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Translation, Criticism, and/or Politics: Assessing and Contextualizing Ezra Pound's
Homage to Sextus Propertius

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary

by

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In a July 1916 letter to one of his protégés, Iris Barry, Ezra Pound wrote, “if you CAN’T find any decent translations of Catullus and Propertius, I suppose I shall have to rig up something” (*Letters* 142). Pound evidently remained unsatisfied because during the next year he began writing the series of loose translations that would comprise his *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. The completed poem, consisting of twelve sections, first appeared in its entirety in Pound’s 1919 volume *Quia Pauper Amavi*. Its content was based on material that Pound selected variously from the final three books (out of four extant) written by Propertius, a Latin elegiac poet who lived during the first century BCE. Propertius’s poetry is autobiographical and largely focuses on his passionate and occasionally torturous love affair with a woman he calls Cynthia. However, it also indicates his keen interest in mythology and—a particularly salient feature of Pound’s renditions—chronicles his involvement in the Augustan literary milieu. However, Pound’s poem offers a reading of Propertius that differs from previous interpretations. For example, the persona presented in *Homage* is frequently sarcastic and an unrelenting critic of Augustus’s imperial ambitions, while historically Propertius had been considered neither of these things. Pound identified in Propertius a voice that he could use to critique the literary and political conformity of his own time, as well as to work through personal and creative anxieties that would allow him to develop further as a poet. *Homage* sees Pound working at greater length than before, too, employing a more expansive form as he moved beyond Imagism and the lyric poetry that had characterized his earlier work.

Homage to Sextus Propertius initially received a United States printing in the March 1919 issue of Harriet Monroe’s Chicago-based magazine *Poetry*; although Pound

sent Monroe the entire sequence, she only chose to include sections I, II, III, and VI. These selections provoked an outraged response from a Latin professor at the University of Chicago, W.G. Hale, who wrote a scathing letter to the editor denouncing the poem for its numerous infidelities to the original text. Hale accused Pound of being “incredibly ignorant of Latin” and even goes so far as to say that “If Mr. Pound were a professor of Latin, there would be nothing left for him but suicide” (*Critical Heritage* 157). The combination of *Poetry*’s abridgement and Hale’s critique annoyed Pound, who then tried to defend *Homage* and clarify his intentions in writing it. In a letter to A.R. Orage, his friend and the editor of the key British modernist magazine *The New Age*, Pound responded to some of Hale’s objections and explained that “there was never any question of translation, let alone literal translation. My job was to bring a dead man to life, to present a living figure” (*Letters* 211). *Umbra*, the first retrospective collection of Pound’s early poems, published in 1920, further supported this claim with a note in which Pound lists *Homage* as one of his three “major personae,” along with “The Seafarer” and “Exile’s Letter” (Ruthven 214). The classification of *Homage* as a persona rather than a translation encouraged reading the poem as an original work, an alternative interpretation that contributed to the construction of an increasingly oppositional framework within which to approach the poem. However, recent criticism has mostly abandoned the debate over how to classify the poem, seeing instead—as Pound’s corpus demonstrates—that translation and original production are neither antithetical nor mutually exclusive.

Translation was always an integral part of Pound’s conception of the poetic process. *Homage* represents one among many poem-translations that Pound wrote

throughout his career, including earlier works such as his versions of Guido Cavalcanti's lyrics and his rendition of classical Chinese poetry in *Cathay*, as well as much later translations of Confucius and Sophocles. Moreover, in his 1934 essay "Date Line," Pound identifies "criticism by translation" as one of five modes of literary criticism—the others being "criticism by discussion," "criticism by exercise in the style of a given period," "criticism via music," and "criticism in new composition" (*Literary Essays* 74). "Criticism by translation," unlike the other four modes, is not accompanied by any explanation, suggesting that Pound saw it as the most self-evident. *Homage*, then, is on one level a critical work, which challenges traditional academic views of Sextus Propertius and argues for the poet's importance within the canon of classical authors.

The polemic of categorization that occupied so much early discussion of *Homage* tended to disadvantage the poem in evaluations of Pound's corpus. When T.S. Eliot compiled and edited Pound's *Selected Poems* in 1928, for example, he decided not to include the poem. He explains the omission in his introduction to the volume:

I felt that the poem, *Homage to Propertius*, would give difficulty to many readers: because it is not enough a 'translation', and because it is, on the other hand, too much a 'translation', to be intelligible to any but the accomplished student of Pound's poetry. (*Selected Poems* 371)

Eliot's assessment of the poem is thus delimited by the oppositional discourse set by the translation debate. More recent readings of the poem's complex thematic content, however, have encouraged reconsideration of its importance in Pound's career. Ronald Bush, for instance, contends that *Homage* is in some ways a greater artistic achievement than *The Cantos* (*Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams* 73), and certainly a key text

for Pound in working toward his epic. Indeed, *Homage* marks a significant development in Pound's poetics, occupying an intermediary space between his early lyric output and the more active engagement with history and the social world that characterizes *The Cantos*.

A major problem posed by *Homage* has been that of historicizing and contextualizing it. One statement made by Pound in a 1931 letter to the editor of *The English Journal* has attracted particular attention to the issue of contextualization, but it has also been fairly mystifying (ironically, considering his stated intentions of demystification):

[*Homage*] presents certain emotions as vital to me in 1917, faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the British Empire, as they were to Propertius some centuries earlier, when faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the Roman Empire (*Letters* 310).

The poem, however, does not offer enough evidence to sustain reading it as a direct allegory or couched political critique. Nevertheless, *Homage*'s numerous anachronisms and its explicit allusions to "Welsh mines" and imperialism indicate that this contemporary context—including the wartime environment in which Pound wrote it—is indeed thematically significant. Vincent Sherry convincingly argues that the anxieties of this historical moment are manifest most notably in *Homage* at the level of language, in the rhetorical structures that Pound appropriates and reveals to be empty. Insofar as it is a political utterance, *Homage* illustrates a departure from the type of poetry that characterized Pound's early work, which was largely written in the belief that art is distinct from and superior to the vulgar world of reality.

Homage to Sextus Propertius, therefore, is a text in which a number of Pound's artistic concerns—as a translator, critic, and modernist innovator—converged with political concerns prompted in large part by the proximity of World War I. Pound found in the figure of Propertius a single voice with which he could express, interrogate, and attempt to navigate many of his own anxieties. The poem is thus important for Pound in several ways. First, it is a key document for understanding the influential theories of translation and literary criticism that Pound developed throughout his career. Secondly, although *Homage* has received some excellent recent critical attention, its significance within the Pound canon has remained underappreciated. Yet as a result of its ability to incorporate heterogeneous elements—both formal and thematic—*Homage* stands as a central, landmark work within the context of Pound's career, a text that laid the way for his poetic development toward *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and especially *The Cantos*.

1. First Responses

In *Personae*, a 1926 collection of Pound's work before *The Cantos*, the date 1917 is printed before the text of *Homage*, indicating presumably that sometime that year Pound had completed writing the poem. The poem, however, was not published in any form until Harriet Monroe's truncated printing in the March 1919 issue of *Poetry*, under the heading "Poems from the Propertius Series." Pound's subsequent complaints about Monroe's editorial intrusion were likely as much reflections of his general frustration with her magazine and lingering bitterness over Hale's letter as actual offense taken at her omissions. In a 1930 article for *The English Journal* entitled "Small Magazines," he wrote that Monroe's excised printing occurred at a time well after he had "ceased to regard *Poetry* or its opinion as having any weight or bearing or as being the possible

implement or organ for expressing any definite thought” (*Ezra Pound’s Poetry and Prose* V. 242). A. R. Orage’s periodical *The New Age*, a publication that Pound at that time viewed more positively, also printed only parts of *Homage*—six sections (I, IV, III, VIII, V, VI) in six issues from June to August 1919 (Gallup 256-57). Then in October the complete sequence was published by the Egoist press as part of the collection *Quia Pauper Amavi*.

Hale’s exacting treatment of *Homage* initiated further controversy, as early discussion of the poem became increasingly polarized between those who agreed that Pound had misread Propertius and those who either thought his reading justified, or believed he had never sought accuracy in the first place. This discourse—and especially the contributions of people supporting Pound—illustrates the poem’s oppositional position in relation to the conservative forces of academia and persisting Victorian aesthetics. However, this initial polarization and the arguments taken by each side tended to overdetermine interpretations of *Homage*, thereby hindering more nuanced critical evaluations and recognition of the poem’s complexity.

An anonymous review of *Quia Pauper Amavi*, which Orage biographer Paul Selver has since attributed to one Adrian Collins, ran in *The New Age* that November, giving a tongue-in-cheek critique of *Homage*’s mistranslations while also making some keen observations about Pound’s methodology. Collins recognizes that the poem’s blunders “are enough to show that Mr. Pound refuses to make a fetish of pedantic accuracy” (*Critical Heritage* 161). Despite this insight, however, Collins flounders when it comes to classifying *Homage*: he writes, “It is obviously not meant as a translation, though it ventures rather too near the original to be taken as a free fantasia on Roman

themes” (161). Although this review is far from an encomium, it treats *Homage* much more sympathetically than Hale does, and Pound was apparently pleased enough to invite Collins to dinner (160). Pound wrote a response to Collins’s review, which *The New Age* printed early that December. In it, he argues that the “tacit question” of *Homage* is “Have I portrayed more emotion than Bohn’s literal version or any other extant or possible strict translation of Propertius does or could convey?” (163). Pound does not make any effort in his response to deny that his poem is fundamentally a translation, though he contrasts it to his “perfectly literal” rendition of Propertius from 1911, “Prayer for His Lady’s Life,” which he considers, in fact, “perfectly lying and ‘spiritually mendacious” (164).

As opposed to the general disapproval *Homage* received from its academic reviewers, Pound’s good friend Ford Madox Ford strongly praised the poem. In a November 1919 review of *Quia Pauper Amavi* for the *Piccadilly Review*, Ford writes that he could “think of no one who has more patiently pursued a living erudition or more preserved a fierce vitality” than Pound, and asserts that “no one has so rendered the soul of Propertius as Mr. Pound has done” (*Pound/Ford* 30). Considering the close relationship between the two writers—resumed in 1919 after Ford’s return from serving in the war—it is not surprising that Ford’s assessment of *Homage* would accord so closely with Pound’s stated intentions. Indeed, *Homage* embodies some of the two writers’ shared aesthetic interests, such as their “aversion to traditional (read: pedantic and one-sided) academicism” (viii) and their dedication to bringing into the present the literary past they admired. Furthermore, before Pound himself began to assert the poem as a twentieth-century commentary, Ford wrote in a 1927 review of *Personae* for the *New*

York Herald Tribune Books: “what is the “Homage to Propertius” but a prolonged satire upon our own day, as if Propertius should come to New York or London or any other Anglo-Saxon capital?” (*Pound/Ford* 86).

Yet another dismissive review again brought one of Pound’s friends, Wyndham Lewis, to his defense. Georgian poet Robert Nichols, in January 1920, derided *Homage* as a “very odd version” of Propertius, which he attributes to a combination of Pound’s apparent discomfort in working with Latin and his insistence on presenting the ironical and snobbish “Poundian personality” (*Critical Heritage* 166-67). Nichols cites a few of the same mistranslations that Hale had already censured; in particular, he echoes the earlier reviewer’s disapproval of *Homage*’s rendering of “*gaudeat insolito tacta puella sono,*” in which Pound reads “*tacta*” as “devirginated,” rather than the literal “(emotionally) moved.” Lewis’s reply, printed a week later, attacks Nichols’s orthodoxy and the general “blind conservatism” that prevents people like Pound and himself from being able to “break through the hybrid social intellectual ring to something that is matter purely of the imagination or intelligence” (168-69). He also suggests that Nichols’s (and Hale’s) fixation on literalness reflects an ignorance of a long literary tradition, in which “Chaucer, Landor, Ben Jonson, and many contemporaries of Rowlandson, found other uses for classic texts than that of making literal English versions of them” (168). The following week, Pound contributed his own missive to the debate, claiming that he intentionally avoided literal translation and that if he was wrong in finding humor in Propertius, then the Latin poet must have been “the greatest unconscious ironist of all time” (170). This letter, moreover, affords Pound the opportunity to poke fun, through Nichols, at Victorian and Georgian conventions. He asks,

[A]re we to suppose that [Propertius] was never ironical, that he was always talking for Tennyson's tea-table, that he attended Dr. Wilson's mid-week prayer meetings, that he was as dull and humorless as the stock contributors to Mr. Marsh's series of anthologies? (170).

The example of one more friendly review from 1920, by novelist May Sinclair, underscores another way that supporters of the poem purported it to be a project grounded in their contemporary environment. In addition to de-emphasizing literal translation and emphasizing the poem's irony, Sinclair suggests the potential political implications of *Homage*. Foreshadowing—and perhaps influencing—Pound's later comment about “the infinite and ineffable imbecility” of the British and Roman empires, Sinclair contends that “There is no essential difference between Rome in the Augustan and London in the Georgian age” with respect to “imperial politics” and a disenchanted and detached intelligentsia (183-84). She offers the poem unqualified praise, writing that Pound “has never found a mask that fitted him better than his Propertius” and arguing that *Homage* alone would have been enough to secure him a literary reputation. Although Sinclair's admiration for the poem was not shared universally, her identification of its political content contributed to the interpretive lens through which it initially tended to be read.

For the next several decades—that is, until Hugh Kenner's landmark study *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951)—reactions to *Homage* consisted mainly of taking a side either in favor of or opposition to Pound. By and large, the question of which side to take hinged on the issue of translation, and how *Homage* fit into or clashed with conventional ideas of it. However, Pound throughout his career tried radically to rethink the

expectations of translation, as well as to challenge the traditional distinctions between translation and original writing.

2. Pound's Translations

Pound always considered translation to be a major part of a poet's education and responsibilities. This insistence on studying foreign languages and literatures can be traced back to his education at the University of Pennsylvania and Hamilton College, and perhaps even before that. In a 1962 interview for the *Paris Review*, Pound said, "I got into college on my Latin; it was the only reason they *did* take me in" (Wilhelm 79). He first studied Propertius at Penn during his sophomore year, in addition to other Latin poets, like Catullus, Vergil, and Ovid (113-14). Also while at Penn he befriended and shared a love for the classics with a young Hilda Doolittle, to whom he would later give the name H.D. After transferring to Hamilton, Pound's academic interests shifted to primarily medieval Romance languages—Spanish, French, Italian, and Provençal—as well as Anglo-Saxon. His graduate studies, again at Penn, focused on both Romance languages and Latin treatises from the Renaissance. When his dissertation proposal on Renaissance Latin was rejected, he attributed that refusal to the fact that he wanted to write about something "OUTSIDE the list of classical authors" (144). This disappointment in graduate school marks the first instance of Pound clashing with the conservative forces of academia, the beginning of an antagonism that was particularly heightened later by his adventurous translation efforts. Although Propertius held a secure place within the classical canon, similar desires to go against the grain and scrutinize the

academic status quo were major motivations for Pound when writing *Homage* a decade later.

Unsurprisingly, Pound's earliest translations as a publishing poet reflect his former academic interests. Volumes like *Personae* and *Exultations* from 1909 and *Canzoni* from 1911 contain translations from Latin, Spanish, and especially Provençal, the language of the medieval troubadour poets that had a tremendous impact on Pound's early verse. Pound's translations noticeably became more experimental along with his poetics. Comparison between "Prayer for His Lady's Life," a Propertius translation from *Canzoni*, and the rendering of the same Latin lines in *Homage*, serves as a helpful illustration of the differences between Pound's translation aims in 1911 and 1919.

"Prayer for His Lady's Life" begins thus:

Here let thy clemency, Persephone, hold firm,
Do thou, Pluto, bring here no greater harshness.
So many thousand beauties are gone down to Avernus,
Ye might let one remain above with us (Personae 37, 1-4).

In *Homage*, however, these lines are condensed to "Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her, / There are enough women in hell, / quite enough beautiful women" (218-19, IX. 14-16). Poetic embellishment and a focus on rendering each word came to be replaced by more direct and laconic translations that sought to convey an overall sense.

1912 saw the publication of two books that signaled a new stage in Pound's career as both poet and translator. In April, *Sonnets and Ballate of Cavalcanti*, a series of translations of the Italian poet, was published, representing Pound's final attempt at traditional academic translation. Then in October followed *Ripostes*, a volume that contains some of Pound's most notable early work, including his version of the Anglo-

Saxon poem “The Seafarer.” This translation, which often gave preference to the sound of the original over the sense, elicited especially irate responses from experts in Old English, foreshadowing the opposition that *Homage* would later receive from classicists.

Shortly after the publication of *Ripostes*, Pound acquired the manuscripts of Ernest Fenollosa, a professor who had compiled extensive notes on Chinese poetry and the Chinese writing system. Although these notes and the conclusions Pound drew from them are deeply flawed, they initiated a lifelong fascination with the Chinese language and led to the publication of his most significant set of creative translations to date in 1915’s *Cathay*. As Hugh Kenner observes in *The Pound Era*, *Cathay* “inaugurated the long tradition of Pound the inspired but unreliable translator” at the same time that it contributed to a modernist effort to revitalize English poetry (199). Pound’s work on *Homage*, which he began about two years later, was another step forward in both of these projects, an audacious departure from deeply rooted norms of translation and the marker of a new and innovative stage of his career as a poet. However, Pound achieved this decisive break in *Cathay* and *Homage* from the academic and Victorian currents that dominated English-language translation only gradually. His initial feelings toward these trends were, in fact, considerably more ambivalent.

Pound’s early reading was dominated by the figure of Dante, who served as a gateway for him to the work of poets like Cavalcanti and the Provençal troubadours, but who also persisted as an influence throughout *The Cantos*. Dante’s centrality is evident in Pound’s first major critical work—and his farewell to academia—*The Spirit of Romance* (1910), which contains a chapter dedicated solely to the Italian poet. In this chapter, Pound frequently cites Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translations of Dante from *The*

Early Italian Poets, which in general he commends. Pound no doubt also knew Rossetti's theoretical statements on translation. In *Dante and His Circle*, Rossetti posits that the "only true motive" for translating—which Pound faithfully adhered to—is "to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty...literality of rendering is altogether secondary to this chief law" (*Translation/History/Culture* 67). Also in his chapter on Dante, Pound expresses an unexpected degree of praise for Percy Shelley, who he describes as "honest in his endeavor to translate a part of Dante's message into the more northern tongue" (*Spirit of Romance* 155-56). In 1910, therefore, Shelley was grouped (loosely, at least) with Rossetti in Pound's mind as a respectable translator. He would agree with Shelley's assertion, from "A Defense of Poetry," that it is ultimately futile to "seek to transfuse from one language to another the creations of a poet" (*Translation/History/Culture* 56). For instance, in *ABC of Reading* (1934), Pound essentially echoes Shelley in his claim that "The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is CAPABLE of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension" (34).

Nevertheless, sympathetic utterances like these by Shelley and Rossetti constitute only a fraction of the nineteenth-century discourse surrounding translation, much of which Pound was consistently reacting against. Even Rossetti, almost immediately following the passage quoted above, adds a caveat that Pound ultimately would not heed:

The task of the translator (and with all humility be it spoken) is one of some self-denial. Often would he avail himself of any special grace of his own idiom and epoch, if only his will belonged to him; often would some cadence serve him but for his author's structure—some structure but for his author's cadence..." (68).

Rossetti's exhortation is essentially calling for what Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), terms "fluency"—that is, transparency in translation that gives the appearance that the translated text "reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text" (Venuti 1). Thus translation and original material seem to coincide, with the corresponding outcome that the translator effectively becomes invisible. Venuti argues that, with regard to English-language translations, value has assiduously been assigned to fluency since the early modern period, creating an implicit preference for transparent translations that remains prevalent today. In the Victorian period, efforts undertaken against the dominance of fluency, such as those of Francis Newman's attempts at "foreignizing" translations, were largely met with scorn and dismissed for being "un-English," both linguistically and in the sense of being unpatriotic (127). Matthew Arnold notably contributed to the attacks on Newman's methodology in his lectures, which were published in 1861 as *On Translating Homer*, and his towering stature in the English literary world helped to ensure that this position in favor of fluency maintained its predominance (129). Moreover, in these lectures, Arnold—who at the time was Professor of Poetry at Oxford—advocates deference to academics for the purpose of evaluating translations. He writes, "No one can tell [a translator] how Homer affected the Greeks; but there are those who can tell him how Homer affects *them*. These are the scholars; who possess, at the same time with knowledge of Greek, adequate poetical taste and feeling" (*Translation/History/Culture* 69).

In *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and elsewhere, as the altercation between W. G. Hale and the poem's supporters indicates, Pound rejected Arnold's idea of authoritative

academic judgment, especially considering the dullness that he perceived infiltrating literary education. In “Notes on Elizabethan Classicists,” which he wrote about the same time he was composing *Homage*, Pound diagnoses the problems he perceives to be plaguing the literary academy: “there is no discrimination in classical studies. The student is told that all the classics are excellent and that it is a crime to think about what he reads” (*Literary Essays* 239). For Pound, rote grammar drills had replaced critical scrutiny. Rather than trying to conform to the tastes of academia, as Arnold had suggested, Pound wrote *Homage* partly in an effort to reclaim Propertius for a vital and critical conception of literature. More was at stake in this decision than the classical canon and revival of literary study, however; Pound wanted his translations to contribute to and promote a vibrant modernist project. They would serve as a connection with tradition, which he, like T. S. Eliot, believed was first necessary before progress or innovation in contemporary writing was possible. Accordingly, Pound states earlier in the same essay that “A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translations; or follows it” (232).

Homage resists fluency to a greater extent than any of Pound’s previous translations, even though he would contend that he had expressed precisely “the foreign writer’s personality or intention.” In a letter to Felix Schelling from 1922, for example, Pound boasted that he could “so snugly fit into the words of Propertius almost thirty pages with nothing that isn’t S.P., or with no distortion of his phrases that isn’t justifiable by some other phrase of his elsewhere” (*Letters* 248). Nevertheless, *Homage*’s occasional anachronisms, such as the reference to a “frigidaire patent” and the use of the adjective “Wordsworthian,” undermine transparency, and the poem’s exaggeratedly

ironical tone foregrounds Pound's voice rather than that of Propertius. *Homage* is a salient example of the heterogeneous discourse that, Venuti points out, modernists cultivated as a challenge to the dominance of the transparent ideal (187). Yet Pound's translations were not always so starkly opposed to transparency. Rather, they attained this position gradually, as his earlier efforts and theoretical statements demonstrate.

Pound writes, in his introduction to *Sonnets and Ballate of Cavalcanti*, that “[i]n the matter of these translations and of my knowledge of Tuscan poetry, Rossetti is my father and my mother, but no one man can see everything at once” (*Translations* 20). Here he admits explicitly the debt to Rossetti that was evident in *The Spirit of Romance*. Venuti argues that Rossetti's versions of Italian poetry inspired Pound to employ archaic diction in his own translations, in an attempt to achieve a translation of “accompaniment” (192). Pound defines this translational mode as one in which the contemporary audience is “made aware of the mental content of the older audience, and of what these others drew from certain fashions of thought and speech” (*Translations* 17). Thus, although Rossetti's translations were primarily governed by fluency, they also suggested to Pound a way to combat fluency by means of stressing the cultural and temporal otherness of the foreign text. Pound's 1932 volume *Guido Cavalcanti Rime*, written well after he had renounced fluency, sees him using archaism much more extensively than in his earlier Cavalcanti translations. But despite these developments, Pound states in 1929 that with regard to his translations of Cavalcanti, “What obfuscated me was not the Italian but the crust of dead English, the sediment present in my own available vocabulary—which I, let us hope, got rid of a few years later” (*Translation Studies Reader* 28). Archaism may

have helped Pound resist transparency, but it potentially came into conflict with another important goal of the modernist project, the rejection of Victorian poetic diction.

In fact, as Pound's recourse to archaic language in "The Seafarer" (1912) indicates, it was not archaisms per se that he came to oppose, so much as their use in contexts that might align him with the Victorians. "The Seafarer" not only tries to imitate alliterative verse and recreate the sound of Anglo-Saxon words, but it also contains numerous nineteenth-century poeticisms, such as "oft," "bide," and "pinion" (Venuti 35). Even so, Pound made no efforts later to qualify his approval of the poem. He was often inconsistent regarding the appropriateness of archaism, and his anxiety about the residue of Victorianism varied depending on what the text to be translated was. Indeed, translation was a key aspect of Pound's iconoclastic critical enterprise, which in seeking to identify the truly exceptional and innovative often either challenged the traditional canon or reinterpreted canonized works. "The Seafarer," like the Provençal translations, *Cathay*, and *Homage*, is involved in this task of critical discernment. This function is indicated by the heading under which the poem first appeared in *The New Age*: "'The New Method' in Literary Scholarship" (Ruthven 213). By replicating the alliterative pattern of the original and the sound of certain Anglo-Saxon words, Pound brings into relief the formal and prosodic features that characterized the origins of English versification. His interest in these origins persisted, as can be seen in the alliterative form with which he begins "Canto I." Furthermore, the preservation of phonological characteristics in "The Seafarer"—for example, the rendering of "bitre breostceare" as "bitter breast-cares"—is indicative of Pound's recurrent tendency to focus his translations not just on the signified, but on the signifier as well (Venuti 34). Pound also employs this

technique at times in *Homage*, such as when he translates the Latin “sitiens” (“being thirsty”) as “sitting” in the line, “Wherefrom father Ennius, sitting before I came, hath drunk” (Sullivan 120-21).

Hugh Kenner argues that in *Cathay*, “Pound is at his best both as poet and as translator; he is amazingly convincing at making the Chinese poet’s world his own” (*Translations* 13). This effect, however, is less a result of Pound’s fluency—in which the distinction between the world of the source text and the translator’s world collapses—than of the fact that he is not bound within the normal constraints of the original poems. He is free of such constraints largely because, at this point, he has no knowledge of the Chinese language beyond what the notes of Fenollosa (who himself knew Japanese much better than Chinese) provide. But his willingness to translate Chinese poetry despite this ignorance indicates that Pound is also free of constraints by choice. According to the distinction he draws at the end of his essay “Guido’s Relations,” there are two types of translation: “interpretive translation,” that which serves as a bridge between the reader and the original text, and “cases where the ‘translator’ is definitely making a new poem” (*Translation Studies Reader* 33). The poems of *Cathay*, like “The Seafarer” (which was actually included in printings of *Cathay*) and *Homage*, are clearly translations of the latter type.

Unlike purely original compositions, though, those that can be considered translations possess—in Pound’s view—a unique capacity for revitalizing contemporary literature by introducing into it elements of past and foreign literatures. Pound saw this revitalization as one of the most important components of the modernist mission, and thus for him translation was always intimately associated with poetic development and

innovation. It is significant that *Homage*, the poem that marks Pound's departure from shorter lyrics into verse that is more expansive in form and content, is a translation.

Pound continually argued for the literary legitimacy of translation in his critical prose. In "How to Read," for example, he comments on how "the histories of Spanish and Italian literature always take count of translators. Histories of English literature always slide over translation...yet some of the best books in English are translations" (*Literary Essays* 34). It was important, then, not only for Pound's modernist agenda, but also for his sense of himself as a cultural authority, that translators and translation be given a prominent place in literary history.

3. Sextus Propertius

Very little is known about Sextus Propertius aside from the biographical details provided in his poetry, and so only a rough outline of his life can be reconstructed. He was born in Umbria, likely in the town of Assisi, between 49 and 47 BCE to an affluent family of the equestrian rank. However, his family suffered violence and land confiscation during the Perusine war between Octavian and Lucius Antonius in 41-40, an experience that Propertius would recall bitterly in his first book of poetry. Sometime later, he moved to Rome to pursue law and politics, but by the year 29 he was instead participating in a literary milieu. It was here that Propertius met the future subject of his love elegies, "Cynthia" (actually named Hostia), whom Gian Biagio Conte describes as "an elegant, refined woman, of great literary and musical culture" who lived "as a courtesan in the fashionable circles frequented by politicians and writers." Propertius's association with this "'free' woman of the demimonde" entailed compromising his social

status. Probably in 28, after the publication of his first book, Propertius encountered the famous patron of Augustan literature, Maecenas, who was eagerly recruiting young writers to sing the praises of the emperor. Through Maecenas, he met other poets of Augustus's court, most notably among them Virgil and Horace. Propertius continued to receive patronage from Maecenas for the remainder of his career, which consisted of only three more books of elegies. His output was cut short by an early death, which on the basis of allusions in his final book probably occurred around 16 BCE (Conte 331-33).

Propertius's first book, known by the Greek title *Monobiblos*, or alternatively, *Cynthia*, was published in 29 or 28 BCE. The poems in it focus almost entirely on Propertius's infatuation with Cynthia. The only reference to current events—which is critical of Octavian—occurs at the end of the book and mentions the impact the Perusine war had on Propertius's family. Jasper Griffin notes: “Every reader knew that at Perusia Octavian had perpetrated a massacre.... The gentle elegist takes the opportunity to remind us, in the normally innocent context of signing off” (*Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* 313). Book II continues to be dominated by the figure of Cynthia, but it also indicates Propertius's involvement with Maecenas and the milieu of the Augustan court. As a result of this involvement, “poetic homage to the princeps and his triumphs slips in” (Conte 332). Cynthia remains at the center of Book III, probably published in 23, but Propertius's adoration of her is “shadowed now by the imminent *discidium*, the definitive break,” which occurs in the book's final elegy (332).

Additionally, the poems here further show Propertius becoming implicated in Augustus's regime as well as the ideology and morality it promoted. Book IV, too, which Propertius seems to have written around the year 16, follows this trend. Only two of the eleven

elegies in this book are about Cynthia, while the others explore themes like Roman mythology and etiology, and are characterized by content that more than any of Propertius's previous work reflects "directives of the official culture" (333).

Propertius wrote all of his extant poetry in the elegiac form, which originated in Ionia and began to spread around Greece in the seventh century BCE. The form's most basic characteristic is its meter, the elegiac couplet, which consists of one hexameter line and one pentameter line. Greek elegies addressed numerous and disparate themes—from politics and polemics to more erotic subjects—and typically treated them with a degree of objectivity. On the other hand, the Roman iteration of the form, whose most prominent practitioners were Propertius and Tibullus, dealt almost solely with love and were largely subjective. Roman elegies depict putatively autobiographical episodes, but these episodes are usually framed "in typical forms and situations, in recurring ways" (322), suggesting that they are part of an assumed poetic role. Indeed, writes Conte, "One may speak of an elegiac world, with conventional roles and behaviors, and of an ethical principal belonging to it, an ideology associated with its founding values" (322-23). Latin elegies such as those in Propertius's first book express an ideology of love, in which the romantic attachment to the loved one is the source of all meaning and value, and in relation to which all other things are apprehended and judged. This ideology is essentially what Alan Peacock identifies in Pound's *Homage* as the "elegiac ethos," which establishes a system of "anti-virtues" and causes Propertius to renounce everything that is not Cynthia or his love for her (*Ezra Pound and History* 92). Another elegiac trope, related to the ideology and values of love, is the *recusatio*, or the refusal of elevated (that is, epic) poetry, which is typically framed as "a necessary choice

determined by [the poet's] own inability" (324). Pound in his poem underscores Propertius's *recusatio*, transforming it into an organizing opposition between the epic and elegiac modes that, beyond a mere aesthetic choice, signifies nonconformity and has both critical and political implications.

The entry on Propertius from *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* begins with the claim that he "is, perhaps, the most difficult of the Roman elegiac poets, but also the one who appeals most to the modern taste" (413). Pound—who was certainly involved in trying to determine what "modern taste" should be—was arguably attracted to obscurity or difficulty itself, but Propertius's poetry contained other elements that elicited admiration from Pound. His earlier remarks about Propertius often praise the elegist's rhythmic virtuosity. For instance, he tells Iris Barry in a 1916 letter that "one could do worse than know [Propertius] by heart for the sake of knowing what rhythm really is" (*Letters* 143). Furthermore, some degree of the irony that Pound attributed to Propertius and that *Homage* is saturated with exists in the Latin poems, though in most cases this is more likely self-irony than the sort of subversive sarcasm Pound identified. The two poets shared more general poetic values in common, too. Conte's description of Propertius's style could equally be applied to much of Pound's work: the elegies, he says, are "characterized by concentration, density of metaphor, and constant experimentation with new expressive possibilities" (336). Part of Propertius's poetic task, like Pound's, was to "make it new." Also, Propertius's poetry proceeds "by unpredictable movements, by leaps, through images and concepts, not making connections explicit but following a hidden, inner logic" (336). Such logic precisely corresponds to the method of juxtaposition that Pound uses throughout *The Cantos*.

In a 1922 letter to his former English professor from Penn, Felix E. Schelling, Pound explains that even though *Homage* is not a translation, he believes it “has scholastic value. MacKail (accepted as ‘right’ opinion on the Latin poets) hasn’t, apparently, *any* inkling of the way in which Propertius is using Latin” (*Letters* 246). This claim indicates that Pound was positing in his poem an alternative Propertius to the one traditionally described by classicists, here represented specifically by Virgil scholar John William Mackail. In Mackail’s 1895 overview of Latin literature, though, he is as laudatory as Pound of Propertius’s metrical ability: “The boy of twenty had already mastered the secret of elegiac verse...and writes it with an ease, a colour, a sumptuousness of rhythm which no later poet ever equaled” (Mackail 124). Nevertheless, Mackail differs from Pound in his assessment of the trajectory of Propertius’s career. Whereas Mackail contends that books II and III “are on the whole immensely inferior to [book I] in interest and charm” (127), Pound sees progress in Propertius’s work. Later in the letter quoted above, for example, Pound argues that “sometime after his first ‘book’ S.P. ceased to be the dupe of magniloquence and began to touch words somewhat as Laforgue did” (246).

One further example of a prominent academic position regarding Propertius before Pound’s *Homage* comes from George Augustus Simcox, a nineteenth-century classics scholar whose two-volume history of Latin literature was published in 1883. Simcox held an unequivocally unfavorable opinion of Propertius, and unlike Mackail, he was not at all impressed with the poet’s technical skill; instead, he argues that “the attempt at an artificial grace compromises the independence of Propertius” (321). He also describes Propertius as overly passionate, with “feelings too impetuous for

language,” which are “seldom deep and strong,” and contends that Propertius “always aims at organic unity, but seldom, if ever, reaches it” (321). The clever and aloof Propertius who emerges from Pound’s poem stands in stark contrast to this interpretation. Moreover, Simcox suggests that there is consensus—both historically and among contemporary readers—to view Propertius as someone “eager about all national concerns” and to accept him “as the chosen friend of all with whom he has linked his name” (320). He claims that Propertius imitates Virgil rather than parodies him, as Pound’s Propertius does. In presenting a Propertius persona who is explicitly ironical and who refuses to conform to the status quo or the dictates of power, *Homage* attempts to deconstruct interpretations like Simcox’s of Propertius as simply the “trumpeter of Vergil and the panegyrist of Maecenas” (320).

Despite the antagonism *Homage* initially faced from people in the classics community like W.G. Hale, Pound’s poem has had a definite impact on subsequent Propertius scholarship. Eminent classicist and Pound apologist J.P. Sullivan played perhaps the most important role in the reconsideration of *Homage*, arguing that it makes novel contributions to Propertian discourse. In addition to his systematic defense of Pound’s apparent mistranslations, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius* (1964), Sullivan responded to what he perceived to be the lack of a thorough overview of the Latin poet’s work with the 1976 volume *Propertius: A Critical Introduction*. In the preface he argues for Pound’s influence on contemporary Propertius criticism, stating that “the scant credit given [Pound] by most classical scholars is a disgrace to the profession” (ix). Additionally, he suggests that *Homage* opened up new ways of reading Propertius’s poetry, and that before Pound, “Propertian studies had been mainly concerned with

textual criticism and exegesis” (ix). Sullivan incorporates into his study important aspects of Pound’s interpretation of Propertius. He agrees, for example, that Propertius is fundamentally anti-imperialist, and argues for the centrality of the *recusatio* to his work: “With Propertius, [*recusatio*] becomes a whole new genre, that simultaneously displays his poetic abilities, rejects Augustan pressures, and defines the true nature of his art” (124).

However, Sullivan’s debt to Pound is most evident in his use of the critical term *logopoeia*, which Pound defined in “How to Read” as “a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas” (*Selected Prose* 424). In his discussion of Propertius’s *logopoeia*, Sullivan explicates Pound’s rather cryptic definition, describing it as “a sensitivity to how language is used in other contexts, and in a deployment of these other uses for its own humorous or satiric or poetic aims, to produce an effect directly contrary to their effect in the usual contexts” (151). Propertius achieves this, for Pound and Sullivan, through his ability to alternate between sincere and ironic uses of rhetorical modes. As Sullivan writes, again borrowing Pound’s language, “magniloquence can be deployed *against* magniloquence” (151). The idea of Propertius’s *logopoeia* persists in later criticism, albeit without Pound’s terminology. After speaking of Propertius’s irony in her introduction to W.G. Shephard’s 1985 translations, Betty Radice explains that “Recognition of such wit and word-play owes much to Ezra Pound” (*The Poems* 14). Similarly, though he does not mention Pound’s name, Oliver Lyne echoes the political element of *Homage* when he describes how Propertius’s irony creates a sense of “undermined patriotism” (*Propertius* xxxii).

Taking Sullivan's argument even further is classics scholar D. Thomas Benediktson, whose Poundian interpretation of the Latin poet is clear in the title of his 1989 book, *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity*. His analysis is not typical of Propertius criticism, but it demonstrates the persistence of *Homage*'s impact on the discourse seventy years after the fact. Because the text of Propertius's poetry is notoriously corrupt, Benediktson concludes that it "will not yield to the traditional modes of textual analysis" and instead requires a new methodology. He then proposes that "Just such a nonclassicist's approach was offered by Ezra Pound" (8). For Benediktson, *Homage* was not the result of Pound reading Propertius in ways that suited his own poetic aims; rather, Pound was first attracted to Propertius's poetry because it was "marked by other traits that we now call modernist"—among these being the interior monologue, stream-of-consciousness, and imagism. Even if the claim that Propertius's poetry displays such "modernist" devices is a tenuous one, Sullivan and Benediktson represent a strain of classics scholarship that has followed Pound's cue and read Propertius in noticeably "modernist" ways.

As he expresses in the "Translator's Foreword" to the 1985 translations cited above, W.G. Shephard had to come to terms with the figure of Pound when he set about translating Propertius. He begins by saying, "It is necessary to say something about Ezra Pound, because his *Homage* to Sextus Propertius provided me with my first introduction to Propertius, and I imagine many readers will arrive at this book by the same route" (*The Poems* 28). Although he goes on to argue that Pound's poem does not attempt to convey the exact sense of the Propertian text—it instead presents a "Sextus Pound" figure—he also acknowledges that *Homage* "can hardly be ignored if one is to say anything at all

about translating Propertius” (28-29). Shephard’s statements here indicate that Pound’s entry into the Propertian discourse with *Homage* pulled down some of the academic boundaries that had before confined Propertius, and introduced new interpretations that could not easily be dismissed.

The fact that a future academic translator like Shepard first encountered Propertius through *Homage* suggests further that Pound’s poem brought the Latin poet’s work into a more popular arena of reading—paradoxically, since Pound was promoting an anti-popular, avant-garde poetics. Sullivan argues that Pound must be given credit “for restoring Propertius in some degree to the public domain by drawing him to the attention of other poets such as Robert Lowell,” who also translated Propertius (*Propertius ix*). Likewise, in the preface to David R. Slavitt’s translation, Matthew S. Santirocco writes that because of first Goethe’s *Römische Elegien* and then Pound’s *Homage*, “Propertius has by now certainly come into his own, acquiring a whole new generation of readers” (*Propertius in Love x*). Thus Pound’s poem—by increasing Propertius’s visibility to the non-academic public and by influencing (often without acknowledgement) subsequent critical studies—continues to be centrally involved in the study of Propertius’s corpus.

4. *Homage* in Early Pound Criticism

W.G. Hale’s excoriating review of *Homage* and the efforts of Pound and his supporters to defend it surrounded the poem with controversy and ensured that—initially, at least—the question of its generic classification would remain the predominant critical issue. Most early studies of Pound’s work in general, and of *Homage* in particular, locate

themselves in relation to this debate before attempting any further analysis. Such limitations—due largely to the widespread assumption that translations and original works form a binary opposition—have disadvantaged *Homage* in both critical assessments and the formation of the Pound canon.

In 1926 *Homage* was included in the first edition of *Personae*, a selection of Pound's poetry up to that point. Two years later, however, T.S. Eliot compiled and edited the Faber & Gwyer edition of Pound's *Selected Poems*, omitting *Homage*. Eliot justified his decision in the introduction by insisting that only someone well versed in the classics would be able to comprehend the poem, and that classicists themselves would dislike it for not conforming to their ideas of translation. Following Pound's suggestion, Eliot identifies the poem as a *persona* rather than a translation, but his editorial choice is ultimately determined by the received antithesis between original and translational writing. In 1934 Faber & Faber published a separate edition of *Homage* on its own, but when the company reissued *Selected Poems* in 1948, the poem was still excluded. Eliot then added in a postscript that he "should now write with less cautious admiration of *Homage to Sextus Propertius*" (*New Selected Poems and Translations* 372), but his change of opinion evidently was not enough to merit the poem's inclusion. It was not until the compilation of a new Faber & Faber volume, *Selected Poems 1908-1959*, in 1975 that Eliot's decisions were replaced and *Homage* was incorporated. Furthermore, when Pound selected the poems to be included in the 1953 New Directions collection, *Translations*, he decided to leave *Homage* out. Explaining Pound's choice in his introduction to the volume, Hugh Kenner echoes Eliot, writing that *Homage*, along with Pound's adaptations of Heinrich Heine, are "rather *personae* than translations.... Pound

calls the Propertius sequence a *Homage*, largely in a futile attempt to keep it from being mistaken for an attempt at translation” (*Translations* 13). Even after thirty years, then, the problem of *Homage*’s generic classification still effectively circumscribed the critical discourse around it, and led to its exclusion from collections both of original poems and translations. In contrast, poems like “The Seafarer” and those from *Cathay* appear in both Eliot’s selections and *Translations*.

With James Laughlin and New Directions, Pound found a reliable publisher for his work. When his literary reputation was in danger because of his support for fascist Italy in his infamous radio broadcasts, Laughlin was largely responsible for keeping Pound’s poetry in print in the United States (Faber & Faber continued to publish his work in England). Laughlin’s efforts through New Directions reflected attempts not only to restore Pound’s reputation but also to construct a modernism that was, as Kenner later called it, a “Pound era.” For instance, Laughlin’s success in corresponding his promotion of Pound with the prevailing New Critical belief that “evaluations of art must be separated from any type of real world issues” was a major factor in Pound receiving the 1949 Bollingen Prize for *The Pisan Cantos*, just a few years after he was charged with treason (Barnhisel 126). Also in 1949, in a departure from Eliot’s collection, nine of the twelve sections of *Homage* appeared in New Directions’ first edition of Pound’s *Selected Poems*. The company then foregrounded *Homage* in 1958 with the printing of *Diptych Rome-London*, which placed the poem alongside *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, thereby suggesting a connection between the two. While these publications have certainly helped to increase the visibility of *Homage*, the poem has continued to be relatively marginalized in critical discussions.

In 1951 New Directions published the first major study of Pound's work, Hugh Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, as another part of its efforts to boost the poet's reputation. Kenner, when discussing *Homage*, attempts to escape the strictures of the translation debate by arguing for its complete originality. He provocatively asserts that "Few more original poems exist in English" and tries to give it credibility by comparing its technique of "misreading" with that used by Joyce in *Ulysses* (151). Moreover, he is one of the first critics to contend that *Homage* marks a significant creative moment in Pound's career, one on which important elements of his subsequent work depended. For example, Kenner anticipates *Diptych Rome-London* by suggesting that there is thematic continuity between *Homage* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. He additionally makes the novel argument—one that would be expanded upon by later critics—that *Homage* is a key text to have in mind when approaching *The Cantos*, in part because both works employ dramatic "shifts of poetic texture and tone" (163). In fact, though, Rolfe Humphries had made a similar assertion in an unprinted introduction to the 1949 New Directions edition of *Selected Poems: Homage*, he writes, presents "the Persona still, Pound to tell us about Propertius, Propertius to speak through Pound about writing. The tone deepens; an idiom has been established.... This, pretty much, is the language, the resonance, of the Cantos" (*Ezra Pound and James Laughlin* 300). Kenner develops this point further, explaining that while the content of *Homage* is not a collage of disparate sources, it juxtaposes various rhetorical modes, creating "a co-presence of contradictory feelings in a way that will later be used to organize" *The Cantos*. He also distances *Homage* from translation by alluding to T.S. Eliot's seminal essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Thus he implies that Pound's use of Propertius's Latin text

demonstrates not a relationship of translation but one of “tradition,” a necessary connection with the literary past.

Despite Kenner’s efforts to separate *Homage* from the discourse of translation, though, the first book-length study of the poem, Sullivan’s *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius* (1964), evaluates the poem’s achievements as a “creative translation.” Although his premise is to reconstruct Pound’s logic and highlight the poem’s successes as a rendering of Propertius, Sullivan also identifies the device of translation as a problematic feature of *Homage*. “Too often,” he writes, Pound “allowed Propertius to blur what he wanted to say” by remaining bound to the Latin text and constrained in his role as translator (23). As this comment suggests, Sullivan tries to judge *Homage* according to Pound’s own standards as articulated in both his general critical statements and his personal remarks about the poem. In essence, he seeks to confront and resolve the problem cited by Eliot as the reason for omitting *Homage* from *Selected Poems*. Indeed, in his preface Sullivan paraphrases Eliot’s statement about the unstable middle ground occupied by the poem:

I found among undergraduates reading classics a dislike of the poem excited largely by its defects as literal translation, and among others reading English a lack of comprehension, firstly, of certain parts of the poem, and secondly, of the achievements of Pound in this translation (vii).

Overall, Sullivan offers a thorough exploration of the reasons for such reactions and satisfying responses in defense of *Homage*; but in doing so, he reasserts the question of how successful the poem is *as* a translation—which dominated its critical discourse from the start—as the most fundamental question to be addressed when dealing with it.

Donald Davie, discussing *Homage* in *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor* (1964), declares his frustration with all the critical treatment the poem has hitherto received: “Espey is surely wrong, as are Eliot and Kenner and Sullivan also; so far from a knowledge of Propertius’s Latin being a help to the understanding of Pound’s poem, it is a perhaps insurmountable hindrance” (80). All of these critics, in Davie’s estimation, are to some degree trapped in thinking about the *Homage* as a translation. John Espey, for instance, in his influential study *Mauberley* (1955), states that *Homage* “requires for its fullest savor some knowledge of the text on which it is based” (103). Davie works to reject the prevailing critical view in his discussion of *Homage*. He confidently posits that the poem is not a translation, and suggests that “When T.S. Eliot says that the *Homage* ‘is also a criticism of Propertius,’ and when Pound himself says that it ‘has scholastic value’ (*Letters*, p. 245), they are surely wrong, because, for this to be true, Pound’s poem would need to be far more of a translation than it is” (83). In addition, he disputes the claims that *Homage* is in any way difficult or arcane: “It is the easiest of Pound’s poems, and it has been treated as one of the hardest” (85). This is not to say that Davie denounces the poem, however. On the contrary, he argues that Pound’s use of “translatorese,” an awkward balance of prose and verse diction with innovative comic and rhythmic effects, represents a type of writing he would go on to employ further in *The Cantos*.

Davie’s irreverent reading of *Homage* was the first to seriously question the narrow considerations that had governed discourse about the poem for the near half-century since it was written. Previously, critics—from Eliot to Sullivan and Kenner—had proceeded by recapitulating or expanding upon Pound’s own statements about the poem. The tendency to discuss *Homage* in this way was motivated largely by a desire to

improve the poem's position within the translation debate that had initially disadvantaged it, but had done little actually to transcend that debate. In effect, Davie set the precedent for more nuanced interpretations by such critics as Michael Alexander and Ronald Bush—by refusing to accept the standard tone of discussion and by altogether rejecting the idea of the poem as a type of translation.

5. *Homage* and its Anxieties

The anachronisms and sarcasm in *Homage* deny it full transparency as a translation and clearly indicate the presence of Pound's voice, but Pound himself offered contradictory explanations of whose concerns—his or Propertius's—were most fully displayed in the poem's content. As his claim that *Homage* contains “nothing that isn't S.P.” suggests, Pound believed that he was being completely faithful to the vision and sentiments of his Roman precursor. Indeed, Pound argued that the irony and nonconformity he gave Propertius in his poem were characteristic features of the original writings, and he complained that Mackail, the supposed academic authority on Propertius, “Doesn't see that S.P. is tying blue ribbon in the tails of Virgil and Horace” (*Letters* 246). On the other hand, as stated earlier, Pound writes that *Homage* reflects “certain emotions as vital to me in 1917” as they were to Propertius when he was writing his elegies (*Letters* 310). Pound may have believed in the accuracy of his interpretation of Propertius, but within this interpretation there was also an articulation of his own feelings. Hugh Kenner posits a similar model to what Pound's statements suggest, arguing that in Pound's *personae* “The original author's attitude of mind passes through the words, but the primary intentions are those of Pound” (*Translations* 13).

The two most explicit quandaries faced by Pound's Propertius in *Homage* are artistic in nature. First, because of pressure from his patron Maecenas to write an epic, Propertius has to deal with the question of genre—whether to continue writing lyrics in the elegiac mode or to follow Maecenas's requests and produce a war poem in the service of the Roman state. Secondly, he struggles to reconcile the recognition of his own mortality with the possibilities for his art in posterity. In Michael Alexander's terms, Propertius demonstrates admirable "dedication [to his craft] alongside a rueful perception of personal irrelevance" (*Poetic Achievement* 113). These two artistic concerns, however, point to other related and implicit anxieties experienced by Pound's Propertius as well as by Pound himself. *Homage*'s complexity derives from its ability to dramatize numerous tensions and oppositions that, in addition to ostensibly predominant artistic matters, operate on both a personal and political level. The poem, moreover, marks a crucial point in Pound's career because much of the thematic content of his subsequent work—especially in *The Cantos*—depends directly on the exploration of these conflicts.

Almost at the very beginning of *Homage*, Pound's Propertius introduces the problem posed by the specter of epic, or the trope of the *recusatio* in the elegiac vocabulary. He sarcastically and dismissively refers to the "Outwearers of Apollo" who "will, as we know, continue their Martian generalities" (*Personae* 205, I. 10), as well as the "Annalists" who "will continue to record Roman reputations" (205, I. 16). Placing himself in contrast to such types, he desires rather "something to read in normal circumstances" (205, I. 19) and "a wreath which will not crush my head" (205, I. 21). However, also in section I, Propertius's attempts to resist epic come into conflict with his idea that art, to some extent, is a means of overcoming mortality. The example he gives

(Varro and Leucadia, Catullus and Lesbia, Calvus and Quintilia, Gallus and Lycoris), he adds his own name: “And now Propertius of Cynthia, taking his stand among these” (224, XII. 76).

The dichotomy between epic and elegiac modes in *Homage* has implications for Pound as a critic, beyond his exegesis of Propertius’s Latin text. Propertius’s rejection of epic in the poem is more accurately a rejection of Virgilian epic, which is presented in *Homage* as purely propagandistic. He sarcastically refers to Virgil, for example, as “Phoebus’ chief of police” (223, XII. 31). Although the *Aeneid* indisputably served a definite function for the Augustan state, attributing these sentiments to Propertius was part of Pound’s heterodox reading of the *Elegies*. The entry on Propertius from *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* explains, in contrast to Pound, that the Latin poet “had the greatest admiration for Virgil, and around 25 B.C. he hails (2.34) the great new Roman epic in progress” (414). The different sentiments expressed by Pound’s Propertius, however, are not surprising considering that Pound himself frequently expressed distaste for Virgil in his critical writings, accusing him in one essay of having “no story worth telling, no sense of personality” (*Literary Essays* 215).

Pound’s apparent denunciation, through Propertius, of epic poetry is complicated by the fact that, by the time he wrote *Homage*, he had already started working on the early Cantos, the beginnings of his own epic project. Known as the Ur-Cantos, these efforts were false starts for Pound and a major source of creative frustration at this time. Virgil, perhaps the name most commonly associated with the epic besides Homer, did not provide a suitable model for the type of poem Pound hoped to write—that is, one that juxtaposed material from different cultures and historical periods and that challenged

handicapped by the provincial nature of the United States and sought to overcome this by locating himself in London, the old imperial capital (*The Great War* 88). As late as 1915, during the heyday of Vorticism, Pound praised the “Roman vortex,” contending that the “value of a capital is the value of centralization, in matters of knowledge and art, and of the interaction and stimulus of genius foregathered. *Ubicunque Romana lingua dominatur!*” (88). At the time World War I broke out, Pound firmly aligned himself with the history and avant-garde culture of Great Britain, alignment that would be severely shaken over the next few years. As Sherry explains, “Within the system of oppositional and right-wrong thinking that the war so obviously fosters, belonging to the correct tradition is the one thing needful for a poet uneasy about belonging to any tradition at all” (88). But as the war progressed and he saw friends like Ford Madox Ford and Wyndham Lewis head to the front and experienced the death of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, his opinions about Great Britain and the imperial capital that was his adopted home changed completely. Soon after in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, a poem that clearly marks this shift, Pound would mourn for the lives lost: “There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them, / For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization” (188, V. 1-4). The bitter sarcasm with which Propertius discusses the Roman Empire in *Homage* also reflects this change.

Alan Peacock suggests that, rather than representing a twentieth-century political critique, the Propertius persona embodies an “elegiac ethos” or assumes a “Bohemian pose.” Either of these would entail a categorical denunciation of everything that is not love or the exalted object of love—here, Cynthia. While this is certainly a useful way to think about the poem, Peacock slights the possibility that choosing to adopt such an ethos

might itself be a political choice, or at least a choice influenced by political anxieties. *Homage*, even if not always overtly, chronicles Pound's political attitudes at a specific moment, after several years of indirectly witnessing (while most of his male peers were directly engaging in) the deadliest war the world had ever seen. In a 1918 letter to James Joyce, Pound mentions the poem and World War I together, suggesting also the complexity of his feelings about the war: "I hope my Propertian ravings will amuse you IF I ever find anyone to print 'em. Thank gawd the war is at least partly over. We will now have the competition of all the returning troops to contend with" (*Pound/Joyce* 145). Pound's politics, particularly at this point relatively early in his life, were highly variable, contingent on personal experiences and even on what he was reading. As he later became increasingly preoccupied with economic matters, his opposition to imperialism waned; and when he resided in and supported fascist Italy, he offered no criticism of Mussolini's imperial ambitions.

Despite the occasional anti-imperialist statements in *Homage*, the poem's most trenchant political critique occurs at a linguistic level. The clearest examples of this result from the Propertius persona's ironical tone and his sarcastic use of rhetorical forms that are undermined by the content they express. For instance, when he says that "It is noble to die of love, and honourable to remain / uncuckolded for a season" (214, V. 61-62), he appropriates the wartime rhetoric of morale boosting but replaces traditional virtues like courage with things more befitting the elegiac mode. *Homage*'s irony largely stems from Pound's recent interest—thanks to his acquaintance with Eliot—in French symbolist poetry, especially that of Jules Laforgue. Pound praised Laforgue for his ability to generate ironic *logopoeia*, one of the three basic qualities he believed poetry

should seek to achieve, in addition to *melopoeia* (musical quality) and *phanopoeia* (imagery). Laforgue and Propertius were the two names Pound most often associated with *logopoeia*, and he spoke of them together in an important letter: “sometime after his first ‘book’ S.P. ceased to be the dupe of magniloquence and began to touch words somewhat as Laforgue did” (*Letters* 246). Still more directly, in *ABC of Reading* (1934), following his explanation that *logopoeia* results from “using the word in some special relation to ‘usage’, that is, to the kind of context in which the reader expects, or is accustomed, to find it” (*ABC* 37), Pound adds parenthetically that “If you want really to understand what I am talking about, you will have to read, ultimately, Propertius and Jules Laforgue” (*ABC* 37-38).

Sherry, in explicating the political dimensions of *Homage*'s irony, convincingly argues that the “mocking earnestness” at the beginning of Section V (“The *bare* attempt would be praiseworthy” and “the *mere* will to act is sufficient” 212, V. 4-5) reflects the tone of the whole poem (Sherry 112). These phrases are reminiscent of the language of rationale that British Liberals used to comfort the populace during the war effort. Moreover, the “Out-weariers of Apollo” and their “Martian generalities” (205, I. 10)—that is, their euphemisms and equivocation—for Pound have done serious damage to meaning, and Sherry argues that this leads Pound to develop a “poetics and prosody of pseudostatement” through “mock sententiousness” (Sherry 114). Propertius heeds the call for a “large-mouthed product” (212, V. 14), and accordingly *Homage* is characterized by long lines and indirectness, a clear departure from Imagist dicta like direct treatment of the thing and eschewing superfluous words. The poem also contributes to the recalcitrance of meaning by combining a tone of familiarity with

obscure classical names (Sherry 114), such as when Propertius speaks about testing epic themes “(Near Q. H. Flaccus’ book-stall). / ‘Of’ royal Aemilia, drawn on the memorial raft, / ‘Of’ the victorious delay of Fabius, and the left-handed / battle at Cannae” (207, II. 9-12).

Although irony and urbane language are pervasive in *Homage*, there are also candid moments where it addresses its subject much more seriously. Vincent Miller schematizes the poem in the following way: the first five and last five sections, both in a conversational tone, deal with “the fret of contemporaneousness” and “trivialities of the day,” respectively, while the central two sections are those of “poignancy” (Miller 458). Although the conversational and apparently flippant parts of the poem certainly contain serious concerns, these poignant passages offer helpful insight into more fully uncovering the network of anxieties that underlie the text. Propertius’s only direct musings on death, for example, occur in Section VI. However, as suggested above, the knowledge of mortality is a major recurring anxiety in *Homage*; it functions as one antipode of an opposition with the possibilities of art in posterity. Propertius is resigned to the reality of his death having a negligible impact on the world, and to the fact that his funeral will likely be “a small plebian procession” (214, VI. 18). He also perceives that death is the ultimate equalizer, bringing “naked over Acheron / Upon one raft, victor and conquered together” (214, VI. 2-3)—that is, unless his poetry might suffice to distinguish him from the rest. He consoles himself by remembering, “There will be three books at my obsequies / Which I take, my not unworthy gift, to Persephone” (215, VI. 20-21). Elsewhere in the poem he explores similar questions about art’s capacity for preservation, most pointedly in Section I. Initially, he is confident that he “shall have, doubtless, a

boom after [his] funeral, / Seeing that long standing increases all things / regardless of quality” (205, I. 23-25), but as he proceeds—and as the rest of *Homage* verifies—he is considerably more insecure about his reputation. While his “songs shall be a fine tomb stone over” the beauty of the women depicted therein,

Neither expensive pyramids scraping the stars in their route,
Nor houses modelled upon that of Jove in East Elis,
Nor the monumental effigies of Mausolus,
are a complete elucidation of death (207, I. 67-70).

Confronted with the fact that death is unavoidable and that what happens after his death is uncontrollable, Propertius decides rather to focus on life-affirming activities, particularly his amorous encounters with Cynthia. Section VII sees Propertius ecstatic after a night spent with Cynthia and contains as a result the poem’s most poignant expression of the power love possesses in the face of death. Propertius recognizes that while “To-day we take the great breath of lovers, / to-morrow fate shuts us in” (216, VII. 31-31); but paradoxically, he also contends,

If she confer such nights upon me,
long is my life, long in years,
If she give me many,
God am I for the time (216, VII. 37-40).

Love, Propertius seems to suggest, is not subject to the same temporality as that governed by death. In his 1983 essay on *Homage*, Ronald Bush draws a connection between lines such as these and a passage from the conclusion to Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance*.

Pater writes: “Some spend this interval [of life] in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among ‘the children of the world,’ in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time” (*Ezra Pound & William Carlos Williams* 67). Bush argues that Propertius is

preoccupied not only with physical death but also with a “death-in-life” existence—that is, living without pursuing “as many pulsations as possible” (67). For Propertius the poet, a deathlike existence would entail conformity to popular taste and literary convention, things that were anathema to Pound and thus to his Propertius persona as well. His *recusatio*, therefore, is more fundamental than merely an aesthetic concern or a statement of nonconformity with the Augustan regime; it represents his fidelity to a general conception of vitality, of which his art and his relationship with Cynthia are the two most prominent aspects.

Pound’s interest in vital forces was significantly influenced by French symbolist poet and critic Remy de Gourmont, whose *The Natural Philosophy of Love* Pound translated in 1922. In this book, writes Bush, de Gourmont “explained how the imagination mediates between sexuality and the life of art”; or in other words, he described “the sexual roots of poetic vision” (72). Moreover, Pound himself discussed de Gourmont and Propertius together, and accordingly, de Gourmont’s influence is present in *Homage*. In a note to his translation of *The Natural Philosophy of Love*, Pound proposes that “Perhaps the clue is in Propertius after all: *Ingenium nobis ipsa puella fecit* [‘My genius is no more than a girl’ (213, V. 28)]” (73). If artistic integrity and love, for Propertius, are related as parts of a generalized appeal to life forces and a rejection of death-in-life, they both also depend on the figure of Cynthia—and specifically sex with her—for activation. *Homage*, then, posits a unifying and transcendent libidinal force, “the power of imagination rooted in desire to marry self and world, and to redeem them from a fragmented and ghostly existence” (74). Fittingly, Pound became interested in de Gourmont’s philosophy around the same time that he composed *Homage*. In a text

characterized by personal and creative anxieties that Pound was attempting to navigate, de Gourmont provided one possible solution.

Nevertheless, de Gourmont's theory and Pound's poem are both problematic with regard to gender. In a 1918 letter to James Joyce, Pound mentions the forthcoming *Homage* and goes on to muse that his writing style is more "phallic" while Joyce's is more "excremental" (*Pound/Joyce* 144-46). This self-classification suggests the influence of de Gourmont's thought on Pound and lends further support to the argument that Pound had him in mind when composing *Homage*. However, it also demonstrates that Pound's interpretation of de Gourmont was literally a phallogocentric one, according to which the creative sexual energies belong exclusively to men. Certainly, parts of the poem—sections XI and XII especially—foreground Cynthia's sexual liberation and agency, but her actions are not depicted as in any way being productive and are filtered through the jealousy-prone subjectivity of Propertius. As indicated in "My genius is no more than a girl," the transformation of sexual instinct into artistic creation relies on an objectified female to receive the sexual energy of the male. Furthermore, since Propertius is quick to point out Cynthia's flaws and to compare these to the flaws of other women in history, the poem conveys a rather cynical view of women in general. Terri Brint Joseph argues that "If women never have asked or stood for 'anything else of importance,' then Propertius loses whatever thin justification he might have had in using Cynthia as his excuse" for not writing Augustan propaganda (98). On the other hand, the belittling of women in the context of elegiac poetry contributes to the insult directed at conformism and empire through the sarcastic voice of the Propertius persona. Cynthia,

then, who is ostensibly the subject of Propertius's poetry, becomes in *Homage* more of a setting, a discursive space in which "higher" matters of art and politics can be addressed.

The anxieties that get played out in *Homage*—artistic, political, and personal—all share the backdrop of World War I, as the environment in which Pound was writing. The two primary points of tension, the dialectic between the epic and elegiac modes and the concerns about death or a deathlike existence that destroys identity, can be unified by the elusive presence of war. By translating an ancient text and then achieving an extra layer of distance through extensive irony, Pound tried to keep his poetry removed from the tumultuous events happening around him. Yet these same events, of which the war was most pressing, force Pound to confront them in *Homage* in indirect ways, such as with considerations of empire or an increased anxiety about the proximity of death. *Homage* is a poem in which Pound could tentatively examine these tensions, and which as a result opened the way for major poetry more openly grounded in his contemporary world, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* and *The Cantos*.

Looking back in 1932 Pound reflected: "I wonder how far the *Mauberley* is merely a translation of the *Homage to S.P.* for such as couldn't understand the latter" (*Letters* 321). This statement, which complicates the tendency to privilege *Mauberley* over *Homage*, has elicited considerable speculation about how the two poems might relate to one another. For one, they are Pound's first two significant long poems, indicators of a transition in his career from the Imagist phase to the project that essentially occupied the rest of his literary life, *The Cantos*. They are also both poems that lead up to Pound's permanent departure from England and the London milieu in

which he earned his reputation as a leading figure in modernist poetry. In this respect, *Mauberley* certainly brings the seeds of discontent present in *Homage* to fruition, offering a vividly bitter depiction of the decaying literary scene as well as famous passages about the ravages of World War I. K.K. Ruthven, in *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae*, argues that *Mauberley* expresses Pound's inability to keep art and the real world separate any longer, that it "dramatizes a conflict between the antithetical demands of aestheticism and politics, a conflict that Pound resolved successfully by rejecting his *Lustra* manner and going ahead with the *Cantos*" (126). I would contend that *Homage* works in almost exactly the same way, only less explicitly. It serves as a textual site where Pound attempted to navigate anxieties that were becoming more pressing in the midst of war and as he tired of the artistic atmosphere in which he was participating. The tentative explorations in *Homage*, concealed beneath translation and layers of irony, were largely what allowed Pound to dramatize so clearly in *Mauberley* the conflict that Ruthven mentions. The question of where *Homage* fits into the Pound canon is a matter of continuing critical debate, and the disadvantage that the poem faced as a result of the constraining translation debate has left a definite mark. Further critical efforts to interrogate the operative tensions in the poem—and perhaps a contemporary book-length study like Espey's *Mauberley*—are important steps in trying to achieve a fuller understanding of *Homage*'s complexities and its influential place in Pound's career.

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