as I have discussed, translation in Carson's oeuvre is the primary vehicle through which past texts are brought to their afterlife.

In Carson's work, light, with its counterpart, shadow, are often put in relation to language, body, wounding, death and rebirth, and the passing of time. In *Nox*, the language dialectic between light and shadow refracts onto the visual elements of the book: the photographs and drawings included in *Nox* portray light effects and silhouettes (see Figure 3 and 4 in Appendix 10), suggesting a presence yet never a clear identity.

Carson gives light both positive and negative connotations, rejecting univocal definitions. *The Beauty of the Husband* opens:

A wound gives off its own light  
 Surgeons say.  
 If all the lamps in the house were turned out  
 You could dress this wound  
 By what shines from it.  
 [...]
 What is being delayed?  
 Marriage I guess.  
 That swaying place as my husband called it.  
 Look how the word  
 shines.  
 (p. 5)

A word shines as a wound gives off its own light in a dark room. The light is not reflected, but rather emanates from a textual wound. By analogy, Carson appears to say, picking a word over another is a violent act that may produce a wound in the body of language and humans alike. Words are wounds, because to assign them a meaning is always a forceful linguistic compromise: 'Each crisis calls for decision and action, but decision is impossible and action a paradox when eros stirs the senses' (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 8). As I will discuss more in depth in section 2, Carson develops her discourse on the corporality of language following a Sapphic strand. In the excerpt below, Davenport formulates the desire structures inherent in Sappho's poetry, from which Carson takes the cue:

Spirit, for Sappho, shines from matter; one embraces the two together, inseparable. The world is to be loved. It attracts, we pursue and possess. Its structure contains the goddess Aphrodite, which inspires love, and her children Eros and Peitho, who tend to their appointed duties, the lighting of the fire of love in the heart and the seduction of the beloved.<sup>25</sup>

According to Davenport, spirit and matter, form and content are inseparable constituents of poetry, language and a world driven by erotic desire.

The wounded text is a physical presence in Carson's work. The fragmentary nature of language mirrors the corrupted status of archaic papyri, which results in the incomplete transmission of ancient texts. As I have discussed in the previous section, it is an inevitable loss, yet one that, for Carson, produces a desire to supplement meaning and write. Advocating negative capability, Carson exploits textual gaps and silences. In the same way, when Carson translates, she focuses on both the linguistic and material aspects of a text, which, in fact, are never distinct. *If Not, Winter* aims at reproducing the fragmentary state of Sappho's *corpus* as a collection of papyrus debris. In the same way, the accordion-like shape of *Nox* makes the book as difficult to navigate as a scroll: it does not have page numbers and ultimately looks like an ancient papyrus roll in a box, recalling the original form of Catullus' *liber*. In *Antigonick*, too, page numbers are not marked; there is no punctuation throughout the book and the text is laid out in columns, hinting at the textual arrangement of archaic manuscripts.

In her critical book *Eros the Bittersweet* Carson develops a phenomenology of the desire to understand. Eros emerges as the propeller of life and art. Understanding is always sought after, but never attained. Writing itself is a falling in love with the attempt to understand. Unable to pin it down to a single definition, desire is presented as a question. As the poet states, ever since its first definition by the ancient Greek

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<sup>25</sup> Davenport, p. 8.

poets, desire is a mingling (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 7) coincidental to a continuous questioning of the self: ‘The self forms of at the edge of desire’ (p. 39). Carson studies the first theories on desire and the self in relation to writing in ancient lyric and asks: ‘To put the question more pungently, what is erotic about alphabetization?’ (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 41) The interplay of eros, writing and the individual imagination is explained by Carson through the theoretical figure of ‘triangulation’. She traces the origin of this poetic configuration to Sappho. The Lesbian poet is pinpointed as the first to have devised a tripartite ‘stereoscopic’ thought structure:

Sappho perceives desire by identifying it *as* a three-part structure. [...] [W]here eros is lack, its activation calls for three structural components—lover, beloved and that which comes between them. [...] The third component plays a paradoxical role for it both connects and separates, marking that two are not one, irradiating the absence whose presence is demanded by eros. When the circuit-points connect, perception leaps. And something becomes visible, on the triangular path where volts are moving, that would not be visible without the three-part structure. The difference between what is and what could be is visible. The ideal is projected on a screen of the actual, in a kind of stereoscopy. [...] Triangulation makes both present at once by a shift of distance, replacing erotic action with a ruse of heart and language. For in this dance the people do not move. Desire moves. Eros is a verb. (*Eros the Bittersweet*, pp. 16-17)

In this passage Carson indicates fr. 31 as the original nucleus of triangulation. Making the link between Eros as a verb and writing explicit, Carson returns to Sappho in the last chapter of *Eros the Bittersweet*, entitled ‘Mythoplokos’—the transliteration of the Greek word meaning ‘weaver of myths’ and used with reference to Sappho herself:

Eros is always a story in which lover, beloved and the difference between them interact. The interaction is a fiction arranged by the mind of the lover. It carries an emotional charge both hateful and delicious and emits a light like knowledge. No one took a more clear-eyed view of this matter than Sappho. (p. 169)

Here the triangulation of desire’s original nucleus is deliberately linked to Sappho’s poetry as the archetypal source of this form. The enlightening power of knowledge is a direct product of eros and its bittersweet feeling.

From the excerpts above it appears that triangulation, in the form of the tripartite structure of eros, is a category involving the literary depiction of love and marriage from Sappho onwards, but also the act of writing itself. 'For Sappho, the desirability of desire seems to be bound up with the fictional process that she calls the "weaving of myth."' (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 170) Carson logically connects erotic desire to writing by defining writing as an erotic desire to understand. The lack that defines life relationships is the same that spurs writing. Eros is the common ground between the two spheres. Triangulation undermines the conception of desire through binaries, allowing for multiple interpretations. The outlook on reality and writing in Carson's work is always multiple. Multiplicity of triangulation creates a horizontal stereoscopic view of the text and the reality it portrays.

Carson exploits triangulation as a formal and structural device in both her poetry and her essays. It is in fact possible to trace a development of triangulation throughout Carson's oeuvre, from its early work onwards. Triangulation in love relationships and within marriage is a recurrent theme of her poetry. The tripartite structure is first found in *The Glass Essay*. The narrative voice of the poem is a woman abandoned by her lover for another woman. The memories are told with reference to a literary triangle: Heathcliff, Catherine and Edgar in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. *Autobiography of Red* tells the story of the unrequited love of Geryon for Heracles who abandons him for another lover. *The Beauty of the Husband* is structured on the triangular relationship between wife, husband and lover(s). In 'Decreation: an Opera in Three Parts', the first section, 'Love's Forgery', appropriates the myth of Aphrodite, goddess of desire, who betrays her husband Hephaistos with Ares, the god of war. Carson identifies the archetypal structure of triangulation in the myth. In the Ares-Aphrodite myth, desire finds a literary form as 'a story in which

lover, beloved and the difference between them interact', passing from the fiction 'arranged by the mind of the lover' to its literary representation.<sup>26</sup> Triangulation also forms the overall structural scaffolding for the piece. 'Love's Forgery' links triangulation to the theme of jealousy: 'ARGUMENT: Jealous of his wife Aphrodite, who has taken Ares as her lover, Hephaistos broods darkly in his mind'. Thus Carson underlines that writing represents the fictions the mind creates to understand the elemental triangular structure of desire.

Since writing is the expression of the fiction the mind creates spurred by desire, thinking becomes an 'erotic space'. Translation prefigured as a dark room consequently becomes an 'erotic room', where the poet seeks knowledge in the form of enlightenment. Drawing on the ancient Socratic analogy between 'the wooing of knowledge' and the 'wooing of love' to interpret Greek texts, Carson's phenomenology of desire in ancient writing concludes:

To reach for something else than the facts will carry you beyond this city and perhaps, as for Sokrates, beyond this world. It is a high-risk proposition, as Sokrates saw quite clearly, to reach for the difference between known and unknown. He thought the risk worthwhile, because he was in love with the wooing itself. And who is not? (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 173)

The longing and seeking for knowledge appears to be more important than the attainment of the truth, because, as Carson continually points out in Heideggerian terms, there seems to be no truth outside one's self. Even in myth or in ritual we cannot ultimately grasp a finite essence:

All myth is an enriched pattern,  
a two-faced proposition,  
allowing its operator to say one thing and mean another, to lead a double life.  
Hence the notion found early in ancient thought that all poets are liars.  
And from the true lies of poetry  
trickled out a question.  
(*Beauty of the Husband*, p. 33)

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<sup>26</sup> *Decreation*, pp. 187-205.

Carson's poetry takes place in oxymoronic places (cfr. sweetbitter eros, poikilos nomos, *Odi et Amo*). It oscillates between binaries: light / shadow, truth / error, man / woman, inside / outside.<sup>27</sup> In 'First Caldaic Oracle', a poem about knowing and the desire to know, the poet states that understanding, the object of knowing, stands beyond oppositional terms: 'it is out there (orchid) outside your *and*, it is.' (*MOH*, p. 11) The poet exploits the gap between two binary opposites to unsettle their relationship. The investment of the poet with the classics, and specifically with the lyrics of Sappho and Catullus is grounded on their archetypal quality as first testimonies of the poetic experience. At the same time, the fragmentary condition of their corpus spurs a desire to fill the gaps in the wounded text, as well as the temporal gap between Carson and the ancient poets. Following her theory on triangulation, gaps are the locus where Carson's poetry flourishes. Paradox as an almost existentialist stance informs her classical lyricism.

Exploiting the oxymoronic quality of archaic poetry, Carson never offers straight answers to the questions posed by her own writing. Speaking of the word *glukupikron* in Sappho 130 Voigt she notes:

Paradox is what takes shape on the sensitized plate of the poem, a negative image from which positive pictures can be created. Whether apprehended as a dilemma of sensation, action or value, eros prints as the same contradictory fact: love and hate converge within erotic desire. Why?  
(*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 9)

Carson continuously returns to the open question of eros.

Significantly, the only possible 'moments of being' are reached through translation. The temporary unveiling of meaning for Carson enables understanding, yet only fragmentarily. This underlies the unlikelihood of fulfilling a complete translation. Cassandra, that is, translation, has the same wounding effect on the text

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<sup>27</sup> Jes Batts, "'Dangling inside the word she'": Confusion and Gender Vertigo in Anne Carson's *Autobiography of Red*, *Canadian Literature*, 176 (2003), 198.

and reality as the writing process described in *Nox*, and in *The Beauty of the Husband*.

We are left with debris:

[Cassandra] splits open an idea of what it is to know Greek. She removes the walls and floorboards and suddenly we are in a site slated for demolition. This site which is not just her body, not just the city of Troy, not just the house of Atreus, but our whole way of knowing the truth about such things, our long-hand approach to every question and answer, our entire careers as classicists, architects or prophets or whatever we are. The way we float and how we float and can we float. Cassandra can. ('Cassandra Float Can', min. 22:36-23:16)

Debris thus comes to represent the perception of human existence and one's own identity: 'the way we float, and how we float and can we float.' But why practice translation if untranslatability is the only evident fact about words? And how does untranslatability affect Carson's work?

## 1.2 The Untranslatability of Silences: Translation and the Floating Being

Carson relates untranslatability to silence and textual lacunae:

There are two kinds of silence that trouble a translator: physical silence and metaphysical silence. Physical silence happens when you are looking at, say, a poem of Sappho's inscribed on a papyrus from two thousand years ago that has been torn in half. Half the poem is empty space. A translator can signify or even rectify this lack of text in various ways—with blankness or brackets or textual conjecture—and she is justified in doing so because Sappho did not intend that part of the poem to fall silent. Metaphysical silence happens inside words themselves. And its intentions are harder to define. Every translator knows the point where one language cannot be translated into another.

[...]

Languages are not sciences of one another, you cannot match them item for item. But now what if, within this silence, you discover a deeper one—a word that does not *intend* to be translatable. A word that stops itself.

[...]

There is something maddeningly attractive about the untranslatable, about a word that goes silent in transit.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Anne Carson, 'Variations on the right to remain silent', *A Public Space*, 7 (2009): <[http://www.apublicspace.org/essays/variations\\_on\\_the\\_right\\_to\\_remain\\_silentanne\\_carson\\_contemplates\\_translation.html](http://www.apublicspace.org/essays/variations_on_the_right_to_remain_silentanne_carson_contemplates_translation.html)> [Accessed 20 February 2013]

The untranslatability of individual languages unexpectedly justifies the practice of translation as a quest to grasp the uniqueness of words. Unable to reproduce the same meaning in two different languages, the search for this essential silence is all that remains to the poet. As pointed out above, in ‘Cassandra Float Can’ Carson draws an analogy between the work of translators and that of etymologists who ‘make cuts that show being as it floats inside things’. In its interpretative process, translation is compared to a discovery of the defining qualities of a floating being. The search justifies Carson’s frequent focalisations on the multiple meanings of individual words; at the same time, translation contributes to the creation of meaning. From an internal point of view, Carson often constructs multiple, contrasting arguments. The effect is a proliferation of lines of thought.

Carson’s translation method follows a similar pattern. Translating involves a shedding of light on meaning. It is the unveiling of certain aspects of words (‘What does this word hide? We will never know’), specifically, of the unstable (floating) configurations of meaning. Carson seems to say that while meaning and being are not fully graspable in their multiplicity it is possible to experience *how* meaning and being manifest. The floating status of being, and its verbal manifestation in manifold, unstable meanings, appears to be the only fundamental truth emerging from her philosophy of language. Translation forces a dialogue between source and target language when words in a single language remain silent. It is a way for Carson to keep the facts she momentarily grasps about a text or an image alive.

Carson never rejects translation as an inadequate exercise; like Pound, she rather emphasizes the individual quality of each language and each author: ‘Nothing in English can capture the passionate, slow surface of the Roman elegy. No one (even in Latin) can approximate Catullan diction’ (*Nox*, 7.1). If one language cannot

approximate the diction, texture and the idiomatic qualities of another, translation can only attempt to reproduce an emotional equivalent of the source text—our own individual experience of a word being the only fact we can pin down about it. A realistic representation of the world proceeds by the same token: ‘By *facts* [Bacon] doesn’t mean to make a copy of the subject as a photograph would but rather to create a sensible form that will translate directly to your nervous system the same sensation as the subject.’<sup>29</sup> There is an overt link between translation and the process of apperception of one’s own self, as Carson notes in her discussion of foreignisation in Hölderlin’s translations of the choruses of *Antigone*: ‘Where does translation happen in the mind? And if there is a silence that falls inside certain words, when, how, with what violence does that take place, and what difference does it make to who you are?’<sup>30</sup> Writing and the self, she had already explained in *Eros the Bittersweet*, happen at the edge of desire to understand. Translation is driven by the same desire. Translation is ultimately a creative process led by a desire to understand oneself against one’s own perception of the world. By means of comparison of different languages, texts and individual interpretations, translation surfaces certain qualities of being in the mind and the self.

As for Pascoli, poetry is a ‘blooming of a poet’s mind’ or, in Pound’s words, comes from a kind of ‘germinal consciousness’. For Carson, similarly, translation is a mind event affecting identity and producing an essential difference. Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The task of the Translator’ is behind Carson’s translating. Her conception of translation as a creative process to find an emotional equivalent to the source text in the target language is rooted in Benjamin’s theories on language and foreignisation. She quotes Benjamin’s essay in her introduction to *If Not, Winter*:

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<sup>29</sup> Carson, ‘Variations on the Right to Remain Silent’.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, ‘Variations on the Right to Remain Silent’.

In translating such stranded verse I have sometimes manipulated its spacing on the page [...]. This is a license undertaken in deference to a principle that Walter Benjamin calls ‘the intention toward language’ of the original. (*If Not, Winter*, p. xii)

This acknowledged debt to Benjamin colours also Carson’s views on language and history. Benjamin envisages a supra-historical kinship of languages, which ‘rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole –an intention, however, which no single language can attain by itself, but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language’.<sup>31</sup> Benjamin posits an unreachable core essence of language, which translation may reveal, or in Carson’s words ‘unveil’ as it ‘floats’. Yet Benjamin (along with Pound) presupposes a truthful essence to language. Carson, on the other hand, never allows for a single approach to writing or a truthful unitary essence of being. Her work is contradictory and relishes in the dimension of error.<sup>32</sup>

The introduction to *If Not, Winter* opens with an epigraph from Jacques Derrida: ‘Breaks are always, and fatally, re-inscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone’ (p. x). By referencing Derrida, Carson associates her work with a poststructuralist view of literature. As Venuti explains, according to Derrida’s and Paul de Man’s views on translation both the source text and the target text are:

[D]erivative and heterogeneous, consisting of diverse linguistic and cultural materials which destabilize the work of signification, making meaning plural and divided, exceeding and possibly conflicting with the intentions of the author and the translator. Translation is doomed to inadequacy because of irreducible differences, not just between languages and cultures, but also within them.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. ‘Essay of what I think about most’ (*MOH*, p.); on the poetics of error: Robert Stanton, “‘I am writing this to be as wrong as possible to you’: Anne Carson’s errancy”, *Canadian Literature*, 176 (2003), 28.

<sup>33</sup> Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 188.

This fits Carson's interest in the 'supplements' of triangulation and in the slippery nature of a Structuralist view of language built on arbitrary pairs of opposites. It justifies her translations and her poetry, which makes manifest the impossibility of reducing words to a single meaning.

Carson admits that to step away from one's own mind is unattainable. The web of references hanging on the mind of the translator when (s)he 'gropes for the light switch' during translation interfere in the process:

I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through. This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) within which most translators labor. If light appears [...] we undo a bit of the cloth.  
(*If Not, Winter*, p. x)

Benjamin argues in favour of transparency. A translator is transparent when (s)he lets the original language shine through the target text. The metaphor of light in relation to meaning is once again exploited:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.<sup>34</sup>

While for Benjamin translation is a literary mode that lets the pure language shine of its own light, for Carson translation is a productive process in which the translator is actively involved in the unveiling of words. As Venuti points out:

[Benjamin's] speculative approach is linked to a particular discursive strategy. The pure language is released in the translation through literalisms, especially in syntax, which result in departures from current standard usage. Benjamin is reviving Schleiermacher's notion of foreignising translation, wherein the reader of the translated text is brought as close as possible to the source text through close renderings that transform the translating language.<sup>35</sup>

Differently from Benjamin, Carson does not envisage an expansion of the translating language as a result of the process of foreignisation, but rather a ritual creation of a past work's future. If her translation language, as I will show, often takes on foreign

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<sup>34</sup> Benjamin, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 72.

elements and performs an act of foreignisation of the target text, Carson's act is aimed at unveiling glimpses of meaning. She longs for understanding and appreciates the process that allows her quest, but she never admits to it.

Sappho features explicitly or implicitly in every single book by Carson, either as a text, an archetypal figure, or in her literary eroticism in the form of triangulation. Catullus' poems, despite being a lesser presence, have a similar structuring function. In subsection 2.2, I will show that Carson employs Catullus' poetry as a structural element shaping a second sphere of her writing, namely, the sphere of death and mourning rituals. As will appear in the following section, Sappho's and Catullus' poetry, brought to their afterlife by means of translation, constitute the lattice on which she weaves her multiple responses to the open question of Eros.

## 2.1 (Un)Knowing Sappho: Lyric Flowers, Wedding Rituals and the Private Mind

Sappho is one of Carson's primary poetic sources. Her extant corpus and its composite reception are the cradle of the linguistic and poetic dynamics in which Carson is invested. The first poet to have developed the notion of eros as desire, lack or unattainability, to have poetically formulated the tension of the erotic paradox ('glukupikron'), and to have actualised 'triangulation', the ambiguity of Sappho's poetry is compelling for Carson.

The presence of Sappho in Carson's writing is of three kinds: translated text, direct and indirect quotations of her fragments, and as a dramatic persona. Sappho is the subject of several of her essays as well as the choral performance piece 'Bracko'. Carson sketches a brief portrait of Sappho in her introduction to *If Not, Winter*:

Sappho was a musician. Her poetry is lyric, that is, composed to be sung to the lyre. She addresses her lyre in one of her poems (fr. 118) and frequently mentions music, songs and singing. [...] All of Sappho's music is lost.

Sappho was also a poet. [...] Whether or not she herself was literate is unknown.

(p. ix)

Underlining the performative aspect of ancient lyric, this excerpt presents Sappho first as a musician and only at a second stage as a poet. As I will show, the musical and performative elements of Sappho's poetry are often remarked by Carson, and influence the way she engages with the ancient lyricist.

Carson's knowledge of Sappho's complete corpus is documented by her 2003 translation of the Lesbian poet's extant corpus in *If Not, Winter*. The translation is generally adherent to the Greek text in terms of language and form. The larger part of the English translations follows the word order and stanza divisions of the original. Additionally, several fragments are equipped with a note apparatus where Carson

comments on both the English and the Greek text. While the scholarly layout suggests an academic purpose, *If Not, Winter* should be considered a self-standing creative work. The translation has stirred mixed reactions, as is often the case with Carson's poetry. Daniel Mendelsohn, for instance, complains that the intended audience of *If Not, Winter* is not clearly delineated; Carson's versions, in his eyes, fail to portray Sapphic poetry in the accurate manner which is implied by the book's scholarly presentation. According to Mendelsohn, the translation falls short by ignoring the performative context of ancient monodic lyric, giving a stereotypical account of Sappho, based on a romanticised idea of the ancient author and her poetry.<sup>36</sup> But, while the Sappho of *If Not, Winter* does strike one as Carson's free re-interpretation of the Lesbian poet's work, this is only problematic when translation is expected to provide a faithful linguistic correspondence to the source text. Carson's translation method seems rather to seek after an emotional equivalent.

The status of *If Not, Winter* as a self-standing work is made evident in 'Bracko', the multimedia performance piece that exploits *If Not, Winter*'s text as a script. In 'Bracko' four actors recite several translations on stage. The script includes some of the footnotes to the fragments, which are read simultaneously to the translations to which they refer, creating a multi-layered effect (I discuss this work further in section 3). This suggests that Carson's footnotes to *If Not, Winter* may not only be para-textual additions, but in fact integral elements to the work overall. This poetic operation is familiar: T.S. Eliot's 1922 *Wasteland* famously included footnotes, so did Samuel Beckett's *Whoroscope* (1930), and *Le occasioni 1928-1938* (1940) by Eugenio Montale—to name a few instances of a long-standing tradition in which

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Mendelsohn, 'In Search of Sappho (Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter*)', in *Waiting for the Barbarians: Essays from the Classics to Pop Culture* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2012), pp. 121-138 (pp. 129-130).

authors comment on their own text by means of the note apparatus.<sup>37</sup> *If Not, Winter* undeniably brings scholarly writing to the creative arena.

In critical editions brackets are textual markers usually employed for manuscript transcriptions to indicate gaps in a corrupted text. But in the introduction to *If Not, Winter* brackets are given an aesthetic function. Carson thus provides a poetic precedent to the neologism ‘Bracko’, created from the union of the term ‘bracket’ and the name ‘Sappho’.<sup>38</sup>

Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it. [...] I emphasize 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. (p. xi)

By intervening freely on the layout of the brackets in the English text of *If Not, Winter* she manipulates the reader’s aesthetic visual experience of the poems. The textual lacunae therefore affect the ‘imaginal adventure’ of the reader.

The transparency Carson advocated as a guideline to her translation is confirmed to be illusory (‘This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) within which most translators labor’). The markers of the textual lacunae in the English translation do not always follow the layout of the brackets in the Greek critical edition by Voigt: the poet inserts or removes brackets in the target text at her discretion. Also at her discretion she intervenes on Voigt’s set text substituting some words with different variants. In other instances she completely dismisses words of the Greek text, excluding them from the translation. She does not, for instance, translate the first

<sup>37</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, ed. by Michael North (New York: Norton, 2001); Samuel Beckett, *Whoroscope* (Paris: Hours Press, 1930); Montale, *Le occasioni (1928-1938)*.

<sup>38</sup> She explains the title ‘Bracko’ in ‘Anne Carson Performs “Bracko” and “Cassandra Float Can”’, Schwartz Centre, Cornell University, 17 February 2012, <<http://www.cornell.edu/video/anne-carson-performs-bracko-and-cassandra-float-can>> [Accessed on 10 July 2013], min. 7:18-7:21.

segment of fr. 95. The scholarly approach resembles Pascoli's combing through in the note apparatus of the ancient texts to find variants for his translations. Both poets exploit the instability of the source text of Sappho to serve their own aesthetic goals in the translations. Carson freely manipulates Sappho's text and exploits the aesthetic power of brackets in order to emphasise the fragmentary instability of the material text. This also provides a visual representation of the text as an aesthetic experience of silences and absence.

In *If Not, Winter* the form of the fragments is a central preoccupation: 'In translating such stranded verse I have sometimes manipulated its spacing on the page, to restore a hint of musicality or suggest syntactic motion.' (p. xii) The graphic layout of the Voigt Greek edition is sometimes altered in the transposition into English, as in fragments 51, 53, 56 104a, 113, 114, 127, 128, 133, 134, 135, 140, 147, 149, 150, 161. The play on the layout of the lines found in her translations is often absorbed into Carson's own poetry. Conceiving the page as a pictorial space, Carson exploits the visual and formal aspect of her poems to convey meaning, as in *Decreation's* series 'Stops' and 'Sublimes'. Here traditional versification is completely dispensed with, in favour of lines of various lengths to compose shapes on the page.<sup>39</sup>

In 'A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways', she gives six different versions of Ibykos' fragment 283 through different speaking voices.<sup>40</sup> The translations' linguistic choices differ considerably from one another. The six translations, though, share a similar structure, for Carson anchors each version in the formal and syntactic structure of the Greek fragment. This reveals how much her investigation of the poetic involves also the skeleton of the text.

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<sup>39</sup> *Decreation*, pp. 2-16; 59-83.

<sup>40</sup> Anne Carson, 'A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways', *LRB*, 34.21 (2012), 42-43.

In *If Not, Winter*, when the fragments present Sapphic stanzas, she maintains the three + one format through a loose reworking of the pattern into English (although she does not employ the traditional English Sapphics). She also attempts to mirror the jolted syntax of the Greek stanzas. Where possible, the poet keeps the word-order of the source text as in a calque, adding a foreign allure to her language, à la Benjamin.

The Sappho emerging from *If Not, Winter* is Carson's rewriting of the Lesbian poet, according to the affinities she finds with the ancient text. On the one hand, she is rigorous in the use of language: she is consistent in her rendition of the most recurrent Greek words, which are always translated with the same locutions or phrases in English: 'ἔπος' is translated with 'desire', (cfr. fr. 96, fr. 112, fr. 115, fr. 116), 'φρήν' with 'mind', 'θῦμον' with 'heart' and 'δηῦτε' with 'now again'. On the other hand, some of Carson's solutions depart from the Greek text considerably. In these instances Carson deliberately, yet not blatantly, abandons all commitment to transparency so that her voice controls the Sapphic material. Her translation of fr. 22, from which she extracts the title-line of the collection, shows this tendency (see the complete English and Greek texts in Appendix 11).<sup>41</sup>

Firstly, she skips the word 'αὐάδην', the Aeolic form of 'ἀηδής' (literally: 'unpleasant'), and replaces it with a square bracket. She then supplies the verb 'sing' to complement the jussive 'κέλομαι', inferred from the general meaning of the stanza, where the *persona loquens* exhorts the two pupils Gongyla and Abanthis to take up the lyre and 'sing'.

The most deviant features of the translation are the rendition of 'ποθος τ... | [ἀμφιπτόταται' with 'longing | floats around you' and of the last stanza. The former instance is concerned with desire and floating. As delineated above, the verb 'to float'

<sup>41</sup> On Carson's translation of l. 6 of fr. 22 Voigt with 'If not, winter' see Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, 'Fragments, Brackets and Poetics: on Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter*', *IJCT*, 11 (2004), 266-272 (pp. 266-268).

is key to Carson's poetics. In 'Cassandra Float Can', she uses the verb 'to float' in three interrelated contexts: 'past floating', 'Greek metrics float inside a Trojan silence', while the etymologists reveal 'being [...] as it floats inside things'. Carson ultimately concludes that translation as a form of prophecy dissects 'how we float'. The verb appears to describe the phenomenon of the manifestation of being (as an unreachable meaning). Considering the poet's theorization of longing for understanding as the driving force of writing and translation, the version of fr. 22 contains *in nuce* all the foundational elements of Carson's poetics. The relationship between longing, floating and language is elliptically established in the last lines of the fragment. She translates:

ὡς ἄρα μα[ι  
 τοῦτο τῶ[  
 β]όλλομα[ι

with:

Because I prayed  
 This word:  
 I want

While the meaning of the words in English approximates the Greek, Carson fills the gap after the neuter article 'τῶ['] and adds 'word', followed by a colon, which is absent from the Greek text. She cleverly fabricates a syntactically consistent sentence out of the corrupted fragment. Yet 'β]όλλομα[ι' was most certainly not a self-standing word in the original Greek. It was probably the main verb of a second clause following 'ἄρα μα[ι'. By translating 'β]όλλομα[ι' with 'I want', the gnomic ending takes on sexual connotations. While the Greek verb expresses a general will, meaning 'to make a decision', it does not indicate a sexual desire. Aeolic Greek had several other words to express sexual longing, such as the verbs 'ἰμέρω' and 'ποθήω' (with their cognate substantives: 'ἴμερος' and 'πόθος'), consistently employed by Sappho

and usually translated by Carson with: ‘to long’, ‘longing’ and rarely with ‘desire’ or ‘yearning’.<sup>42</sup> In fr. 22’s last lines Carson builds on the previous stanza, where the narrative voice puts herself into a contest with Aphrodite, dragging the whole weight of the fragment down to two concepts: word and desire.

The wounding quality of word utterances is also stressed through Aphrodite’s disapproval. Some of the Sapphic themes which Carson repeatedly exploits in her oeuvre are present in this poem: eroticism, longing, the relationship between desire and words and the presence of the ritual aspect of prayer, in itself a performative act. In *If Not, Winter*, it is never clear whether Carson speaks like Sappho, or Sappho speaks like Carson. Carson’s personal vocabulary, and especially the recurrent key words she employs to refer to writing, infuses her translation of Sappho. The contexts of the metaphors are similar in both her translating language and her poetic language:

Fr. 120

But I am not someone who likes to wound  
Rather I have a quiet mind.

[ἀλλά τις οὐκ ἔμμι παλιγκότων  
ὄργαν, ἀλλ ἀβάκην τὰν φρέν ἔχω]

Wounding in relation to body and writing, as expounded in the previous section, is a fundamental theme in Carson’s work. The mind is a place where the self is defined and where the feeling of a desire for understanding forms. Wounding itself takes place in the mind. In her distych translation of Sappho 120 Voigt, wounding is linked to the activity of the mind. But Carson draws from one of the secondary meanings of the Greek ‘παλιγκότων’ (‘adverse’, ‘hostile’) to achieve the effect. She picks the meaning related to the semantic field of medicine: ‘to exacerbate’, mostly used to describe

<sup>42</sup> For the translations ‘to long’ / ‘longing’ see *If Not, Winter*, fr. 1, 22, 36, 48, 74b, 94, 96, 102; for ‘ἔμπερος’ translated with ‘desire’ see fr. 78, 137, for ‘ἔμπερος’ translated with ‘yearning’ see fr. 95.

illnesses and wounds. A literal translation of the line would be: ‘but I am not one prone to anger / hostility’. Showing an attentive study of the Greek Carson digs into the secondary meanings of words tingeing the lyrics with her own personal interpretation. This is consistent with her idea of translation as the unveiling of a word which transfers its subjective emotional effect onto the individual who translates.

Carson’s views on language, textual instability and her notion of poetry as a manifestation of erotic desire to understand inform her playful attitude to the linguistic multiplicity of the Greek text and its numerous variants. In her translation of fr. 1 Voigt she emends Voigt’s Greek text.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the commonly accepted ‘Ποικιλόθρον’ she inserts the variant ‘Ποικίλοφρον’ in line 1. As she also points out in her notes to the text, all the most recent critical editions by Lobel, Page, Campbell and Voigt reject ‘ποικίλοφρον’ as a *lectio facillior*. In a rather unscholarly manner, she justifies her choice as follows:

it is Aphrodite’s agile mind that seems to be at play in the rest of the poem and, since compounds of thron- are common enough in Greek poetry to make this word predictable, perhaps Sappho relied on our ear to supply the chair while she went on to spangle the mind.  
(*If Not, Winter*, p. 357)

The poet is keen to link back to Sappho the relationship between mind and eros at the basis of her theories on triangulation. Yet it seems that Carson’s mind spangled Sappho’s text with her own interpretation of it, rather than the opposite.

I described above how the Sapphic structure of triangulation finds expression in Carson’s poetry as the literary enactment of the fiction of the mind. The narrative structure of *Decreation* is not only tripartite, but also contains Sapphic overtones. In ‘Aphrodite’s Stroke and Dye Aria’ Carson mingles the image of Aphrodite dying her hair with the Sapphic images associated with the goddess:

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<sup>43</sup> On this and other emendations of the Voigt texts by Carson see Yatromanolakis, ‘Fragments, Brackets and Poetics’, pp. 271-272.

And the fantasies kept sending me out those dusty dawns I couldn't find  
 Even a palmful of it  
 To damp  
 The tarmac.

Night gives no relief, night installs it and hurts me.  
 Other women  
 No doubt  
 Put this to use:  
 Backed up roses bleed out the ends of my hair.  
 I beg you  
 Keep looking.  
 [...]  
 (p. 192)

Roses are related to the iconography of Aphrodite, the goddess of desire with whom Sappho has a privileged relationship (cfr. fr. 1). In Sappho's poetry, as I have shown multiple times in this thesis, roses, scarlet and purple flowers are employed to describe or symbolically refer to girls as objects of desire. Moreover, the Pierian roses connects the floral image to poetry as a blooming, and poems as flowers (fr. 55): 'Pieria is a mountainous region in northern Greece which was believed to be the birthplace of the muses; the works of the Muses—music, dance, poetry, learning, culture—are symbolised by their roses'.<sup>44</sup> The colour of the dye dripping from Aphrodite's head is described as roses bleeding out of her hair, linking the image of roses blooming to both the ritual loss of maidenhood, and also to poetic creation as a wounding. In this passage we also find the contrast between the light of dawn ('dusty dawns') and the darkness of night ('night gives no relief') in connection to desire, blooming and defloration. These are the same defining elements of the Sapphic appropriations by Pascoli and Pound.

Sappho constitutes the hidden thread between light, beauty and ritual defloration in *The Beauty of the Husband*. The opening immediately focuses on the

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<sup>44</sup> Carson's note to fr. 55 in *If Not, Winter*, p. 368.

theme of marriage: ‘What is being delayed? | Marriage I guess.’ (p. 5) The theme of eros as an agent of enlightenment and its mythical connection to the natural alternation of day, night and seasons has also Sapphic roots. Lanata notes:

C’è, in Saffo come in Pindaro, non il motivo dell’innamoramento a prima vista, come si avrà più tardi nella ripresa teocritea, ma la registrazione espresso in modo quasi formulare del potere di seduzione erotica che lo spettacolo ‘luminoso’ della bellezza esercita sui sensi e attraverso i sensi, ma l’amore luminoso del sole e la bellezza, [...] (fr. 58, 26), non sono in Saffo dei semplici vagheggiamenti estetici: il ‘barbaglio luminoso’ [...] (fr. 16, 18) del volto di Anattoria anche nel ricordo rievoca l’amore, come i ‘raggi che barbagliano’ [...] (Pindaro, fr. 123, 2-3) dagli occhi di Teosseo travolgono immediatamente chi non abbia un umore di ferro nell’ondata della passione.<sup>45</sup>

Carson references this article and its discussion of Sappho’s phenomenology of desire in her notes to fr. 38 (‘You burn me’) in *If Not, Winter* (p. 366). Carson’s appropriations repeat the same pattern presented by Pound, and before him Pascoli, directly linking eroticism to light (or solar myths).

*The Beauty of the Husband* is the story of a marriage falling apart due to the unfaithfulness of a husband. Several narrative voices overlap, providing multiple perspectives on the recollected events. The two main viewpoints are the wife’s and the husband’s. Following her husband’s betrayal the wife gets involved in a second relationship with another man. The triangular structure wife-husband-lover holds the narrative poem together. Within triangulation the wedding as the ritual sealing a woman’s coming of age through the discovery of womanhood and sex is explored. Framing the narrative into a lyric environment, a series of epigraphs from Keats’ work introduces each of the twenty-nine chapters, or ‘Tangos’. The Keatsian fragments constitute a supra-narrative thread, topically connected to the internal narrative of the Tangos. For instance, the epigraph to the second ‘Tango’, taken from *Otho the Great, A Tragedy in Five Acts* (I. I. 137-39), reads: ‘Tis chosen I hear from Hymen’s jewelry,

<sup>45</sup> Giuliana Lanata, ‘Sul linguaggio amoroso di Saffo’, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, 2 (1966), 63-79 (pp. 76-77).

| And you will prize it, lady, I doubt not, | Beyond all pleasure past and all to come.’

(p. 7) Echoing the use of the ritual invocations to Hymen by Pound and Pascoli, the reference to the divinity of weddings and defloration is salient. It creates a parallelism with the Sapphic strand of the narrative. In the second Tango Carson proceeds to describe the first intercourse with her husband. In the last lines of the Tango, she also explains how the experience offered the poetic occasion for her Short Talk ‘On Defloration’.<sup>46</sup>

Intertextual references to Sappho are woven into the text of the *Beauty of the Husband* at key moments of interaction between wife and husband or wife and lover. So, in ‘Tango XIX’, the wife asks her husband during an exasperated argument: ‘Be my ally’, which is the ending line of Sappho’s fr. 1, as she translates it in *If Not, Winter*. In ‘Tango XXVIII’, approaching the end of the poem, Carson uses a pastiche technique in which references to Sappho fr. 2 are evident and inserted into a discussion of desire. The scene is coloured in red, one of the prominent shades in Sapphic poetry:

So you see  
I work at correcting the past—  
As Ray put it (title of one of his paintings) Me and My Desire under the Red  
Stars—

What was coming through the night there like holy Aphrodite orchids,  
Blackish red,  
Or apple branches with sounds of cold water rushing by them in the dark.

The name of the lover is ‘Ray’, associating the erotic scene with the sphere of light. The second stanza of this excerpt is a reworking of Sappho 2. In the ancient fragment we find the image of cold water resounding through apple branches, roses giving shadow and a meadow coming into bloom with spring flowers.

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<sup>46</sup> *Plainwater*, p. 33.

Similar phrases can be found in the second stanza of Sappho fr. 2 in *If Not*,

*Winter*:

And in the **cold water** makes a clear sound through  
**Apple branches** and with roses the whole place  
 Is shadowed and down from radiant-shaking leaves  
 Sleep comes dropping.  
 (p. 7)

The flowers of Aphrodite in the excerpt from ‘Tango XXVIII’ are specified to be dark red orchids instead of roses, which visually and linguistically layer the passage with erotic references. The Sapphic flowers in the epithalamia are purple (for instance, in fr. 105b Voigt: ‘on the ground the purple flower’), while the etymology of the name ‘orchid’ is from the Greek word for scrotum (‘ὄρχις’), adding a further sexual connotation to the flowers.<sup>47</sup>

Carson’s depiction of the wife’s loss of virginity in epithalamic poetry resounds in ‘Tango VI’, subtitled: ‘To clean your hooves here is a dance in honour of the grape which throughout history has been a symbol of revelry and joy not to say analogy for the bride as uncut blossom’ (p. 29). The subtitle also connects popular seasonal festivities to natural cycles and folkloric symbols; the grape is the traditional symbol of the virgin bride in Catullus 62:

Ut uidua in nudo uitis quae nascitur aruo,  
 Numquam se extollit, numquam mitem educat uuam,  
 Sed tenerum prono deflectens pondere corpus  
 Iam iam contingit summum radice flagellum;  
 Hanc nulli agricolae, nulli coluere iuenci:  
 At si forte eadem est ulmo conuncta marito,  
 Multi illam agricolae, multi coluere iuenci:  
 sic uirgo dum intacta manet, dum inculta senescit;  
 (ll. 49-56)

In the same carmen the bride is also compared to an ‘uncut blossom’:

Ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,  
 Ingotus pecori, nullo conuolsus aratro,

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<sup>47</sup> See *OED*: ‘orchideous’.

[...]  
 multi illum pueri, multae optauere puellae:  
 idem cum tenui carptus defloruit ungui,  
 nulli illum pueri, nullae optauere puellae:  
 Sic uirgo, dum intacta manet, dum cara suis est;  
 Cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem,  
 Nec pueris iucunda manet, nec cara puellis.  
 (ll. 39-47)

As for Pascoli, phytomorphic representations of virginity and defloration are illuminated by the Sapphic framework. Carson continues to describe a winemaking scene in the countryside, after which the (still unmarried) couple has sex:

Naked in the stone place it was true, sticky stains, skin, I lay on the hay  
 And he licked.  
 Licked it off.  
 Ran out and got more dregs in his hands and smeared  
 it on my knees neck belly licking. Plucking. Diving.  
 Tongue is the smell of October to me.  
 (p. 29)

The metaphor of a blossom being plucked to refer to the act of defloration is the same which Pascoli and Pound employ. The word ‘defloration’ and the verb ‘to deflower’ linguistically contain the poetic image of loss of virginity as the cutting of a blossom in their Latin etymology: *de-floresco* means to ‘remove the flower’. The roots of this image are for all three poets to be found in the epithalamia of Catullus and the monodic lyric of Sappho. The red roses, which Sappho employed as ‘the pattern for her sense of beauty’,<sup>48</sup> indeed appear as symbols of defloration in ‘Tango IX’. Here the theme is also connected to the myth of Persephone being abducted by Hades in the ‘Homeric Hymn to Demeter’, determining the alternation of the seasons on earth. Moreover, the pattern of the alternation of day and night and the seasons is associated by both Pound and Pascoli with the pattern of *eros* and *thanatos*, which is also allegorised in the Persephone myth. In the myth of Persephone and Hades, death and

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<sup>48</sup> Davenport, p. 9.

rebirth are represented as a strife between vital force (Demeter) and death (Hades). In Carson's poem, Hades and Demeter provide a parallel pair to the seducer of the adolescent girl and her mother:

Roses in your room'd he send you those?'

Yes.

What's the occasion?

No occasion.

What's going on with the color.

Color.

Ten white one red what's that mean.

Guess they ran out of white.

To abolish seduction is a mother's goal.

She will replace it with what is real: products.

Demeter's victory

over Hades

does not consist in her daughter's arrival from down below,

it's the world in bloom—

cabbages lures lambs broom sex milk money!

These kill death.

I still have that one red rose dried to powder now.

It did not mean hymen as she thought.

(p. 42)

The deflowering is craftily connected to words, as Carson suggests in the subtitle and the first stanza of 'Tango IX':

'IX. BUT WHAT WORD WAS IT'

Word that overnight

Showed up on all the walls of my life inscribed *simpliciter* no explanation.

What is the power of the unexplained.

(p. 41)

As words are wounds, defloration involves a kind of wounding, too. Carson is questioning the meaning of the act as she would question the meaning of a word, opening up the discussion to the questions of gender roles in society. Through the interplay between highly lyrical lines and the staged ritual of the marriage, Carson

exploits the tension between the private and public spheres, the inside and the outside world, the visible and the hidden.

Rituals such as weddings, whether ancient or contemporary, are ways of dealing with the gap between the symbolic and the factual, as well as the gap of signification occurring between the two realms.<sup>49</sup> Speaking of ancient vase images representing wedding scenes Carson comments:

[T]hese paintings, although evocative of mythical prototypes like the rape of Persephone, are not in themselves to be interpreted as mythical scenes but as ideal representations of normal wedding rites, bristling with ambiguities as such rituals do in many cultures. [...] From beneath these social and religious layers, however, a fundamental emotional fact exerts its shaping pressure on iconography and ritual concept: eros. Such societal and aesthetic sanction given at once to lover's pursuit and beloved's flight has its image on Greek vases as a moment of impasse in the ritual of courtship, its conceptual ground in the traditionally bittersweet character of desire. *Odi et amo* intersect; there is the core and symbol of eros, in the space across which desires reaches. (*Eros the Bittersweet*, p. 25)

The impasse created by unresolved and frustrated erotic longing is the drive not only of poetry and art but also of rituals as representations of life. All these elements, which constitute the framework of Carson's oeuvre, are found *in nuce* in the ancient lyric of Sappho and Catullus. The exploration of bittersweet love is inspired by Sappho 130 Voigt ('Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me— | Sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in') and Catullus 85 ('Odi et amo quare id faciam fortasse requiris | Nescio sed fieri sentio et excrucior').<sup>50</sup> While Pound defined eros as the emotional base of humanity, Carson states that eros is a 'fundamental emotional fact'. Both poets give to eros the characteristic of vital force.

In 'Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity' Carson uses Sappho's poetry to explore representations of the feminine in

<sup>49</sup> 'Dirt and Desire, Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity', in *MOH*, pp. 130-157.

<sup>50</sup> In *MOH* Carson translates carmen 85: 'Odi et Amo ("I Hate and I love Perhaps You Ask Why")', p. 42.

ancient ritual. She interprets Sappho 31 as a literary enactment of the ancient wedding ritual of the *anakalypteria*, the unveiling of the bride. Sappho herself is treated as one of the actors in the ritual performance. Yet unveiling is also the metaphor that Carson uses for translation and writing in 'Cassandra Float Can'. Throughout her oeuvre, Carson creates a cluster of interconnected metaphors, which present themselves in diverse fashions according to the context. This multiplication of interpretative layers recalls Pound's mythical cluster of Eros. Carson's multifaceted cluster is constantly expanding and cannot be reduced to one of the single elements composing it.

To the ritual patterns which are at the base of Pascoli's and Pound's appropriations of ancient lyric (studied in Chapter 1 and 3), she adds the fundamental element of the exploration of female representation and sexuality. Only when the different elements are considered in a dialectic relationship with each other can we make sense of them:

The poem [fr. 31] is framed in verbs of seeming. 'He seems to me' (*phainetai*) it begins. 'I seem to me' (*phainomai*) it ends. The Greek verb φαίνεσθαι means 'to be seen', 'to appear', 'to be made manifest,' 'to stand revealed.' As a confession of love and at the same time an evocation of the *anakalypteria*, this is a poem devised 'out of revelation itself', as Longinus says. Yet it is not the bride who stands revealed at this wedding. It is not the material boundaries of a bridal veil that fall open. It is not the bridegroom who suddenly sees what he has not seen before. Sappho has constructed her poem as a play upon the ritual formalities of the unveiling ceremony in order to situate her own emotions, which are intensely personal and properly hidden emotions, at the single most extraordinary moment of exposure in female life and so to bend its ritual meaning onto herself with an irony of reference as sharp as a ray of light. The result is what James Joyce would call 'infrahuman': the bride is unveiled, but the poet renders herself transparent. [...] Sappho has chosen the most solemn and authoritative of the rituals that sacralise female boundaries and used it to explode the distinction between the outside and the inside of her self. (pp. 151-152)

Sappho and her lyric poetry are inscribed within the public sphere of symbolic rituals and their anthropological framework. Sappho's poetry contains this tension between the private and public spheres of existence. In 'Dirt and Desire' lyric poetry is

portrayed as the struggle of the feminine self to acquire the state of independent space for the private and gain independence from the social context of ritual. Sappho ultimately appears so impossibly irresistible to Carson not only because she is the archetypal female poet, but also because she is a figure of unknowing, identified as the driving force of existence: ‘Sappho is one of those people of whom the more you see the less you know’ (‘Dirt and Desire’, p. 152).<sup>51</sup>

The interplay between the private and the public spheres of identity is staged by Carson in the two poems entitled ‘TV Men: Sappho’ in *Men in the Off Hours* (see complete texts in Appendix 12).<sup>52</sup> In both, Sappho features as a character. She stages as an actress of a television series. In the first poem, Sappho coincides with the *persona loquens*. She pictures her impressions of a TV-set in Place de la Concorde in Paris. Sappho’s internal monologues are centred on the concepts of law and lawfulness: ‘No one knows what the laws are. That there are laws | we know, by the daily burnings if nothing else.’ (p. 62) Carson builds Sappho’s character by reference to the ancient poet’s lyrics. In her academic essay ‘The Justice of Aphrodite in Sappho I’ Carson in fact gives an interpretation of fragment 1 arguing that it is a non-ironic display of the dynamics underpinning the ancient Greek conception of ‘erotic justice’ as an ‘eternal principle’.<sup>53</sup> Sappho’s figure becomes an act on the fictional contemporary stage created by Carson’s poetry. The poetic persona is shaped by Carson’s contemporary interpretation of Sappho, displaying the Canadian poet’s non-linear view of time and literature.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Carson concerns herself with marriage rituals also in *Decreation*, ‘Totality: the Colour of Eclipse’, pp. 147-154.

<sup>52</sup> *MOH*, pp. 62-63; 118.

<sup>53</sup> Anne Carson, ‘The Justice of Aphrodite in Sappho I’, in *Reading Sappho*, ed. by Greene, pp. 226-232.

<sup>54</sup> In the same collection, Carson explicitly references Einstein’s theory of spacetime by referencing the concept of ‘elsewhere’ in ‘Epitaph: Zion’: ‘Here lies the refuges breather | Who drank a bowl of elsewhere’, *MOH*, p. 9.

In the second poem, a third person narrator observes Sappho preparing herself to appear on the set. Several voices interject at different points of the composition:

*Places everyone, calls the director.*

*Toes to the line please, says the assistant cameraman.*

*Action!*

Sappho stares into the camera and begins, *Since I am a poor man—*

Different verbal utterances, marked by italics, mingle with an unidentified narrative voice. The external narrator speaks every first line of the poem's eight distichs. In the second lines of the stanzas, another distinct voice takes the lead:

Sappho is smearing on her makeup at 5 a.m. in the woods by the hotel.  
He She Me You Thou disappears

Now resembling a Beijing concubine Sappho makes her way onto the set.  
Laugh Breathe Look Speak Is disappears

Every second line is composed of an unpunctuated list of words referring to Sappho 31, whose last line is misquoted at the end of the poem by Sappho's character. She utters: '*Since I am a poor man—*', instead of 'even a poor man', confusing Sappho's gender. The poem is entitled 'TV Men: Sappho'. Sappho's character recites the last line of fr. 31 in the first person implying that her character is a man. At the same time she is described as a Beijing female concubine in line 3, and throughout the poem Sappho is referred to with feminine pronouns. In 'Dirt and Desire' Carson also questions the ancient category of 'female'; in both the essay and in 'TV: Men', Sappho, as a female homosexual poet and the paradigm of unknowing, offers Carson a starting point to develop her own questioning of gender categories.

When read in a sequence the second lines of the first six stanzas of 'TV Men: Sappho' look like a lattice composed of the key words of fragment 31:

He She Me You Thou disappears  
 [...]

Laugh Breathe Look Speak Is disappears [γελαίσας, ἴδω, φώνη-ς', ἔμμεν']  
 [...]

Tongue Flesh Fire Eyes Sound disappears [γλῶσσα, πῦρ, οπάτεσσι]  
 [...]

Cold Shaking Green Little Death disappears [ἴδρωσ, τρόμος, χλωροτέρα,  
 ὀλίγω, τεθνάκην]  
 [...]

Nearness When Down In I disappears [πλάσιον, ὤς, ἐν]  
 [...]

But All And Must To disappears [ἀλλὰ πᾶν, καί, τόλματον]  
 (p. 118)

Carson translates the key words of fr. 31 in a different grammatical form, scattering them in the five sequences of the poem.

The repetition of the word ‘disappear’ is a reference to the corrupted state of the Sapphic fragments and an indirect reference to Emily Dickinson’s line ‘To disappear enhances’. In an introductory address at Cornell University (17 February 2012) preceding the performance of ‘Bracko’ Carson stated that:

[Sappho] does seem to exist as pleasure for us as much as because of what is lacking as because of what is present. Every history of Sappho contains so much that it does not contain. When I translated Sappho’s fragments in a book a few years ago I attempted to suggest these various kinds of absence-presence by using brackets and empty space on the pages. There is a stanza of Emily Dickinson that summarizes the sensation I was trying to evoke. It’s from a poem that begins: ‘To disappear enhances’ and it ends with the stanza:

The fruit perverse to plucking  
 But leaning to the sight  
 With the ecstatic limit  
 Of unobtained delight.<sup>55</sup>

The Sapphic disappearing defines the absence of the poetic addressee but also the corrupted state of the fragment’s text, which has the function of stirring poetic imagination, thus enhancing the expressive power of the poems. The parallelism

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Anne Carson Performs “Bracko” and “Cassandra Float Can”’, min. 9:02-9:28.

between Sappho's poetry and Dickinson's writings is also made explicit in the notes of *If Not, Winter*.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the fact that *Men in the Off Hours*, published in 2000, chronologically precedes both *If Not, Winter* and 'Bracko', Carson finds equivalence between Sappho and Dickinson's lines early on. Dickinson is alluded to twice in *Men in the Off Hours*: the poem 'Sumptuous Destitution' is structured on a string of quotations from Dickinson's letters, while 'Flat Man (2<sup>nd</sup> draft)' (ll.16-29) contains an intertextual reference to Dickinson's 'There is A Certain Slant of Light'.<sup>57</sup> The reference to 'unobtained delight' thus enriches the word 'disappears' in 'TV Men' with extra connotative layers, connecting absence to the dimension of frustrated desire: 'unobtained delight'. Through the intertextual reference to Dickinson the metaphor of virginity as uncut blossom ('The fruit perverse to plucking') and the inability to fulfil one's desire is brought into a Sapphic framework. 'Disappearing' connects Sappho to the figure of unknowing as the driving force of erotic desire.

The allure of mystery around Sappho's figure is increased by the imagery of the poem. Sappho's makeup, for some reason, is smeared, yet no contextual information is provided; her appearance is effaced, just like her text. The references to fragment 31 as a corrupted papyrus text are reinforced by the utterance of the cameraman 'toes to the line' and the last word of the poem: 'Cut'. Sappho the poet, Sappho the archetypal figure of love, as well as Sappho as a textual presence intermingle. Through a staging of the Sapphic persona and the mixing of different voices, the public and private dimension of the poem coalesce, creating Sappho's afterlife. The dissemination of excerpts of the lyric fragments of Sappho in Carson's poems highlights her synchronic view of literature. The contemporary reception of

<sup>56</sup> *If Not, Winter*, p. 371.

<sup>57</sup> *MOH*, p. 13 and 25; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by R.W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Sappho is formed by historical sources, textual tradition and poetic appropriations. Carson's poetry deconstructs the figure of Sappho; yet by casting the figure of the ancient poet into her own writing she grants the survival of Sappho's fiction.

## 2.2 Carson and Catullus: Giving Thanatos Back to Eros

Catullus, too, however less prominently, features in Carson's poetry. Inevitably, being Latin, he does not hold the same archetypal appeal as Sappho. Indeed himself a translator of Sappho fr. 31, Catullus belongs already to the legacy of archaic Greek lyric. Carson engages with Catullus at two points: in the series of fifteen translations entitled 'Carmina' in *Men in the Off Hours* and throughout *Nox*.

Sex, eroticism and the realm of the mind are the main threads running through the series of earlier Catullan translations in *Men in the Off Hours*. Yet the seed of the elegiac strand which would fully grow in *Nox* is already present. John D'Agata notes that the whole middle section of the book to which the series of Catullan poems belongs 'could be considered a meditation on translation: its virtues, vices, and ultimate potential for duplicating the kind of lyric experience that readers have come to expect in poetry, and thus the kind of thing Carson is prone to try to complicate.'<sup>58</sup> The lyric experience that Carson complicates through the translation of Sappho and Catullus shares affinities with the kind of classical lyricism outlined in the previous chapters. It is possible to trace a line from Carson to the experiments of Pound, Eliot, and also, as D'Agata remarks, Robert Lowell's *Imitations* (1961) and Christopher Logue's Homeric reinventions in *War Music* (1981-1994).<sup>59</sup> The translations in *Men in the Off Hours*, ordered according to the Latin numbering, include carmina 2, 76,

<sup>58</sup> John D'Agata, 'Review of Men in the Off Hours.'

<sup>59</sup> John D'Agata, 'Review of Men in the Off Hours'; Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Frank Bidart (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), pp. 193-418; Christopher Logue, *War Music* (London: Faber, 2001).

96, 101, 109, which deal with death or mourning (carmen 2 and 101). The rest of the translations are concerned with sex, unrequited love or justice. The dimension of longing is present in all 15 lyrics, either as frustrated sexual desire or longing for an absent person.

The translations are loosely modelled on the Latin: Carson freely omits or adds lines; she moulds the Latin material to fit a contemporary setting. Some lines contain references to modern historical events or objects: 'It's the one she calls Little Bottle after Deng Xiapoing' ('*Passer Deliciae Meae Puellae* (My Lady's Pet)', l. 4); 'Why can't I | Live in the nineteenth century' ('*Salve nec minimo Puella Naso* (Hello Not Very Small Nosed Girl)', ll. 6-7); 'Opened the fridge' ('*Hesterno Licini Die Otiosi* (Yesterday Licinius at Our Ease)', l. 7); 'I drove an ambulance for the Red Cross' ('*Siqua Recordanti Benefacta Priora Voluptas* (If for a Man Recalling Prior Benefactions)', l. 3).

There are no references to defloration or marriage, which are reserved to female speaking personas and the Sapphic realm. However, in her version of Carmen 2 '*Passer Deliciae Meae Puellae* (My Lady's Pet)', compressing the Latin poem into a four-line stanza, Carson plays on the symbolic sexual function of the *passer* in the Catullan poems. First she turns Catullus' sparrow into a dog and transposes the erotic connotations carried by the Latin 'passer' into a series of erotic allusions: 'On her lap one of the matted terriers. | She was combing around its genitals.' (ll. 1-2) The sexual connotations in Catullus' carmen are conveyed allegorically. The relationship between the Lady and her pet is apparently asexual. The lady in Catullus limits herself to feeding the sparrow. In Carson the sexual content is made explicit. The interaction between the poet and the pet suggests sexual innuendos: 'It grinned I grinned back', the Catullan persona gazing sardonically. D'Agata notes on 'Carmina':

The scholar in Carson intends to advance the conversation about translation and appropriation and the contract of artistic license between critic and poet. Carson the artist, on the other hand, is exploring the outer limits of lyric possibility. By titling each of her riffs on Catullus after the actual first lines of his poems, and then by translating those first lines--quite literally, in most cases—Carson invites readers to participate in the very act of translation, inviting us to notice, figure out, or simply wonder where, to what extent, and why she has deviated from the original Latin.<sup>60</sup>

Carson meta-poetically draws attention to language in her translation of carmen 101 in ‘*Multas per Gentes et Multa per Aequora Vectus* (Through Peoples Through Oceans Have I Come)’ (see complete text in Appendix 13).<sup>61</sup> Catullus comes to perform a burial ritual on his brother’s tomb, bringing gifts: flower, milk, honey and wine. These were most likely the elements that would compose the gift making and the ritual, although the list does not feature in the source text.<sup>62</sup> Carson supplies the missing information. The poem in fact describes a personalised ritual of mourning.

First the speaking voice asks to cut out all the words in the list of gifts, except the word ‘brother’. Then he invites one to gather them, drop them into a bag and pour them over the dead body. The image suggests that pronouncing the words on the brother’s body would complete the ritual, thus signalling the end of mourning. Yet Carson, echoing Catullus’ skepticism, questions the validity of the ritual itself. Inspired by the figure of absence evoked by the Latin ‘mutam’, the poem asks an ambiguous first question, ‘How long does it take the sound to die away?’ The question is left hanging unanswered. The same concept is used again in the last line, with a second question, also left unanswered: ‘What sound?’ Denying any possibility of speaking with her brother or to hear from him again, she undermines the validity of the performative act of the ritual as a form of last salutation. When facing individual

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<sup>60</sup> John D’Agata, ‘Review of Men in the Off Hours’.

<sup>61</sup> *MOH*, p. 45.

<sup>62</sup> Cfr. Ellis: ‘Manantia: would seem to imply the offerings were mainly solid: possibly flowers’ (p. 481).

grief, the ritual fails and the communication between private and public spheres is interrupted. The ritual gathering of pieces, as gathering of words to make sense of death and loss, loses meaning when there is no possibility of reply to the invocation.

Carson questions the mourning ritual also in *Nox*'s translation of Carmen 101 (*Nox*, 7.2) (see complete text in Appendix 13). The translation is more adherent to the source text. Thus the line 'et mutam nequiquam adloquerer cinerem' (l. 4) is formulated as a question, foregrounding its paradoxical nature:<sup>63</sup> 'And talk (why?) with mute ash.' She in fact translates 'nequiquam' (literally 'in vain') with a provocative 'why?' In the translation the parenthesis provide a space for commentary. By internal focalisations Carson gives voice to intrusive thoughts: line 6 is broken up twice by '(wrongly)', which translates the Latin 'indigne'. This reflects the Latin poem's two levels of thought: the first that 'the ceremony requires [Catullus] to address his dead brother and to say certain things', yet inadequately; the second that 'there really exists between him and his brother some possibility of communication transcending normal experience'.<sup>64</sup> In *Nox*, Carson seems to put into question both levels of thought. She extracts Catullus' disillusionment. On these lines C. E. Robinson notes: 'in the quandoquidem clause the full realization of [Catullus'] loss comes to explain and at the same time to deepen the disillusion of which nequiquam gave the first hint.'<sup>65</sup> So in 8.5, talking about her dead brother she writes: 'There is no possibility I can think my way into his muteness', which intra-textually circles back to an earlier reflection on translation in the book: 'A brother never ends. He does not

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<sup>63</sup> 'Like all elegies, "Nox" is a massing of words facing a muteness.' Brian Seibert, 'Movement Transforms a Poet's Elegy', *The New York Times* (13 May 2012) <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/arts/dance/rashaun-mitchell-choreographs-nox-at-danspace-project.html?src=recg&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/arts/dance/rashaun-mitchell-choreographs-nox-at-danspace-project.html?src=recg&_r=0)> [Accessed 18 February 2013].

<sup>64</sup> Quinn, *Latin Explorations*, p. 81. Cfr. Giuseppe Gilberto Biondi, 'Poem 101' (1976), in *Catullus*, ed. by Gaisser, pp. 177-197 (pp. 179-180).

<sup>65</sup> C.E. Robinson, 'Multas per Gentes', *G&R*, 12 (1965), 62-63 (p. 63).

end. Prowling the meanings of a word, prowling the history of a person, no use expecting a flood of light.’ (*Nox*, 7.2)

In section 1 I have discussed how *Nox* can be considered as a statement of poetics in itself, in which Carson linguistically, visually and materially represents her ideas on literature by way of the ancient text of Catullus. For the first time in *Nox*, Catullus’ poetry is the main focus of one of Carson’s books, providing the framework for her elegy. The fact that Catullan poetry provides the scaffolding for her reflection on the death of her brother is a testimony to its key role in Carson’s writing. While the translations in the ‘Carmina’ series develop the themes of eroticism, sex and desire within a modern context, matching the lyricism proposed by the Sapphic persona, with *Nox* a shift occurs. Carmen 101, the elegy Catullus addresses to his brother, is dissected and appropriated in Carson’s elegy for her own dead brother. The themes of brotherhood, death and justice are the main focus of the second period of Carson’s work; she in fact takes it up again in *Antigonick*.

Significantly, *Nox* is the first book from which Sappho is absent. Notwithstanding the thematic shift, Carson’s classical lyricism in *Nox* remains concerned with the themes of desire and understanding. Replacing the theme of marriage, the reflection on ritual performativity takes place with reference to elegy, mourning and death. In the opening sections she describes ancient rituals of mourning. Several references to archaic rites are made by use of visual elements: in section 5.5, for example, Carson inserts the picture of an egg, which was a symbol of afterlife both in Greece and Latin Italy (see Figure 5 in Appendix 10).

Translation is also performed as a ritual of (partial) enlightenment, a way to negotiate the tension between silence, shadow and darkness and the unveiling of

meaning. *Nox* stresses these elements at different points.<sup>66</sup> As in Sappho's fragments, silences and shadows in Catullus' poem are made to carry meaning. The self-fashioned dictionary entries, which are sometimes placed on odd pages beside the main text, underline the presence of darkness and silences within language. Almost every single dictionary entry contains a textual example employing the word 'night'. The entry for 'Mutam' at 4.3 includes the example sentence: '*silentia muta noctis*, deep speechlessness of night'. 'Nox', the Latin word for 'night', is in fact also a synonym of 'death'. In the dictionary entry for 'mortis' Carson remarks: '*patiens noctis* liable to endure death, mortal: death as a personified agent of deity, Death; death as a state (usually in phrase in nocte when dead)'. Her crafted constructions of the lemmas are a way to pierce the surface of the Latin words and show their floating meaning. The process of unveiling is displayed in its different stages through the multiple definitions of the dictionary entries.

Carson's translations and engagement with the classical legacy are productive. On the one hand they presuppose Greek and Latin as living languages; on the other hand, the poet's appropriations construct the ancient texts' afterlife. Carson shapes her voice against Catullus' and Sappho's poetry, but she simultaneously generates the authors' afterlife by intervening on the source and target texts on which their reception progresses.

*Nox* suggests that silence and death are complementary to the erotic drive behind language and poetry, which Carson highlights in the rest of her oeuvre: 'eros is a verb'. Darkness and silences are the very matter of translation, and yet their untranslatability can only be interrupted by temporary glimpses of light, 'kidnaps'.

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<sup>66</sup> *Nox*, 9.1.

Death thus becomes elemental to both the life cycle and language: words contain silences, dawn is followed by darkness, *eros* is brother to *thanatos*.

### 3. Dancing Your Way to the Afterlife: Ancient Lyric in Multimedia Performances

In the more recent collections, Carson has been increasingly exploiting the relationship between poetry and performativity. *Decreation* includes opera librettos and scripts for the theatre. Most significantly, Carson has employed her translations of the lyric fragments of Sappho and her elegiac piece *Nox* to create dramatic readings. The multimedia performance piece ‘Bracko’ premiered on 4 December 2008 at the Skirball Centre for the Performing Arts in New York. On the same night, another collaborative piece entitled ‘Stacks’ was staged, too:

Language, dance, and sculpture collide in ‘STACKS,’ a work exploring themes of collapse in the human body, grammar, and everyday objects. In 2007, Carson created the original text, inspired by sculptor Peter Cole’s exploration of piled objects that subvert the tradition of walkaround sculpture. This coincided with Carson’s collaboration with choreographer Jonah Bokaer about collapse in the human body. ‘Stacks’ results in a multi-disciplinary performance, including a live reading by Carson, new choreography by Bokaer, and immersive sculpture by Cole. “Bracko” features Carson’s celebrated translations from “If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho,” with choreography by Mitchell. This performance features a projected backdrop of brackets, which corresponds to the punctuation Carson used in her translations, indicating what was absent on the original papyrus.<sup>67</sup>

The analogy between the collapse of texts into fragments and the fragmented body is made explicit in ‘Stacks’ and ‘Bracko’. These multimedia performances including text, acting, dancing, sculpture and, sometimes, music, while subdued in tone, have the allure of a ‘total’ work of art, an all-encompassing take on reality. Carson

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<sup>67</sup> ‘The A List’, *The Villager*, 78 (19 November 2008) <[http://thevillager.com/villager\\_290/thealist.html](http://thevillager.com/villager_290/thealist.html)> [Accessed 18 February 2013] and New York University Website <<http://cwp.fas.nyu.edu/object/cwp.ne.reading.2008.12.4>> [Accessed 19 February 2013].

effectively inscribes essay excerpts and the lyric fragments, two traditionally non-dialogic forms, into the dialogic.

In the 2012 performance at Cornell University, including also a student-led dramatic piece and the multimedia reading of ‘Cassandra Float Can’, Carson introduced ‘Bracko’ as:

A choral work; it’ll be performed by myself, Robert Currie, Jacob Brogand and Dan Smicker. The score was created by myself and Currie using various chance operations, including a star-map of the night-sky of the Island of Lesbos of the night Sappho was born, and various other mechanisms.<sup>68</sup>

The performance included four actors reading, actors playing on stage, and video projections on the backdrop. The four voices alternated and overlapped. Single words or lines were read at times by different actors, at times by some or all of them together. Carson and Currie read the English translation of the Greek text by Carson; the first actor gave voice to the gaps in the text pronouncing the word ‘bracket’ when marked in the text of the translation; the second actor read the titles and some of the notes Carson included in the back of *If Not, Winter*. This created a complex choral effect, which also staged the different layers behind the Sapphic text today, including the lacunae and the scholarly annotations.

‘Bracko’ completely disrupts the illusion of authenticity of the Sapphic lyric voice by disseminating her fragment into the choral performance. The chance mechanisms heighten the depersonalizing effect. John Cage and Merce Cunningham were the first to use chance techniques in their music and choreography:

The first music that John Cage wrote according to chance operations was *Music of Changes* in 1951. [...] And Merce decided to extend them into his choreographic processes. The first piece in which he used chance operations was a long work called *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three*, in

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Anne Carson Performs ‘Bracko’ and ‘Cassandra Float Can’, min. 9:30-9:55.

the same year, 1951. [...] [T]here was a quartet, the last dance but one in the piece, of which the whole choreography was done by chance.<sup>69</sup>

The two artists also produced several collaborative pieces involving visual artists and writers, in which music, choreography, writing and visuals were composed independently.<sup>70</sup> The first event of this kind took place in 1952 at Black Mountain College, paving the way to the Happenings.<sup>71</sup>

Carson's work follows this tradition. The poet expressed her admiration for Cunningham with a poem published upon his death.<sup>72</sup> Rashaun Mitchell—a former member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company—created the choreography for 'Bracko'. The 'chance operations' add an extra interpretative key to 'Bracko', as if Carson was adding arbitrariness to her equation on language and meaning. This makes sense in the light of the element of randomness involved in the transmission of ancient texts from antiquity to the present.<sup>73</sup>

In both 'Stacks' and 'Bracko' the staging of the collapse of the text and the human body through different media has a depersonalizing effect. The different voices reciting lines or words of the same fragment shatter the already feeble unity of the poems. In 'Bracko' words are disembodied from Sappho (both as author and *dramatis persona*) and consigned to a rarified oral space, in which they are free to roam without the constraint of grammar or meaning. The fragments of Sappho are woven into a wider net, in which textual silences are given voice and grammatical, spatial and bodily constraints have subsided. Nonetheless the process of deconstruction is counterbalanced by the unity of the pieces. These multimedia

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<sup>69</sup> Earle Brown, Remy Charlip, Marianne Preger Simon, David Vaughan, 'The Forming of an Esthetic: Merce Cunningham and John Cage (1985)', in *Merce Cunningham: Dancing in Space and Time*, ed. by Richard Kostelanetz (London: Dance Books, 1992), pp. 48-65 (p. 48).

<sup>70</sup> Jacqueline Lesschaeve, *The Dancer and the Dance: Merce Cunningham in Conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve* (London: Maryon Boyars, 1991), p. 137.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> 'Merce Sonnet', *LRB*, 33.3 (2011), 8.

<sup>73</sup> Jonah Bokaer, the choreographer of 'Stacks' was also a member of the Merce Dance Company.

performances strike one as another form of re-embodiment. Sappho metamorphoses into ‘Bracko.’ We come full circle to the idea of creative translation as a ritual unveiling, a freeing, and also as a ritual process of rebirth into the afterlife.

After the 2008 New York premiere, ‘Bracko’ has been performed in different venues, often with other multimedia pieces. On 26 March 2008 at 92nd street Y, in New York, after a recitation of ‘Cassandra Float Can’, Carson commented: ‘Well now that we dismantled the house of language we are going to build it up again in poetic form’ (min. 28:21-28:28). A multimedia recitation of ‘Possessive Used As Drink (Me): A Lecture on Pronouns in the Form of 15 Sonnets’ followed. Contradiction is at the very core of Carson’s oeuvre and she relishes in it.

One of the 15 sonnets recited is ‘Sonnet Isolate’ (see complete text in Appendix 14).<sup>74</sup> In this poem the process of the construction of meaning is openly acknowledged. Some people are ‘cut out of the fog of meaning’, sonnets are ‘rectangles upon a page’, yet are given bodily attributes: ‘Whatever idea here rises from its knees’. Poetry, finally, asks for ‘a deep blue release’, a clarity defined by pairs of opposites. In order to achieve clarity, the poet must use only two pronouns: ‘I’ and ‘not-I’. But Carson’s view of poetry and language eschews clear-cut definitions.

The dynamics of contradiction and chance, which lie behind the poetic drive, involve Carson’s classical lyricism and her approach to the classical tradition. Failing to give straight answers, raising questions about ancient poets remains a way of continuing the quest for knowledge. The process of engagement with the classics and their legacy becomes meaningful in itself, so that the fragmentary and contradictory turn out to be essential to poetry. The creation of the unity of the poem appears to

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<sup>74</sup> The sonnet was published in *LRB*, 32.21 (2010), 35.

partially resolve the fragmentation and contradiction inherent to texts and language. Yet this resolution, in Carson's work, is represented as a wounding act; a forcing through the multiplicity of meaning.

'Bracko' exploits the multiplicity of meaning in several ways: manipulating the various signifieds of the term 'Sappho', and the gap occurring between what is generally thought to be 'Sappho's I' and 'Sappho's 'not I'. 'Bracko' also engages with the historical Sappho and the very scanty information we have about the performative aspect of archaic lyric. It takes Sappho as the symbol of her fragmented corpus and eventually manipulates Sappho's fictions by mixing them with the poet's archetypal status within her poetic reception. As Carson herself points out, it is impossible to establish who Sappho really was. All that has come down to the present is that Sappho was a musician, a poet, and that it is unclear whether she was literate.<sup>75</sup> By performing Sappho's fragments Carson partly gives them back to their original oral context in which '[t]he monodic lyricist sang her (or his) poetic-musical composition to her (or his) own accompaniment on a stringed instrument, usually the lyre or its somewhat less respectable relative the barbitos.'<sup>76</sup> However Sappho's poems were mostly likely sung by a solo voice. With her dramatisations Carson transposes the monodic to a choral dimension.

*Nox* was employed for a multimedia performance, too. 'Nox' (the performance) premiered in Boston in July 2010—for it, Carson collaborated again with Rashaun Mitchell, who choreographed and danced with Silar Riener in the piece.<sup>77</sup> Brian Seibert describes the performances in May 2012:

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<sup>75</sup> *If Not, Winter*, p. ix.

<sup>76</sup> John Herington, *Poetry into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 36.

<sup>77</sup> Alastair Macaulay, 'Translating Poetry to the Stage, With or Without Words', *The New York Times* (21 July 2010)

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/arts/dance/22mitchell.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/arts/dance/22mitchell.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)>

[Mitchell and Riener] are not alone. Ms. Carson and the artist Robert Currie operate overhead projectors, pedagogical devices turned to non pedagogical purposes. Ms. Carson's recorded voice reads from her book-collage of memories and repurposed scholarship. Mr. Mitchell continues solo, as if figure skating. But a shadow passes over the stained glass, and Mr. Riener rematerializes on the balcony, both walking and arching backward until he falls through a glowing doorway.<sup>78</sup>

'Nox' is akin to 'Stacks' and 'Bracko'. Only a few excerpts of the multimedia performance are available on the web.<sup>79</sup> Similarly to 'Stacks', the dancing element plays a more prominent role than in 'Bracko'. Carson is not on stage and she is present only through her voice. The focus is on one voice and the two dancers.

There is a close correlation between archaic poetry and dance. F.G. Naerebout explains that this relationship, in Greek culture, can be partly explained by the concept of *mousikē*:

[*mousikē*] can stand for all arts presided over by the Muses, indeed all artistic and scholarly pursuits, but is used more specifically for poetry, music and dance combined in a unity, what has also been called song and dance culture.<sup>80</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Paul Valéry, in his Socratic dialogue 'L'âme et la danse' (1923), speaks of dance as a metamorphic art expressing truths about the soul through the movements of the dancers. Poetic language, Valéry seems to say, should flow as dance steps. In the dialogue Socrates teases Phaedrus: 'Voici donc que tes lèvres sont envieuses de la volubilité de ces pieds prodigieux! Tu aimerais de sentir leurs ailes à tes paroles, et d'orner ce que tu dirais de figures aussi vives que leurs bonds!'<sup>81</sup> The

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[Accessed 26 February 2013]

<sup>78</sup> Seibert, 'Movement Transforms a Poet's Elegy'.

<sup>79</sup> 'Nox', Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, July 2012, (1)

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJSZXuGNp08>> [Accessed 26 February 2013]; (2)

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eDInu4Y2f4>> [Accessed 36 February 2013]

<sup>80</sup> F.G. Naerebout, *Attractive Performances: Ancient Greek Dance: Three Preliminary Studies* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1997), pp. 183; 197.

<sup>81</sup> 'So then, your lips envy the volubility of these prodigious feet! You would like to feel their wings on your words, and adorn your words with figures as lively as their leaps!' [My translation]. Paul Valéry, 'L'âme et la danse', in *Eupalinos, L'âme et la danse, Dialogue de l'arbre*, 8<sup>th</sup> edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1944), pp. 129-180 (p. 152).

relationship between metrical feet and dance steps in both archaic Greek and Latin was also essential:

There is also a marriage of foot and voice in lyric verse, but on terms far different from the independent give and take of epic. In lyric the dance is fundamentally subordinate to the word: the lyric poet is a creator of rhythm, he is never passive, except to his own peculiar rhythmic microcosm. [...] Greek lyric metres cannot be generated or understood as stylizations of normal speech rhythms, which were generally iambic in Greek as in English. The λόγος is rather required to generate a genuine and relatively independent dance pattern, composed of various kinds of ‘feet’ or dance steps—an achievement of high order in itself, which earns a Greek poet alone the title and duty of chorus-teacher (χοροδιδάσκαλος)—and then simultaneously to harmonize with it.<sup>82</sup>

Carson exploits this connection between word and choral lyric in Greek poetry. By inserting the monodic lyric of Sappho and Catullus into a choral performance she divests the two poets and lyric poetry of their specificity.

With the multimedia performances, the resurrection of Sappho and Catullus is completed. Carson not only gives the two poets a voice, a composite voice, a voice that is made of their present much more than their past, but also a context which plays with all the fragmentary information surviving about poetry in its most archetypal form. By providing Sappho and Catullus with a new body and a new setting through dramatic rendition, Carson’s operation removes the monodic lyric from inward looking solipsism, transposing it to the public sphere.

This starkly intellectual operation ends up eradicating the intimacy of the lyric as an internal monologue. It is structured on the same logic of dissemination and collapse of genre definitions initiated by Pound’s *Cantos* and operas. It partly addresses the archaic, original context of the lyric, and partly, if subjectively, provides an open space in which several versions of Sappho and Catullus are free to exist without the constriction of a keyhole view associated with a single perspective.

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<sup>82</sup> A.P. David, *The Dance of the Muses: Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 218-219.

Through her views on language, translation and her idea of living classics, Carson's classical lyricism is thus granted a free-floating existence in a horizontal, timeless present, in which the infinite questions one could ask about literature and language are more significant than their multiple possible answers.

## Conclusion

This thesis has traced, studied and evaluated the textual presence of Sappho and Catullus in some major 20<sup>th</sup>-century Italian and American poetry. I have shown that the two ancient poets are central to four leading poetics of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary tradition. Across a hundred-year span and two national literatures, Sappho and Catullus have emerged as two of the main interlocutors in the meta-poetic discourse on language and poetry.

The multifaceted poetic legacy of Sappho and Catullus in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century still negotiates the tension between the historical and fictional accounts of the two ancient poets that characterised their 19<sup>th</sup>-century reception. All four authors considered develop their classical lyricism intertextually through translations and appropriations; at the same time, the four types of classical lyricism enrich Sappho's and Catullus' afterlife by employing the figures of the two poets as fictional characters or poetic personae.

Classical lyricism is defined by four main theoretical areas shared by all four poets: poetry as the expression of the intrinsic qualities of human beings; a meta-poetic critique of language and meaning in relation to literary history; the relevance of the classical tradition and the past in contemporary poetry; and finally, translation as an interpretative, creative and vivifying process establishing a contact between past and present literature(s).

All poets' classical lyricism(s) are interwoven with their respective poetics of translation. Each author assigns translation a similar literary function, bridging the gap between the past and the present. Pascoli sees translation as the closest form of temporary re-enactment of a lost past and its authors. Translation forms eidola of dead authors through which the present can enter into contact with the past. Quasimodo

takes translation as a way to give contemporary qualities to the earliest manifestations of the lyric absolute. Pound's notion of translation as revivification by means of re-creation enacts the simultaneity of his view of literary tradition. Carson sees translation as a process of illumination of the dynamics of language and an actualization and externalisation of the future, as a dimension inherent to any literary work. While for Pascoli the ancients and the past are unrecoverable, for Quasimodo, Pound and Carson the ancients and their language are still living in the present. Translation is the vehicle of the ancients' afterlife in contemporary language. The roles of Sappho and Catullus and the forms of their poetic reception change according to the different poetics of language and translation of the four authors.

Pascoli's classical lyricism is foundational to the poet's exploration of the anthropological roots of poetry. While Sappho and Catullus are appropriated into the highly subjective poetic horizon of the poet, Pascoli draws some of the key poetic archetypes underpinning his poetics from Sappho and Catullus. On the one hand, Sappho and Catullus are the two poetic archetypes of the lyric. Sappho, and her solar myth in particular, is representative, for the poet, of the anthropological archetypes that are the manifestation of the eternal, primitive qualities of human beings. On the other hand, Sappho's and Catullus' poetry and their relationship with ritual and popular culture provide some of the elements for Pascoli's poetic syncretism. As historical manifestations of the link between nature, humans, ritual and poetry, the ancient lyrics of Sappho and Catullus become traces of the collective subjectivity of poetry, and manifestations of the poetic faculty as a discovery of this truth.

My study of a body of unpublished Sapphic translations by Pascoli supported my textual analysis and interpretation. The MSS 'Studi di Traduzione dal | Greco' and folio 8<sup>r-v</sup> were for the first time studied against Pascoli's anthropological conception

of the lyric. The analysis shed new light on Pascoli's poetic reception of Sappho, delineating a new Sapphic framework within Pascoli's oeuvre. Appropriating the ancient figure of *eros* and *thanatos* and its poetic representations in Sapphic hymenaic poetry, Pascoli grounds his symbolic sublimation of eroticism through phytomorphic representations into the epithalamia of Sappho.

The appropriative mode of Pascoli's translations, paired with his idiosyncratic monodic lyric voice, give a new form to Sappho's and Catullus' poetry. Pascoli's classical lyricism stands out as another expression of his own domestic world and subjective recollections. Sappho and Catullus are thus caught in Pascoli's expansive poetic 'I'. In one of his essays, Renato Serra poignantly expresses his dislike of Pascoli's inability to separate his individual gaze from his poetry: 'è probabile che l'uomo non mi piaccia e che uno stesso moto mi allontani l'artista; poiché l'uno e l'altro sono troppo stretti nella medesima persona'.<sup>1</sup> Pascoli's classical lyricism is a poetic reality made possible by the individual memories of the poet's past and his poetics of *thanatos athanatos*.

Salvatore Quasimodo is the only poet out of the four not to be concerned with exploring the anthropological roots of ancient lyric. Quasimodo's translations in *Lirici greci* are an intellectual operation sprung from the poet's top-down application of the hermetic poetics to the classics. Sappho's poetry functions as a paradigm of solitude and absence—two of the defining categories of the lyric according to Hermeticism.

In Pascoli the process of universalisation of poetic elements for the interpretation of reality and literature is grounded in a comparative analysis of language, culture and history inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century *Zeitgeist*. For Quasimodo, the radicalisation of the lyric genre happens through a theorization of a

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<sup>1</sup> Renato Serra, 'Giovanni Pascoli', in *Scritti*, ed. by G. De Robertis and A. Grilli, 2 vols (Florence: Le Monnier, 1938), I, 1-47 (p. 20).

metaphysical lyric absolute, of which Sappho and ancient lyric in general, are the earliest manifestations. Translation functions as a bridge between two lyric moments, distant in time and yet expressing the same aesthetic absolute, which transcends time and space. In this sense, for Quasimodo, the experience of translation itself becomes not only a form of revivification, but also a means of establishing the primacy of the lyric genre as the truthful expression of the ‘heart of man’.

Quasimodo’s appropriation of ancient lyric is aimed at giving Sappho’s and Catullus’ poetry a new contemporary lyric voice. This approach shares a concern with novelty as championed by Pound’s views of poetry and tradition. However, Quasimodo’s classical lyricism appears to be a specific product of the hermetic aesthetics of the lyric. Sappho and Catullus are associated with the militant affirmation of *letteratura come vita*, a gradual removal of the lyric from its social context and a view of lyric poetry as the highest genre. As for Pascoli, the appropriations of Sappho and Catullus are a way to justify a particular poetics from a historical perspective. Ancient lyric is irrevocably linked to the expression of poetic universals and the definition of the intrinsic qualities of human beings. Pascoli’s and Quasimodo’s classical lyricism(s) are monologic. The ancient lyrics of Sappho and Catullus are progressively absorbed into a form of aestheticism, of which *Lirici greci* is the last expression.

The problematic reception of Quasimodo’s legacy after WWII may have had an impact on the reception of Sappho and Catullus in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Italy. I have shown that the hermetic movement, and any form of aestheticism (with which Pascoli is also associated), were subject to heavy critiques from the politically engaged critical intelligentsia in the second half of the *Novecento*. *Lirici* was considered Quasimodo’s greatest poetic achievement and the emblematic

work of Hermeticism. This may have contributed to establishing the association of the ancient lyric of Sappho and Catullus with the same aestheticism that was being put into question. After 1945 indeed the attention to the ancient lyric of Sappho and Catullus in *traduzioni d'autore* dramatically diminishes.

The presence of Sappho and Catullus in the North American tradition follows an opposite trend. The lyric as genre is not universalised, but rather put into question. Like the rest of his oeuvre, Pound's classical lyricism, followed in line by Carson's, challenges the very notion of poetic genres. While the poetry of Pascoli and Quasimodo may be defined as 'epic-lyric', in that they either insert lyric fragments within epicising forms such as the *Poemi conviviali* by Pascoli or the socially engaged poetry of Quasimodo's *Giorno dopo giorno*, the two Italian poets' classical lyricism(s) remain monodic and their perspective unitary. Pound's and Carson's classical lyricism is, on the other hand, choral in character.

Pound's idea of poetic simultaneity prompted a ductile and multifaceted appropriation of Sappho and Catullus. While the two authors still represent two lyric archetypes from which the modern poetic tradition descends, Pound's appropriations treat them as two of the many voices coexisting in present literature. Sappho and Catullus do not represent lyric absolutes, but are two manifestations of the vital force of *eros* underpinning all areas of life and reality, counterbalanced by *thanatos*. Pound's classical lyricism thus freely evolves throughout his poetic career. Pound's classical lyricism takes shape in three phases in which the Sapphic and Catullan appropriations define themselves in an oppositional dialectic. In the first phase, the multiplication of poetic voices by means of poetic masks bestows a dramatic quality on the translations of the lyric of Sappho and Catullus, which is typical of the Modernist experimentations with dramatic monologues and poetic personae. Sappho

and Catullus speak through different voices with a depersonalising choral effect. The second and third phases disseminate ancient lyric into dialogic forms: the epic of the *Cantos* and the dramatic representations of the opera.

Pascoli's and Pound's classical lyricism are linked by a shared comparativism and the poets' mutual interest in anthropology. Despite the generation gap, the two authors express the positivistic attitude of scholarship at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two explore the ritual basis of the lyric and identify its cultural origins in wedding songs, floral representations of the loss of maidenhood, and the several connections of the lyric trope of *eros* and *thanatos* to natural phenomena. Yet, as I have shown, their respective modes of appropriation of these tropes are very different.

While Pascoli's lyricism proceeds inward and on the vertical line of the past, where the present is defined only in relation to a lost past and a personal re-elaboration of memories, Pound's looks outward. It is concerned with the future, and develops on the horizontal plane of simultaneous presence. This allows for a dissemination of voices, poetic modes, fragmentation and creative appropriations, which separate the poet as a man from his poetry. The North American reception of Sappho and Catullus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century begins from the same premises as the Italian one, but develops in an opposite direction. The Italian poetic reception of Sappho and Catullus is adjoined to a radicalization and an abstraction of the lyric genre as monodic song. Conversely, the Sapphic and Catullan masks in Pound's poetry assume different voices through time, representing only two elements of a choral proliferation of personae. Significantly, Pound engages with the performative dimension of ancient lyric and its ties with other poetic forms.

Anne Carson's poetics of appropriation of Sappho and Catullus is the culmination of Pascoli's and Pound's different types of lyricism. Carson's poetics

develops from a phenomenology of desire as eros, which is structured on Sapphic archetypes. At bottom, poetry is fuelled by an erotic desire to understand, and that this pattern was first found in the lyric poetry of Sappho. She places the Lesbian poet at the centre of her poetics. For Carson, Sappho's figure and her work are paradigms of 'unknowing', which she recognises to be the fundamental structure of the desire sustaining poetry and language. Catullus appears to be a complementary figure to Sappho. While Sappho denotes eros, Catullus represents death in the classical dyadic structure of *eros* and *thanatos*.

Carson posits the original nucleus of the linguistic and poetic structure of desire in ancient lyric, and particularly in the Sapphic structure of triangulation. Similarly to Pound, she defines erotic desire as the fuelling force of poetry; like Pound, she employs creative translation to create emotional equivalents of the ancient texts in contemporary poetry in order to unveil glimpses of meaning. Her classical lyricism takes form by means of poetic personae and dramatizations that follow the tradition begun with Pound. Yet her appropriations deconstruct the contemporary idea of Sappho and Catullus through the very act of poetic performance. Carson's classical lyricism is thus aware of itself. In her poetry Sappho and Catullus are explicitly reconstructed textual figures, containing traces of the poets' historical existence, mythical legends and fictional characters at once. In this sense Sappho and Catullus in Pound's and Carson's oeuvres are archetypal manifestations of language.

The process of deconstruction displayed by Carson's poetic appropriations of the lyric of Sappho and Catullus is in constant tension with her creative effort and cohesive poetic voice. While dissecting its multiplicity, classical lyricism is a foundational and cohesive element of Carson's poetics. Through classical lyricism she

connects language to man and society. She thus traces the lyric structures of signification and desire in contemporary poetry, myth, and wedding rituals.

All four poets' classical lyricism(s) appear to be explorations of humans and language. Pascoli, Pound and Carson strive to draw a link between the human as a social being and poetry as expression of the individual. This finds its sharpest illustration in Carson's multimedia performance pieces. The monodic lyricism of Sappho and Catullus is staged to underline its social construction and its dialogic potential.

The comparative approach of this thesis has illuminated otherwise invisible transnational threads connecting the four kinds of classical lyricism expounded in my case studies. While the poetic reception of Sappho and Catullus is a product of the individual poetics of the four authors, my study has shown that in spite of geographical and temporal distance, the four poets' classical lyricism(s) share fundamental common features. The ancient lyric figure of *eros* and *thanatos* is central to all four poets' oeuvres. But there are other elements, shared by all four kinds of classical lyricism that reveal a deeper connection between the four authors' poetics. Three out of the four poets studied—Pascoli, Pound and Carson—develop their interest in Sappho and Catullus as a poetic research into the anthropological roots of the lyric in ritual. This attention focuses on wedding songs. My comparative analysis has demonstrated that the three poets employ a common set of imagery and poetic tropes. These tropes orbit around floral representations of loss of maidenhood and eroticism, blooming as a manifestation of erotic desire and poetic creation, the image of light as a poetic revelation of meaning and, finally, representations of alternating day and night.

This hidden thread linking three out of four kinds of classical lyricism seems to be grounded in a philosophical function associated with poetry as knowledge and as a process of understanding of human beings and language. It has confirmed the role of the classics within the two national literatures as bridges between the past and the present. At the same time, the emphasis on the ritualistic aspect of the lyric, anchored in the ancient poetry of Sappho and Catullus, re-habilitates the lost performative qualities of the ancient texts.

The common topical elements linking the four types of classical lyricism, which have for the first time been uncovered by this thesis, should be added to my initial working definition of classical lyricism. This suggests that classical lyricism may stand as an interpretative historical category of the classical legacy. The findings of my thesis open the way to further studies in the field, both in relation to the single authors and to classical lyricism as a literary trend. Classical lyricism may in the future therefore be considered in relation to several other case studies, different national literatures and diverse timeframes. At the same time, the study of the socio-historical background of the textual fortune of classical lyricism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is still an unmapped area. Exploring such relationships as the connection of classical lyricism with Fascism, literary scholarship, and publishing policies may illuminate new aspects of Sappho's and Catullus' reception, uncover specific dynamics of literary transmission, and clarify issues of authorial and national identity in the literary history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Appendix

**1. Interpretative transcription of MS ‘Studi di Traduzione dal | Greco’ by Giovanni Pascoli, Archivio di Casa Pascoli, Castelvecchio - Barga, Box LXXIV, File 3 ‘Quaderni Vari’, n. 8, fols 159-176**

The words cancelled or partly cancelled are here given in italics. Pascoli’s corrections in the autographs are included underneath the word to which they refer. *Supra line*a additions are indicated with | abc | and also included underneath the line to which they refer. [abc] indicates an integration by me; [...] illegible letters; [++] illegible letters that have been excised and [ ] a blank space in the manuscript. The line numbers next to each text are my addition for clarity purposes.

**Folio 159:** White paper leaf functioning as the cover of the notebook, with some black ink stains on the right hand side of the page. The writing begins half way through the page:

Po

Studi di traduzione  
dal Greco

**Folio 160**

Frammenti de' poeti lirici  
di Lesbo Ed. Bergk

Terpandro.  
I. A Giove.  
.1.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----(?)--

- 1 Zeu, di tutte cose principio
- 2 di tutte cose duce,
- 3 Zeu, a te libo
- 4 questo principio, l'inno (?).

## II. Ad Apollo

--o-- --o-- --o-- --o--  
--o----

- 1 Di nuovo per me (?) l'eroe lungi-saettante
- 2 canti l'animo. (Nom.)

## III. Ad Apollo e alle Muse.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

- 1 Libiamo alle Muse figlie (fanciulle)
- 2 di Memoria<sup>1</sup>
- 3 e al conduttur delle Muse
- 4 di Latona (dell'obblío) figlio

---

<sup>1</sup> Lines 1-2 are linked by a left bracket.

## IV. Ai dioscuri.

## I.

— — — — —

1 o di Giove e di Leda bellissimi salvatori

Esametro.

## II.

- 1 E a te noi, disamato il canto da' quattro suoni
- 2 con cetra (φόρμιγγι) di 7 corde nuovi inni celebreremo.

## III.

- 1 Li e l'asta de' giovani fiorisce e la musa canora
- 2 E giustizia dalle larghe strade, in belle opere ausiliatrice

## Folio 161

Saffo.

Saffica.

.1.

- 1 Dalla seggiola variopinta, immórtale Afrodite,  
 2 figlia di Giove, che intrecci inganni, ti supplico  
 3 *che* né con dolori né con rimbrotti non domarmi  
 4 o veneranda, l'animo:  
 5 ma quà vieni, tu che anche da altra parte (altra volta)  
 6 le mie voci *avendo udite*  
 7 udivi, e del padre la casa lasciata  
 8 l'aureo (venisti)  
 9 carro avendo aggiogato; e i belli ti conducevano  
 10 veloci passerì intorno alla nera terra (circa)  
 11 scossando spesso le ale dal cielo per mezzo  
 12 l'etra.  
 13 E subitamente arrivarono: e tu, o beata,  
 14 dopo sorriso coll'immortale volto  
 15 domandavi; come di nuovo io aveo sofferto, e come, di  
 |che cosa ho sofferto perché |  
 16 nuovo chiamava  
 [chiam]|o|  
 17 e che cosa maggiormente voglio che succeda  
 18 al furente animo. Chi di nuovo vuoi che Peitho  
 19 conduca al tuo amore, chi a te, o  
 20 Saffo, fa del male?  
 21 Poichè *quella che* fugge, presto inseguirà  
 se ti<sup>2</sup>  
 22 e *quella che* non riceve di doni, invece li darà  
 se<sup>3</sup>  
 23 E *quella* che non ama, presto amerà  
 se<sup>4</sup>  
 24 anche se non voglia.  
 25 Vieni a me anche ora, e scioglimi dalle dolorose  
 26 cure, e ciò che l'animo mi desidera  
 27 di fare, fà tu stessa  
 28 siimi alleata.

---

<sup>2</sup> 'se' and ti overwritten onto 'quella' and 'se'.

<sup>3</sup> 'se' overwritten onto 'quella che'.

<sup>4</sup> 'se' overwritten onto 'quella'.

## Folio 162

## 2.

- 1 Sembrami quello uguale agli Dei  
 2 essere uomo, il quale di faccia invero  
 3 siede, e da vicino dolce parlante (te)  
 4                   ode (tacitamente)  
 5 E ridente soavemente, ciò invero a me  
 6 il cuore nel petto suole spaventare.<sup>5</sup>  
 7 poichè come ti vedo per un poco, di voce  
                                   |εῦ|  
 8                   nulla più           ....(cede? rimane?)  
 (oppure – nulla più mi viene alla bocca, alla voce-  
 non posso più parlare.  
 9 Ma la bocca (la lingua) resta spalancata, e tenue  
                                   |e|  
 10 subito alla pelle un fuoco è corso,  
                                   |sotto|  
 11 e agli occhi non è alcun vedere, e  
 12                   ronzano le orecchie.
- 13 E il sudore esce a gocce, e un tremore  
 14 tutta mi occupa, e più gialla dell'erba  
 15 sono, *ed* esser morta poco *mi* mancandomi,  
                                   |ad|  
 16                   sembro (pazza)  
 17 Ma ogni cosa sopporto [poichè anche il povero]<sup>6</sup>

## 3.

- 1 Le stelle bensì intorno alla bella luna  
 2 Di nuovo scoprono la splendida faccia,  
 3 quando piena massimamente splende  
 4                   (sulla) terra   ∪∪–∪  
 5 –∪–∪ d'argento (la luna) ∪–∪.

<sup>5</sup> The use of the small letter after the full stop is archaic.

<sup>6</sup> Square brackets by Pascoli.

**Folio 163**

4.

- 1 E (*intorno*) il freddo (vento? acqua?) strepita pei rami  
 I[ntorno]<sup>7</sup>  
 2 dei meli, e delle foglie secche  
 3 defluit sopor (veternus).

5.

- 1 Vieni Cipride  
 2 negli aurei calici mollemente  
 3 mescolato ai fiori il nettare  
 4 mescitando.

6.

- 1 O te Cipro, o Pafò, o Palermo

7. x 8.

- 1 E a te io presso l'altare d'una bianca capra  
 x x x  
 1 E lascerò invero.

x 9.

- 1 Oh! Afrodite dall'aurea corona  
 2 . . . . .

10

- 1 Esse onore mi fecero le opere  
 2 Loro *avendone* dato.

11

- 1 Queste ora alle compagne  
 2 mie dilettevoli cose bellamente canterò.

12

- 1 poiché quanti  
 2 ben (rincorro-tratto-pongo?), quelli più mi  
 [...]
 3 fanno danno.

---

<sup>7</sup> 'I' overwritten onto 'i' of 'intorno'.

**Folio 164:** On the margins of this leaf, next to fragments 14, 16, 17 and 18, there are several numeric annotations and calculations written by Pascoli himself.

x 14

- 1 a voi— le belle— il pensier mio  
|mie|  
2 Immutevole.

16

- 1 E a loro freddo divenne il cuore (animo)  
2 E fa cader (παρίεισι) le ale.

17

- 1 E lui alcuni (ἄμωι o sabbie) facendolo  
2 errare portano  
3 e con cure (?)

18

- 1 Poco fa me l'aurora dagli aurei calzari

19

- 1 e i piedi  
2 un variopinto calzare copriva, Lidio  
3 bel lavorio.

20

- 1 di gialli (colori?)  
2 tutte sorte incisa

x21

- 1 e da noi avesti (hai) l'oblio

x22

- 1 o se alcun altro  
2 più degli uomini di me ami (amavi)

26

- 1 Quello(?), o dall'aurea seggiola Musa, dicesti  
2 inno, cui dalla nobile terra  
3 ricca di belle donne cantò piacevolmente  
4 l'onorevole vecchio Teio.

## Folio 165

27 (?)

- 1 Dell'ira nel petto dispersa
- 2 invano latrante la lingua ha guardato

28.

[ ]<sup>8</sup>

29.

- 1 Stammi in faccia amico  
|anche|
- 2 e negli occhi profondimi la grazia

30

- 1 E gli aurei ceci alle rive vivono

31 .

- 1 Lato e Niobe erano inviero [.....]<sup>9</sup> compagne  
|[Lato]na|

32.

- 1 Dico che alcun si ricorda anche all'ultimo di noi.  
(Dico che *alcuno* ha chiesto alcuna in moglie [..]to  
? )

33

- 1 Di te io un tempo, già gran tempo, o
- 2 Attide, era/o innamorata.

34

- 1 Tu sembri a me essere una fanciulla
- 2           piccina e sgarbata

---

<sup>8</sup> After the number 28 a curved line in black ink follows.

<sup>9</sup> An ink stain prevents to read the word underneath, I can distinguish six letters.

## Folio 166

x 35

[ ]

36

- 1 Non so *ad* che fare: ci ho due pensieri

37

- 1 *Non* probo caelum contingere duos [++++] (?)  
[N]ec poll[...]<sup>10</sup>

x38

- 1 E come fanciullo dietro la madre ho svolazzato

39

- 1 Della primavera nunzio [++++]nuolo  
usig  
2 dall'amorosa voce.

x40

- 1 E di nuovo l'amore λυσιμέλης mi turba  
γλ. αμ. ὄρπετον

x41

- 1 Attide, a te è venuto ad uggia pensare  
2 a me, [++++](?) verso Andromeda  
e voli<sup>11</sup>

42

- 1 *L' amore* di nuovo sconvolse *il* me il cuore,  
A[more] in<sup>12</sup>  
2 il vento dal monte squassando le quercie

43

οτα

- 1 quando il vigile . . . . (eam eas?) *conturba*  
per[turba]<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 'Nec' overwritten onto 'Non' and 'poll[...]' overwritten onto an illegible word.

<sup>11</sup> 'e voli' overwritten onto an illegible word.

<sup>12</sup> 'A' overwritten onto 'L'a' of 'L'amore'; 'in' overwritten onto 'il'.

<sup>13</sup> 'per' overwritten onto 'con' of 'conturba'.

**Folio 167**

44

- 1 E le salviette ? dei...καγγόνωον
- 2 purpuree
- 3 e quelle tu disprezzerai,
- 4 mandò dalla Focea
- 5 onorati doni καγγόνωον

45

- 1 Age quidem diva mihi testudo
- 2 vocalis esto.

46

[ ]

**Folio 168:** written in red ink with corrections. From l. 22 the corrections are written in black ink, here indicated in **bold**.

- 1 O dea c'haï troni così belli, figlia  
 2 di Giove, ingannatrice! Ecco, ti prego,  
 3 non stare a premer con affanni e crucci,  
 4 diva, il mio cuore:
- 5 vien quà piuttosto, se altra volta mai  
*della mia*  
 6 le mie querele udendo di lontano  
 7 *desti* pur retta, e, *inf* fin, dalla paterna  
 davi<sup>14</sup>  
 8 casa movesti  
 9 ed attaccasti il cocchio d'oro. La bella  
 10 coppia che allora te quaggiù tirava!  
 11 *Dal* ttean, dal cielo, nell'azzurro, i *bei*  
 Sba[ttean] belli<sup>15</sup>  
 12 passerì l'ale,  
 13 che fu un momento l'arrivar. Tu allora,  
 14 dopo sorriso col divino aspetto,  
*chiedevi cosa è successo*  
*ancora*<sup>16</sup>  
*che avviene a succede* e come  
 ancor ti chiamo  
 15 chidei che avvièmmi ancor di nuovo, e come  
 16 anche ti chiamo,  
 17 e cosa proprio ancor vorrei per questo  
 18 pazzo mio cuore. Mo' chi dunque brami  
 19 che Peitho meni all'amor tuo? chi mai,  
 20 Saffo, t'offende?  
 21 chè s'or ti schifa, ti verrà *pur* dietro;  
 [p]oi<sup>17</sup>  
 22 E se i regali ti rimanda, presto  
 |or|  
 23 ne *darà*; t'amerà, via, s'*or* non t'ama  
 f [arà] [s]e<sup>18</sup>  
 24 Voglia o non voglia

<sup>14</sup> 'davi' overwritten onto 'desti'.

<sup>15</sup> 'Sba' overwritten onto 'Dal' to form 'Sbattean'; 'belli' overwritten onto «bei».

<sup>16</sup> 'ancora' overwritten onto 'è successo'.

<sup>17</sup> 'oi' overwritten. From l. 23 onwards the corrections are in black ink, indicated in blue in the text.

<sup>18</sup> 'f' and 'e' overwritten.

## Folio 169

- 25 Viém mí ànche adesso, e scioglimi dai gravi  
 |dalle gravi *cure*|  
**pene**<sup>19</sup>
- 26 *affanni* , e quanto il cuor duol  
 |**cavami**|  
*cure* *che si compia*  
*desia che avvenga*  
**compire**<sup>20</sup>
- compilo**
- 27 Fa' tu che **av**venga; sii tu stessa, o dea  
 28 *meco* alleata.  
**molto**<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> 'pene' overwritten onto 'cure'.

<sup>20</sup> 'compire' overwritten onto 'che avvenga'.

<sup>21</sup> 'molto' overwritten onto 'meco'.

2. Interpretative transcription of MS Folio 8<sup>r-v</sup> by Giovanni Pascoli, Archivio di Casa Pascoli, Castelvechio - Barga, Box LXX, File 9

Folio 8 recto

- 1 Gli astri intorno alla bella luna  
 2 nascondono la splendida faccia  
 3 quand'ella piena massimamente irradia  
 4 la terra.
- 1 (Ἄστερες μὲν ἄμφι κάλαν σελάνναν  
 2 ἄψ αποκρύπτουσι φάεννον εἶδος,  
 3 ὄπποτα πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπη  
 4 γᾶν . . . . .
- 1 Dove è notevole la testimonianza di *Giuliano*  
 d'un antico<sup>22</sup>
- 2 Σαφρῶ ἡ καλὴ τὴν σελήνεν ἀργυρέαν φησί καὶ  
 3 διὰ τοῦτο τῶν ἄλλων ἀστέρων αποκρύπτειν τὴν ὄψιν.  
 4 Non è codesto un graziosissimo idillio mitico nella  
 5 sua indeterminatezza? *Ma datelo in mano a*  
 6 *uno di codesti poeti convenzionali*
- 7 La luna è bella, è [xxxxx] e splendida come l'argento:  
 bianca<sup>23</sup>
- 8 *gli atelle* n'hanno invidia e *si* nascondono la faccia.  
 le s[telle]<sup>24</sup> |disp[.].re|
- 9 Questo non è mito: non fa appello a nessuna tradizione:  
 10 a nessuna favola: a nessuna rappresentazione plastica  
 11 o pittorica: è proprio naturalmente sbocciato nella mente  
 12 di Saffo: come direbbe un poeta Arcadico? Sa ben  
 13 difficile un tempo non di Diana e non suscitare  
 14 con ciò una pagina ben delineata e dalla quale  
 15 mi sembra e mi è sembrato sempre un po' troppo  
 16 pretendere ch'ella faccia lume a quella maniera!  
 17 In questo frammento d'imeneo (che io non tradurrò)v'è  
 18 pure un [+++++] e una personificazione: e con tutto  
 dialogo<sup>25</sup>
- 19 ciò a nessun mito: è riferito:  
 |non si riferisce|
- 20 Παρθενία, Παρθενία, ποῖ με λιποισ' οἴχη ;  
 21 Ουκέτι ἤξω προς σέ, οὐκέτι ἤξω.  
*È ben lecito supporre che Saffo*
- 22 il cambiamento spesso di paternità degli Dei mostra  
 23 che gli antichi avevano coscienza qualche volta del loro  
 24 significato etimologico.

<sup>22</sup> 'd'un antico' overwritten.

<sup>23</sup> 'bianca' overwritten.

<sup>24</sup> 'le' overwritten onto 'gli' and 's' overwritten onto 'a'.

<sup>25</sup> 'dialogo' overwritten.

**Folio 8 verso:** written in blank ink, starting half way through the page.

- 1 Verginità, verginità dove m'andasti che non sei quà:
- 2 Non tornerò verso te più, non tornerò, non mai, *mai* più  
|non|

- 1 Verginità, verginità
- 2 dove m'andasti che non se' da me
- 3 Non tornerò verso te più
- 4 non tornerò non mai non più.

- 1           
Botton di rosa, botton di rosa.
- 2 Dove m'andasti, dove sei tu?
- 3 S'è aperto il fiore, sbocciò la rosa,
- 4 cadran le foglie, non torna più.  
|la gioventù|
- 5 bocciuol di rosa [++++++] più.  
non torni<sup>26</sup>

- 1           
Ma Perché mi vuole, perche mi vuole  
|ma|
- 2 *farmi* appassire, *farmi* morir  
*e*
- 3 viole e rose, rose e viole
- 4 non fanno gioia solo a Pasqua  
|che|
- 5 sono sbocciate per appassir.
- 6 *per farti appassire.*
- 7 Ei vuole ei vuole farlo

- 1           
Tra le sue braccia, tra le sua braccia
- 2 d'essere un'altra
- 3 Perché non sono quella di ier?
- 4 Non son più quella d'oggi, perché?
- 5 Perché ti bacia, perché t'abbraccia
- 6 perché ti sugge tutto il tuo te.
- 7 tra le sue braccia, già un'altra se'.
  
- 8 se' la semenza
- 9 Cadean le foglie, restava un seme,
- 10 *Se'* tu quel seme e un altro egli è  
*Sei*<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'non torni' overwritten onto an illegible word.

<sup>27</sup> 'Sei' overwritten onto 'Se'.

3. Text of Sappho, fr. 1 and 2 Bergk, from *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, ed. by Theodor Bergk, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Leipzig: Teubner, 1882), III: *Poetas Melicos*

Sappho fr. 1 Bergk

Ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα,  
 παῖ Δίος, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,  
 μή μ' ἄσαισι μήτ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,  
     πότνια, θῦμον·  
 ἀλλὰ τυῖδ' ἔλθ', αἵποτα κἀτέρωτα  
 τᾶς ἔμας αὖδως αἴοισα πῆλυι  
 ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα  
     χρῦσιον ἦλθες  
 ἄρμ' ὑπαζεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον  
 ὤκεες στρουῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας  
 πύκνα δινεῦντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω αἴθε-  
     ρος διὰ μέσσω  
 αἵψα δ' ἐξικοντο· τὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,  
 μειδιάσαισ' ἀθανάτω προσώπῳ,  
 ἦρε', ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι  
     δηῦτε κάλημι,  
 κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι  
 μαινόλα θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε Πείθῳ  
 μαῖς ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα, τίς σ', ὦ  
     Ψάφ', ἀδικήει;  
 καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει,  
 αἰ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει,  
 αἰ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει  
     κωὺκ ἐθέλοισα.  
 ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλεπᾶν δὲ λῦσον  
 ἐκ μεριμνᾶν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι  
 θῦμος ἱμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτὰ  
     σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

Sappho fr. 2 Bergk:

Φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν  
 ἔμμεν ὦνηρ, ὅστις ἐναντίος τοι  
 ἰζάνει, καὶ πλασίον ἄδῳ φωνεύ-  
     σας ὑπακούει  
 καὶ γελαίσας ἱμερόεν, τό μοι μάν  
 καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόασεν:  
 ὡς γὰρ εὔιδον βροχέως σε, φώνας  
     οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει:  
 ἀλλὰ καμ μὲν γλῶσσα ἔαγε, λέπτον δ'  
 αὐτίκα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν,  
 ὀπατέσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημ', ἐπιρρόμ-  
     βεισι δ' ἄκουαι.

ἂ δὲ μίδρωσ κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ  
 παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας  
 ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύεσ  
 φαίνομαι (ἄλλα).  
 ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, [ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα].

**4. Text of 'Preghiera a Afrodite' and 'Dolor d'amore' by Giovanni Pascoli, from *Poesie di Giovanni Pascoli*, ed. by Augusto Vicinelli, 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1958), IV, 1635-1636**

PREGHIERA A AFRODITE

Afrodite, figlia di Giove, eterna,  
 trono adorno, piena di vie: ti prego!  
 non domar con pene e con crucci, o grande  
 nume, il mio cuore.

Anzi vieni qua, s'altra volta ancora, 5  
 quella voce mia di lontano udendo,  
 l'ascoltavi: dalla paterna casa  
 subito uscisti;

aggiogasti al carro tuo d'oro i belli 10  
 tuoi veloci passerai: sulla nera  
 terra, tra l'azzurro del cielo, con un  
 battere d'ale

rapido, eccoli! ecco che tu, beata 15  
 con un riso dell'immortal tuo viso  
 mi chiedevi cosa mai fosse, cosa  
 mai ti chiamassi,

cosa voglio mai per il folle cuore 20  
 mio. Chi vuoi che Dolce-parola ancora  
 tra codeste braccia conduca? chi, o  
 Clara, t'offende?

Ché se fugge, poi ti vorrà seguire,  
 se ricusa i doni, vorrà donarne,  
 se non t'ama, poi t'amerà se anche  
 tu non lo voglia.

Vieni anche ora e scioglimi dalle dure 25  
 pene e tutto ciò che il mio cuore brama  
 che s'adempia, adempimi tu: tu vieni  
 meco alla guerra.

## DOLOR D'AMORE

A me pare simile a Dio quell'uomo,  
quale e' sia, che in faccia ti siede, e fiso  
tutto in te, da presso t'ascolta, dolce-  
mente parlare,

e d'amore ridere un riso; e questo 5  
fa tremare a me dentro il petto il cuore;  
ch'al vederti subito a me di voce  
filo non viene,

e la lingua mi s'è spezzata, un fuoco 10  
per la pelle via che sottile è corso,  
già non hanno vista più gli occhi, romba  
fanno gli orecchi,

e il sudore sgocciola, e tutta sono  
da tremore presa, e più verde sono 15  
d'erba, e poco già dal morir lontana,  
simile a folle.

**5. Transcription of the unpublished ‘Cartolina Postale 20 luglio 193[7?]’, from Luciano Anceschi to Enrico Falqui. Archivio del Novecento, Università La Sapienza, Rome. Fondo Enrico Falqui, Series ‘Corrispondenza’, Sub-series ‘Corrispondenza con Personalità’, File ‘A. F. Anceschi, Luciano (1937-1963)’, Sub-file ‘Datate’**

Milano, 20 luglio

Caro Falqui,

mi addolora assai la notizia che Ella mi dà. Conosco queste estenuanti e dure vicende, e il loro peso sulla nostra giornata. Voglio vivamente sperare che le cose si mettano per il meglio, al più presto: lo auguro cordialmente alla persona a Lei cara e a Lei: il nostro lavoro è fatto di tempi più calmi e di meno allarmati affetti.

Quanto al buon Walter, è già tempo che io ebbi occasione di parlare con Solmi del suo libro: a me, che dicevo il mio giudizio, egli rispondeva col suo, che poi ha pubblicato, confermandolo. Bene.

Con Quasimodo stiamo traducendo Saffo: anzi Quasimodo traduce Saffo, ed io lo aiuto.

Caro Falqui, creda al sincero augurio del suo Anceschi

**6. Transcription of three unpublished letters (fols 1, 16, 17) from Salvatore Quasimodo to Luciano Anceschi, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna, Fondo Speciale Luciano Anceschi, File: Carteggio: Salvatore Quasimodo**

**Folio 1 (Dated: Milan, 20 November 1937)**

Milano 20 nov. 37  
Viale Mugello, 6

Mio caro Luciano,  
anch'io sono rimasto senza un amico; e la vita mi diventa penosa ogni giorno più. Intendo la fatica per procurarsi il cibo, che è ormai come uno sforzo muscolare al quale non si resisterà per lungo tempo. E non basta la volontà e il tener duro. Melancolie. Immagino il tuo luogo di esilio; e conosco la disperazione delle sere provinciali. La gente gioca nei caffè, rossa e idiota. No: per noi non c'è scampo che in un verso, nel dolore. Fino a che il dolore è capace di possederci, e che non ci trovi già inerti e crudi per la noia. Codardia e tristezza. Non lavoro che pochissimo, e per sapermi vivo ho spedito a Meridiano l'ultima mia lirica e la traduzione di Saffo. Scheiwiller mi ha chiesto più volte di te. Perché non continuiamo quel lavoro sui testi greci? Anche da lontano si potrebbe. Non lasceremmo certo ai "posterì,, un epistolario noioso e tetro. Vedo sui Circoli che sei trattato molto bene da Apollonio; e lo scritto in quella rivista mi ha fatto assai piacere. Susini dovrebbe scrivere, su "Quadrivio,, di me; almeno questo è il suo desiderio. Sono stato in compagnia di Sereni qualche sera: Betocchi lo ha tirato con mollezza da scaccino, ma non conta. Ancora pazienza per tutti. Ti lascio con una gran voglia di riabbracciarti presto  
tuo  
Quasimodo

Non ho ancora visto 'Letteratura,. So che c'è il tuo articolo su Falqui. Ottobre! Perbacco: finiremo col non potere comprare più nemmeno un quotidiano.

**Folio 16 (Dated: Milan, 19 August 1938)**

Milano 19 agosto '38

Caro Luciano,

domani compio 37 anni. Il secolo corre; io l'avevo inagurato così bene, con poche macchine in terra e in cielo, con pochissimi poeti. Tristezze. Sono molto lieto che tu in questo periodo "druognesco" pensi alla Dea nata dalle acque. Ti ringrazio della traduzione dell'Ode ad Afrodite; per ora la metto insieme ad altre due che già possiedo e al mio primo tentativo di risolvere poeticamente questo testo, invero assai duro nel suo numero geometrico.

Fui quasi tentato di aggiungere questa traduzione nel mio libro; ma quel senso di legittimo rigore che è stato norma costante di moralità e di costume letterario me lo impedì.

Ho molto desiderio di tornare al mio lavoro, alle rinunce che esso esige; ma non sono in "armonia", non trovo che stanchezza nelle ore che sono mie. Il nuovo ufficio mi costringe a mediocri attività, a rapporti con persone che non avrei mai avvicinate. Anche questo è miseria.

Attendo da te altre traduzioni, da Saffo, da Alceo (quella dell'Estate per esempio). Di Saffo desidererei che ti procurassi il testo dell'ode che comincia all'incirca così: "bello è vedere un campo con armati... ma più bello è l'amore della donna, ecc.". Questa poesia è poco nota e, credo, non tradotta in versi italiani.

Cardarelli mi ha lodato "come uno degli Dei..."; parte di questa lode va a te. Il libro ti è stato spedito in Viale Certosa e sono certo che ti raggiungerà nella Valle Vigizzo.

Ma pensa alle cure amorose, ora; e stai sano.

Ricambia i saluti a tua moglie. Un abbraccio affettuoso dal tuo

Salvatore

P.S. Pugliatti mi scrive in questo momento che si è interessato con moltissimo impegno per il tuo trasferimento. Ti trascrivo il pezzo che ti riguarda: (è la persona che ha ricevuto l'incarico che scrive a Pugliatti)

"ho scritto un appunto per segnalare il prof. A. al capo Divisione Comm. M.

Sono sicuro che questi, se gli sarà possibile, soddisferà il desiderio del raccomandanda-

to. Il movimento del personale insegnante non sarà deciso prima della fine

del mese.... Auguri.

**Folio 17 (Dated: 9 September 1938)**

9 sett. '38

Mio caro Luciano,  
grazie della traduzione da Alceo. Ma per ora non trovo un'ora per  
il mio lavoro. E questa lettera col tempo mi rende amaro e mi  
umilia.

Leggo il tuo Flora su "Meridiano,,; avrai certamente delle noie per  
questo scritto, da parte dell'avanguardia critica fiorentina. Pensa a  
Gatto e alla sua posizione "crepuscolare,, di basso ottocentista! Il libro,  
almeno per il momento, suscita benevolenze "curiose,,. Al tuo ritorno a  
Milano ti farò vedere parecchie lettere che ho ricevuto in questi giorni.  
Io continuo i miei rapporti con gli "amici,, sempre con rigore: non avranno  
le mie "ossa,,

Lavora, caro Luciano e sii felice.

Saluti a tua moglie

Un abbraccio

dal tuo

Salvatore.

7. **Text of a polished translation of Catullus 61 by Ezra Pound. The MS is kept at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, in YCAL 43, Box 138, Folder 6074. Transcribed by Margaret Fisher in *Ezra Pound's Third Opera: Collis O Heliconii* (Emeryville, CA: Second Evening Art, 2005)**

She comes, in flaming cloak, Aurunculeia,  
 She comes, and the snowy foot  
 Gleams from the saffron sandal.

Hymen, Hymanaeus! [sic]

Spread doors. She comes,  
 See how her poppy mouth  
 Gleams as on marble, white.

Penthelicon.

Sing out! you boys, sing out,  
 Wave up your torches,  
 Wave out their quivering cressets

Hymen, Hymenaeus!

Tiller of the Heliconian hill,

Hymen, Hymenaeus!

Hesper adest.

Sing out the bridal song  
 With reedy voice. Day goes. She gleams,  
 Like Asian myrtle boughs in flowery time  
 Make haste, Make haste. Day goes.

8. **Text of the MS scenario for the aria ‘Catullus 61’ of the opera *Collis O Heliconii* by Ezra Pound. The MS is kept at the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, in YCAL 43, Box 138, Folder 6074. Transcribed by Margaret Fisher in *Ezra Pound's Third Opera: Collis O Heliconii* (Emeryville, CA: Second Evening Art, 2005)**

There was a wedding toward ino X Domus Quinti [?]. Julia of that [?] was to [match] with Manlius [?] in highest of the Roman forms of coemption permitted only to leading patrician: Each family patris [sic] would lay down at the altar an equal sum in gold in token that husband bought wife, wife husband in equal right to refuse...

There was now arranging of the bride in the gynaeceum, placing upon her blessed hair the wreath of amaracus, and on her feet little slippers of saffron color, and about her shoulders, the “flam[m]eum,” the cloak of flaming yellow, to match the appointed slippers. It was late in the roseous day, & a chorus of girls were already in the [?] or court central, walking to give her their escort. The sun went near his rim beyond the Tiber & the outlines of the rim were reddened, & the marble eddyies [sic] burned with gold, & blue purples. & a rumour [of] voices came nearer. Then they heard young shouting

before the door, & the procession set out of boys & girls in two bands one quiet. The other noisy with torches. The girls scattering flowers, & moving with slow steps & in time. The boys rambling and shouting Hymenaeus. And then they all together began a solemn hymn to that god as they went onward through the twilight to Manlius' house. & in the [street?] or a [temple] they all rested [...].

**9. Transcription of the unpublished e-mail interview conducted by Cecilia Piantanida with Anne Carson, 27 January 2010**

**1. Cecilia Piantanida:** *In Autobiography of Red you say that 'The fragments of the Geryoneis itself read as if Stesichoros had composed a substantial narrative poem then ripped it to pieces and buried the pieces in a box with some song lyrics and lecture notes and scraps of meat'. This tendency towards fragmentariness and pastiche is also typical of much of your work. Yet while drawing from the most disparate literary and cultural references, exploiting different forms, media and languages, all of your books engage, in one way or another, with the Classics. In Autobiography of Red and Nox the poetry of Stesichoros and Catullus even provide the main framework to the development of your own narrative. Is the centrality of the Greek and Latin Classics in your work justified by a particular aesthetics? As poet, do you feel part of a legacy?*

**Anne Carson:** I love Greek and Latin and happen to know how to read them so I guess that means I am part of their legacy. the fact that the Greek and Latin poets come down to us as fragmentary traditions has perhaps influenced what you call my "aesthetic" , or even justified it, but most poets find a way to justify their desire to create fragments don't they. all poems are fragments. that's why they're interesting. negative capability etc.

**2. Cecilia Piantanida:** *You describe translation as a room where one gropes for the light switch. Translation, in particular from Greek and Latin, is often one of the vehicles of your own poetry. To what extent is your poetic voice shaped by translation from the ancient languages? When you translate do you think of Latin and Greek as 'living' or dead languages?*

**Anne Carson:** what on earth does "dead language" mean?

**3. Cecilia Piantanida:** *In your poetic work, you seem to privilege lyric poets such as Sappho and Catullus—which you have also extensively translated. Your re-appropriations of these 'monologic' authors and of their lyric fragments often resolve into long narrative poems which can be described as 'dialogic' in character. Do you think of your poetry as 'lyric'? To what extent is the question of genre central to your poetry?*

**Anne Carson:** genre confuses me

**4. Cecilia Piantanida:** *A free version of carmen CI, 'Multas per Gentes et Multa per Aequora Vectus: (Through Peoples Through Oceans Have I Come)', features in Men in the Off Hours. Much of Nox is built around the process of translating Catullus CI; a translation of the carmen, much closer to the original Latin than your earlier version is also provided. How do the two compare? Do you think of both as translations?*

**Anne Carson:** all translations are provisional ( or, Homer would say, ephemeral: balanced on the day)

I guess in that sense they are all "lyric" - arising out of a certain moment in time.

## 10. Series of five illustrations of Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010)



Figure 1 - Anne Carson, *Nox* (2010)

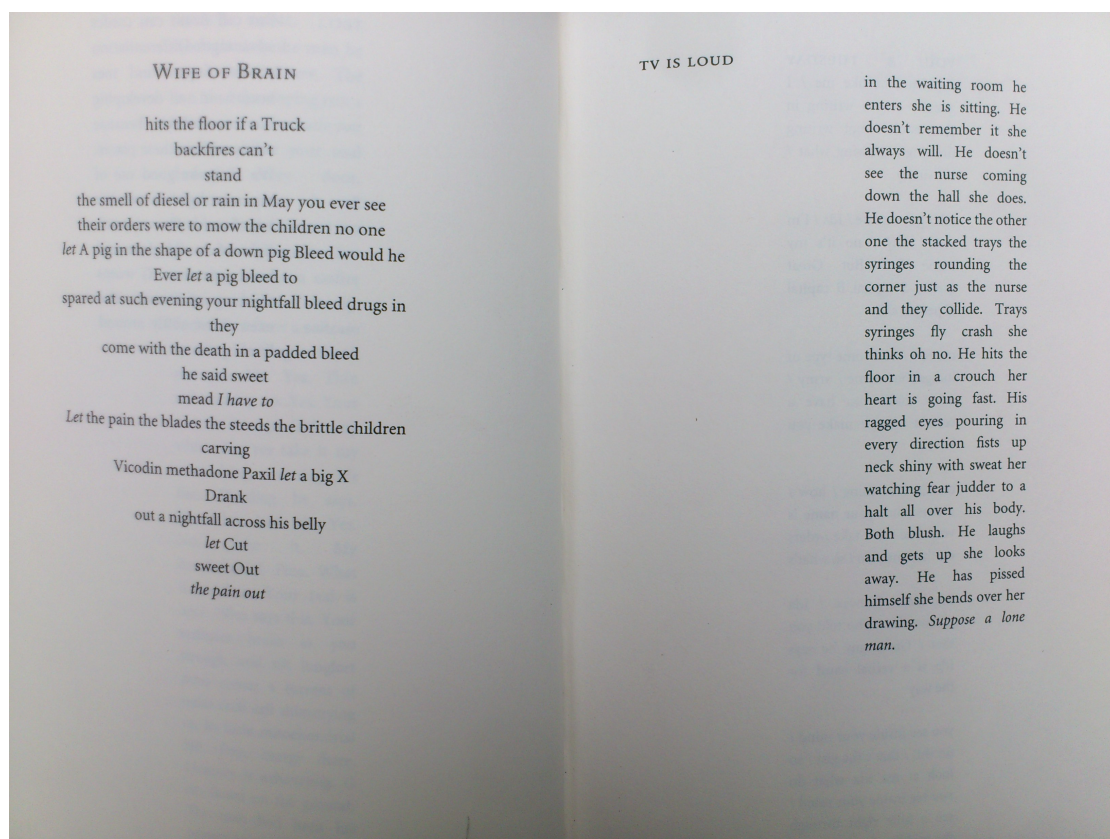


Figure 2 - Anne Carson, *Red Doc>* (2013)

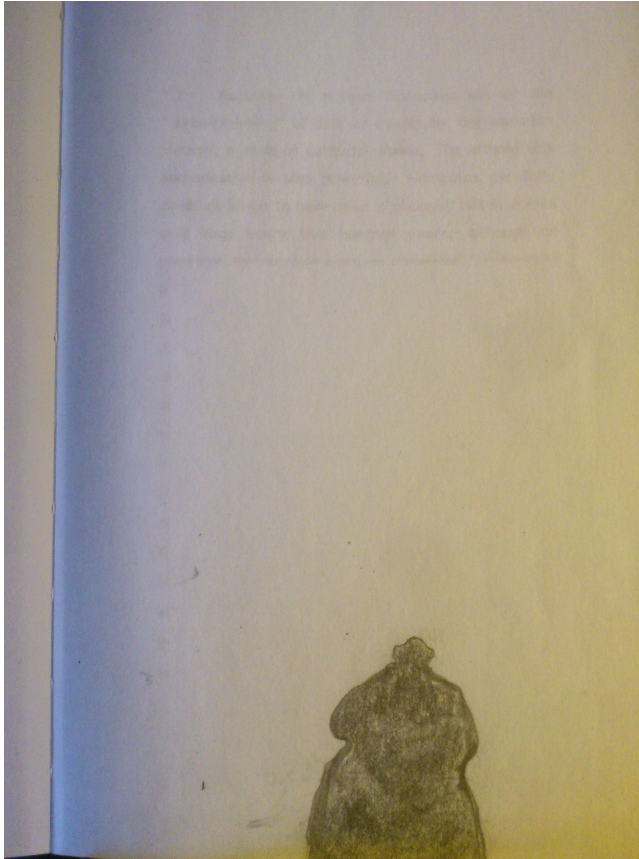


Figure 3 – Anne Carson, *Nox*, 1.1

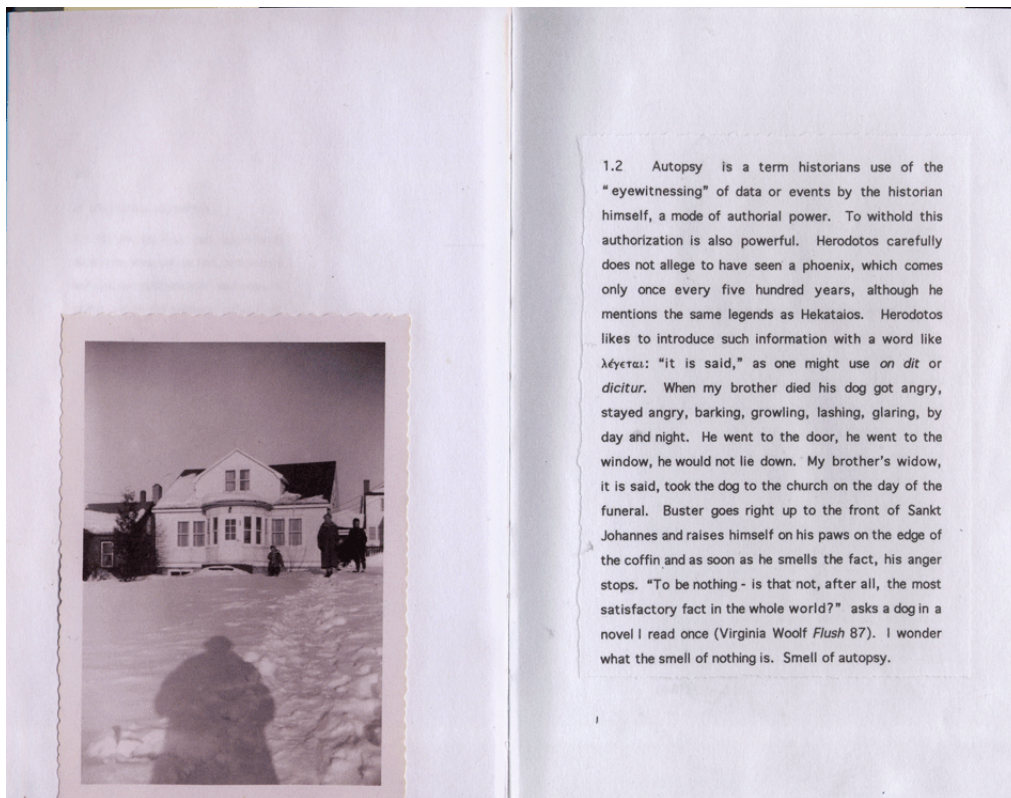
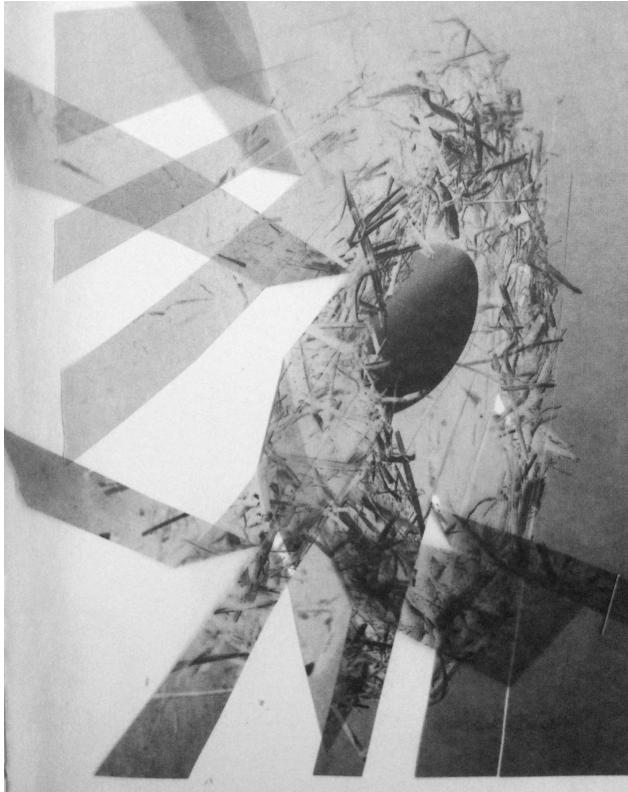


Figure 4 – Anne Carson, *Nox*, 1.2



**Figure 5** -Anne Carson, *Nox*, 5.5

**11. Anne Carson, Translation of Sappho, fr. 22 Voigt, in *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (2003), with accompanying Greek Text**

**Translation of Sappho's fr. 22 Voigt by Anne Carson**

]
   
]work
   
]face
   
]
   
if not, winter
   
]no pain
   
]
   
]I bid you sing
   
of Gongyla, Abanthis, taking up
   
your lyre as (now again) longing
   
floats around you,
   
  
 you beauty. For her dress when you saw it
   
stirred you. And I rejoice.
   
In fact she herself once blamed me
   
Kyprogeneia
   
  
 Because I prayed
   
This word:
   
I want

**Sappho, fr. 22 Voigt**

]βλα [
   
]εργον, . . λ'α . . [
   
]ν ῥέθος δοκιμ[
   
]ησθαι
   
]ν ἀνάδην χ . [
   
δ]ὲ μή, χεῖμων[
   
]οισαναλγεια
   
]δε
   
  
 .]. ε . [. . . .] . [. . . κ]έλομαι ς . [
   
 . .] . γυλα . [. . .]ανθι λάβοισα . α . [
   
πᾶ]κτιν, ᾗς σε δηῦτε πόθος τ . [
   
 ἀμφιπόταται
   
  
 τὰν κάλαν· ἃ γὰρ κατάγωγσις αὐτα[
   
ἐπτόαις' ἴδοισαν, ἔγω δὲ χαίρω,
   
καὶ γὰρ αὐτα δὴ πο[τ] ἐμεμφ[
   
 Κ]υπρογέν[ηα

ὡς ἄραμα[ι  
 τοῦτο τῶ[  
 β]όλλομα[ι

## 12. Anne Carson, ‘TV Men: Sappho’, in *Men in the Off Hours* (2000)

### ‘TV Men: Sappho’

*avec ma main brulée j’écris sur la nature du feu*

I.

No one knows what the laws are. That there are laws  
 we know, by the daily burnings if nothing else.  
 On the second

day of shooting in the Place de la Concorde  
 I notice the leaves in the Jardin have changed  
 overnight,

but mention this to no one  
 for fear of continuity problems.  
 I had already invalidated 16 (otherwise good)

takes this morning by changing an earring.  
 You cannot erase.  
 Is this a law?

No, a talent. To step obliquely  
 where stones are sharp.  
 Vice is also sharp.

There are laws against vice.  
 But the shock stays with you.

II.

*la vie est brève  
 un peu d’amour  
 un peu de reve  
 ainsi bonjour*

The Talent has a talent  
 for the obvious.  
 See this rope?

Tie one end to me  
and the other to Death:  
overlit on all fours I shall

circle Him  
At a consistent focal length  
Not too close not too far—

(‘Home’, whispers the cameraman)  
as the gravestones in the background  
spill slowly

out of the frame.  
Earth will be warmer than we thought,  
after all this circling.

**‘TV Men: Sappho’**

Sappho is smearing on her makeup at 5 a.m. in the woods by the hotel.  
He She Me You Thou disappears

Now resembling a Beijing concubine Sappho makes her way onto the set.  
Laugh Breathe Look Speak Is disappears

The lighting men are setting up huge white paper moons here and there  
on the grass.  
Tongue Flesh Fire Eyes Sound disappears

Behind these, a lamp humming with a thousand broken wasps.  
Cold Shaking Green Little Death disappears

*Places everyone*, calls the director.  
Nearness When Down In I disappears

*Toes to the line please*, says the assistant cameraman.  
But All And Must To disappears

*Action!*  
Disappear disappears

Sappho stares into the camera and begins, *Since I am a poor man—*  
Cut

**13. Anne Carson, Translations of Catullus 101 from *Men in the Off Hours* (2000) and *Nox* (2010)**

**Catullus 101, *Men in the Off Hours*:**

*Multas per Gentes et Multa per Aequora Vectus*  
(Through Peoples Through Oceans Have I Come)

*Catullus buries his brother.*

Multitudes brushed past me oceans I don't know.  
Brother wine milk honey flowers.  
Flowers milk honey brother wine.  
How long does it take the sound to die away?  
I a brother.  
Cut out carefully the words for wine milk honey flowers.  
Drop them into a bag.  
Mix carefully.  
Pour onto your dirty skeleton  
What sound?

**Catullus 101, *Nox*, 7.2**

Many the peoples many the oceans I cross –  
I arrive at these poor, brother, burials  
So I could give you the last gift owed to death  
And talk (why?) with mute ash.  
Now that Fortune tore you from me, you  
Oh poor (wrongly) brother (wrongly) taken from me,  
Now still anyway this – what a distant mood of parents  
Handed down as the sad gift for burials –  
Accept! Soaked with tears of a brother  
And into forever, brother, farewell and farewell.

**14. Anne Carson, 'Sonnet Isolate', *London Review of Books*, 32.21  
(2010)**

'I force myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste.'

Marcel Duchamp

A sonnet is a rectangle upon the page.  
 Your eye enjoys it in a ratio of eight to five.  
 Let's say you're an urgent man in an urgent language  
 construing the millions of shadows that keep you alive.  
 If only it were water or innocent or a hawk from a handsaw,  
 if only you were Adonis or Marcel Duchamp  
 settling in to your half hour of sex or chess, not this raw  
 block cut out of the fog of meaning, still damp. But no,  
 you are alone. Whatever idea here rises from its knees  
 to turn and face you quicker than a kiss  
 or a hyphen or the very first moment you felt the breeze  
 of being a creature who will die – one day, not this –  
 will ask of you most of your cunning and a deep blue release like a sigh  
 while using only two pronouns, 'I' and 'not-I'.

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G&R: *Greece & Rome*

GSLI: *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*

IJCT: *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*

LRB: *London Review of Books*

NYRB: *New York Review of Books*

RP: *Rivista Pascoliana*

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