Did their Propertius walk that way? Ezra Pound’s *Homage to Sextus Propertius* as a complaint against classical philology

William Dingee*

This article proposes to re-examine Ezra Pound’s *Homage to Sextus Propertius* through the lens of Pound’s response to classical philology in general and Latin textual criticism in particular. It begins by examining certain key details of Pound’s education as an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania and seeking to situate this background within the history of classical scholarship. It proceeds to examine aspects of Pound’s aesthetic and political thinking as they relate to his opposition to philology and to his project in the Homage. In the main analytical section of the article, selected passages from the Homage are read as parodic appropriations of philological approaches to Latin texts, deployed in such a way as to forward a vision of Propertius very different from that predominant in the classical philology of Pound’s student days. The conclusion of the article relates the Homage to Pound’s broader project of creating a ‘new method in scholarship’ and considers the poem as an attempt to make a serious academic contribution to the study of Propertius.

Ezra Pound’s *Homage to Sextus Propertius* stands among the poet’s best work, and must be recognized as one of the great achievements of the Modernist interaction with antiquity. Though its initial reception ranged from puzzled to viciously critical,¹ it slowly gained recognition as a major, if flawed, work, and has since occasioned more than half a century of enquiry from students of both antiquity and Modernism. Published secondary literature has understandably been dominated by questions about Pound’s method as a translator of Propertius, and the successes and failures thereof.² In what follows, I propose to largely side-step the question of translation on a line-by-line level, focusing instead on the factors that first drew Pound to Propertius and arguing that his *Homage* is, among other things, a response to his frustrations with the practices of classical philology as he

---

* Correspondence: Department of Classics, Princeton University, 141 East Pyne, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA. Email: wdingee@princeton.edu

William Dingee is a doctoral student in classical philology at Princeton University.

¹ For the poem’s early reception history, see Sullivan (1964a: 3–16).

encountered them as an undergraduate and graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. I will then seek to demonstrate that this reaction to philology informed the technique Pound employed to shape and supplement the Propertian material that he reworked in the Homage.

**Backgrounds to the Homage: Pound’s classical education in context**

In 1901, at the age of 15, Pound enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Pennsylvania on the strength of his entrance examinations in Latin. During his freshman year, he completed the college’s introductory Latin sequence. In his sophomore year (1902–3), he ‘enrolled as a special student to avoid irrelevant subjects’ after finding himself frustrated, as he would note in a letter of 1930, with the ‘lack either of general survey [sic] of literature or any coherent interest in literature as such (as distinct for example from philology)’ (Robbins 1963: 15). Freed from requirements, Pound spread out into a characteristically polymathic array of pursuits. Nonetheless, he found time for no fewer than four Latin courses that year (one being a two-semester survey). They were as follows:

- Cicero, *De Senectute or De Amicitia; Letters*. Roman History and Antiquities [Gibbons]
- Horace, *Satires and Epistles* [McDaniel]
- Catullus and Tibullus. History of Roman Lyric and Elegiac Poetry [McDaniel]
- Propertius and Ovid. History of Roman Lyric and Elegiac Poetry (continued) [McDaniel]

Walton Brooks McDaniel, who taught Pound Horace, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, was the teacher of Latin who had the greatest direct influence on Pound during this time.⁴ In 1902, he was a new arrival from Harvard, where he had completed his PhD on textual criticism of the Homeric Hymns in 1899.⁵ As we will see, McDaniel’s interest in textual criticism would become one focus of Pound’s frustration with the academy during his later career as a student.

After his sophomore year, Pound was forced for academic reasons to move to Hamilton College to complete his Bachelor’s degree, during which time he studied no further Latin.⁶ He returned to UPenn in 1905 to enrol as an MA student. During

---

³ This list is based on Pound’s undergraduate and graduate records, located at The University of Pennsylvania Archives, in collection UPF 1.9 AR [Office of Alumni Records Biographical Records 1750–2002], box 2119, together with the *Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania: 1902–1903* (1902: 163, 164). Some of this information has previously been reported in Thomas (1983: 165).

⁴ See Moody (2007: 14, 15).

⁵ For more information, see ‘Walton Brooks McDaniel’ (1972).

⁶ Pound’s undergraduate records from Hamilton are stored in the college archives. See Merit Register HAM COLL HG R24m 1897, 29.
his first year, he primarily studied Spanish, French, and Italian literature, but also enrolled in a Latin pro-seminar focusing on textual criticism with his old teacher McDaniel. The course catalogue for that year describes it as follows:

An introduction to the methods of textual and exegetical criticism (a special study of Catullus, Martial, or Tacitus). Practice in using philological periodicals, and the books of reference that are of most importance to the teacher of Latin, as well as the dissertations and works that especially deal with the author chosen as the basis of the year’s work.

The author chosen for that year was Martial, and Pound paid enough attention at one meeting—perhaps the first—to note McDaniel’s high praise for Lindsay’s recent edition (1902) and to record the names of a half dozen textual scholars and commentators whose editions could serve as exemplars. When Pound would later complain of philologists that they employed an ‘uncritical habit of mind’ masked by an ‘apparatus criticus’ (1973b: 167), he spoke from a position of some experience on the subject. Despite Pound’s grievances, discussed in more detail below, McDaniel’s classroom evidently had a lasting impact on him. Pound began one of his first publications, The Spirit of Romance, with the disclaimer that it was ‘not a philological work’ (1910: v). Nonetheless, during a discussion of the Pervigilium Veneris in the very first section, he writes in a footnote: ‘I discount lines 69–74 as the spurious marginalia of some copyist’ (1910: 10, n.1) — a judgement articulated in precisely the terms of Latin textual criticism as he would have encountered it in this seminar.

Pound’s years in McDaniel’s classroom, both as an undergraduate reading Propertius for the first time and as Master’s student gaining exposure to Latin textual criticism, came on the tail end of a period of ferment in the history of professional scholarship on Propertius. Perhaps no other ancient writer’s text has generated as much controversy and editorial speculation as that of Propertius, and the history of work on his text is unique for the sheer number of large-scale transpositions that have been suggested, as well as the redivision and recombination of both individual poems and whole books. Such large-scale interventions have inevitably engaged larger aesthetic ideas about what would or would not have been conceivable to a poet writing in Propertius’ milieu, more so than the

7 See n. 3 above.
9 These notes are preserved at Yale’s Beinecke Library, YCAL MSS 43 87.3722. Also preserved at YCAL MSS 43 87.3716 is an essay written for McDaniel comparing passages from Martial and Ovid.
10 Many essays by Ezra Pound have been cited in reprints for ease of reference, in which case original dates of publication are available in the final bibliography. Facsimiles of Pound’s contributions to periodicals are available in Baechler et al. (1991), and Gallup (1983) should be consulted for more details on all publications by Pound.
11 For the transmission of Propertius, see Butrica (2006). For a history of editions of Propertius, see the introduction in Heyworth (2007).
word- or line-level emendations that form the dominant questions of many other traditions.\textsuperscript{12}

The tradition of suggesting major corruption within the transmitted text of Propertius can be traced back at least as far as the 1577 edition of Scaliger, in which the editor freely proposed emendations and transpositions when he detected an apparent logical problem or discontinuity. These transpositions enjoyed widespread influence until the 1816 edition of Karl Lachmann,\textsuperscript{13} which undid many of Scaliger’s excesses, returning to a careful examination of the manuscript evidence. However, his edition was not strictly conservative. It still contained transpositions, and proposed for the first time the division of the manuscripts’ book II into two separate books. The edition used by Pound, Müller’s Teubner, is clearly in the Lachmannian tradition, though it benefitted from advances in the study of the manuscripts and introduced new transpositions of its own.\textsuperscript{14}

The 1880s and 1890s were a remarkably active period in the history of Propertian textual scholarship. Emil Baehrens’s 1880 Teubner established a solid apparatus criticus and may be considered the first fully modern edition. In 1888, A.E. Housman published an article with dozens of his own conjectures and proposed transpositions.\textsuperscript{15} J. P. Postgate’s edition was published in 1894 and contained transpositions so wild that even the pro-intervention Housman objected to the extent to which they were employed.\textsuperscript{16} It was in response to this climate that, in the preface to his 1901 Oxford Classical Text of Propertius, published the year Pound entered UPenn as an undergraduate, Phillimore famously wrote quot editores tot Propertii.\textsuperscript{17}

Such was the background of textual scholarship against which Pound first encountered Propertius, and many of Pound’s ideas about Propertius and about classical literature in general can be read as a strong reaction against the methods of philologists practicing in this tradition. His relationship with the academic establishment and the scholarship which it produced was always one of tumult. During his MA, he quarrelled his way across departments at Penn, and was eventually forced to leave, this time for good, before completing his doctoral thesis.\textsuperscript{18} Pound would complain in a 1906 essay that the student of classical texts was required ‘to

\textsuperscript{12} For an overview of the history of Propertian scholarship, see Fedeli (2006). For scholarship in the twentieth century, see Tarrant (2006). For a recent discussion of the intersection between literary and textual criticism in the case of Propertius, see Tarrant (2016).

\textsuperscript{13} See Timpanaro (2005: 75–81).

\textsuperscript{14} Pound used a stereotype reprinting, under the title Elegiae, of the text of Propertius from Müller (1870). Müller’s Latin introduction, found in the full 1870 edition but not reproduced in the reprinting used by Pound, discusses his indebtedness to and departures from Lachmann. Pound’s copy is held at the Harry Ransom Center at UT Austin (PA 6644 A2 1898 PND).

\textsuperscript{15} See Housman (1972a).

\textsuperscript{16} See Housman (1972b).

\textsuperscript{17} ‘There are as many Propertii as there are editors of Propertius’.

\textsuperscript{18} See Moody (2007: 29–31).
spend most of his time learning what his author wore and ate, and in the endless pondering over some utterly unanswerable question of textual criticism such as: “in a certain epigram”, not worth reading, and which would not get to print today, “is a certain word secar or secat? The meaning will be the same but the syntax different?” (1906: 31). This is no hypothetical example, but rather a window into McDaniel’s classroom, where Pound must have heard a discussion of emendations to the manuscripts’ reading of secat at Martial V.38.3, and perhaps even consulted a recent contribution by Postgate (1892), mentioned above as the preparer of an edition of Propertius. Pound protested that he was constricted by this approach to texts, and complained that anyone who tried to venture more broadly would be scorned as a ‘dilettante’. In an early hint of the anti-German sentiment which would grow to animate much of Pound’s response to philology, he wrote in this same piece that ‘no one knows the contempt and hatred that can be gathered into these few syllables [i.e., ‘dilettante’] until they have been hissed at him by one truly Germanized’ (1906: 31).

Years later, in the aftermath of the initial negative reception of his Homage, Pound asserted that ‘the philologists have so succeeded in stripping the classics of interest that I have already had more than one reader ask me, “Who was Propertius?”’ (1919: 83). What, precisely, did he feel that these professors had gotten so badly wrong? Pound’s personal conflicts with academic authority provide a partial biographical explanation for this rancour, but they hardly constitute the substance of his objection. His complaints against philologists are often centred on the notion that they lavish their attention on everything but real issues of literary criticism, and that by so doing they impose harsh technical barriers for entry to the study of classical texts without encouraging students to really enjoy them aesthetically and intellectually.

Müller’s edition of Propertius may well have been in the front of Pound’s mind when he wrote: ‘I know that all classic authors have been authoritatively edited and printed by Teubner, and their wording ultimately settled at Leipzig, but all questions concerning “the classics” are not definitely settled’ (1954d: 240).

Lindsay (1902) cites this piece in the apparatus ad loc.

Pound’s opposition to philology is well-attested in his published essays and letters. For his comments on classical philology, see those gathered by Sullivan (1964b). For a wide-ranging discussion of Pound’s objections to philology in general, see Logenbach (1987). Turner’s history of philology and its role in the birth of the modern humanities is helpful in situating Pound’s objections to philology in the context of the broader history of the American research university; it also makes clear that Pound was not the only American man of letters in the early twentieth century to use philology as a slur (2014: 272, 273). It must be noted that while this article is concerned with classical philology, Pound was perhaps more deeply engaged with Romance philology, as demonstrated by his careful notes preserved in Beinecke YCAL MSS 43 87-3733, 3734. For recent work on Pound and Romance philology, see Riobó (2002) and McMullan (2017). Pound also engaged with Old English textual criticism and philology in his poem The Seafarer, as discussed by Robinson (1993).
The case of A. E. Housman, mentioned above as a prominent textual critic of Propertius, may serve as a revealing example of the type of philology that Pound came to protest against and the nature of his objection to it. It is perhaps only a coincidence that *Canzoni*, the first volume in which Pound directly engaged with Propertius, includes these lines from a poem called ‘Song in the Manner of Housman’: ‘We also shall be dead pretty soon/Therefore let us act as if we were dead already’ (1911: 38). Here, Pound’s scorn focuses on Housman the poet, but much later, in 1934, Pound would set his sights on Housman the critic, in a negative review of his lecture on the *Name and Nature of Poetry* (1936). While Pound focuses his critique on Housman as a critic of English literature, he sarcastically refers to him as a ‘Professor of Latin in a recognized institution of learning’ (1954c: 66) — a phrase which recalls the words of William Gardner Hale, an early critical reviewer of the *Homage*, who wrote ‘if Mr. Pound were a professor of Latin, there would be nothing left for him but suicide’ (1919: 55). Pound even goes so far as to parody the language of philology in his objection to Housman’s argument: ‘On page 19 I would offer an emendation. As the text stands we are invited to suppose that “the intelligence” (they are discussing the eighteenth century) involved “some repressing and silencing of poetry”. The intelligence never did anything of the sort’ (1954c: 68).

This mocking tone towards Housman’s profession suggests that behind Pound’s criticism of this romantic conception of poetry as a force opposed to the intellect lies a resentment towards Housman’s status as a Latinist. Rather than view Pound’s rejection of Housman’s views on English poetics as being caused by the separate factor of his resentment of Housman’s classical scholarship, we might more productively consider how these strands of thought may have been entangled in Pound’s mind. Pound’s decision to lampoon Housman both as a poet and as a critic suggests that he saw a certain kinship between the dry pedantry with which he thought academics like Housman placed themselves between modern readers and classical texts, ‘hiding them under their persons’, as Pound would have it in the *Cantos* (Pound 1986: 63), and the aesthetic mortification of which he accuses Housman’s verse, his late-Victorian tendency to act ‘as if [he] were dead already’.

Pound’s comments on Housman are hardly the only testament to the way that Pound’s views on philology dovetail with broader aesthetic and political matters in which Pound fashioned himself as a conscientious objector. Pound wrote that

Catullus, Propertius, Horace, and Ovid are the people who matter. Catullus most. Martial somewhat. Propertius for beautiful cadence though he uses only one meter. Horace you will not want for a long time. I doubt if he is of any use save to the Latin scholar. I will explain sometime viva voce. Virgil is a second-rater, a Tennysonianized version of Homer. Catullus has the intensity, and Ovid might teach one many things. (Paige 1951: 138)\(^{21}\)

\(^{21}\) Note that for the letters of Ezra Pound I have used the more comprehensive 1951 London edition. This differs in pagination and content from the 1950 New York edition and subsequent reprints thereof.

86
The term ‘Tennysonianized’ opens up onto many further issues colouring Pound’s perception of Roman poetry. Pound cannot have been unaware of Tennyson’s own affinity for Vergil, and this was more than a casual comparison — Tennyson here stands for Victorianism as an aesthetic movement, but also as an era of imperial self-confidence and of an unsettlingly close relationship between poetics and politics. Pound assimilated Tennyson the poet laureate, author of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’, with Vergil as ‘Phoebus’s chief of police’ (Homage xii) — indeed, an early draft of the Homage references ‘Tennysonian Virgil and Gladstonian Horace’. Politics and poetics are never far apart for Pound, and his objections to certain nineteenth-century governmental, philological, and aesthetic ‘authorities’ are manifestations of the same iconoclasm and articulated in a shared vocabulary of a quest for directness and individualistic immediacy. To this we must add that an anti-German sentiment animating Pound’s opposition to philology became increasingly obvious as World War I drew to a close. In his series of essays on ‘Provincialism and the Enemy’, published in 1917, Pound would complain that ‘people see no connection between philology and the Junker’ (1973b: 161). In this work, Pound sketches a theory of the crisis in Europe: that it arose from ‘provincialism’, from a lack of ‘communication’, from a balkanization of European consciousness. This balkanization had its analogues and to some extent its sources in the increasing specialization of academic departments around specific national literatures, a system modelled on that of Germany, the most aggressively ‘provincial’ of the European states. At the heart of this system lies the neglect of the value of the thinking individual, and of art qua art. In essence, Pound placed philology at the root of the fracturing of Europe, of authoritarian anti-individualism, of nationalism, and of the war itself.

22 See Tennyson’s ‘To Virgil’.
24 Preserved in Beinecke YCAL MSS 43 126.5200. Unpublished text by Ezra Pound is copyright © 2018 by Mary de Rachewiltz and the Estate of Omar S. Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.
25 Scholars have generally been much mislead in reading the Homage’s politics by Pound’s comment in a letter from 1931 suggesting that the Homage ‘presents certain emotions as vital to [him] 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 idiocy of the Roman empire’ (Paige 1951: 310). Davie (1975: 54–61) represents the most sophisticated and influential reading of the poem’s ‘anti-imperial’ style, although his argument that the mistranslations of Latin in the poem are analogous to ‘babu’ English is not only somewhat idiosyncratic but also, in the wake of postcolonial studies, regrettably phrased. We must note, however, that Pound wrote this comment over a decade after the poem’s publication. By that time he had been living in Italy for years and his politics had drifted in the direction of Mussolini’s fascism. In 1917, Pound wrote that, in contrast to Germany, ‘England and France are civilization because they have not given away to the yelp of “nationality” . . . for all their “Little England”, “La France”, “Imperialism”, etc.’ (1973b: 160). This is not to say that Pound had no
From this necessarily brief survey, we begin to glimpse some of the intellectual strands which Pound would weave together in writing his *Homage*. Of course, this picture can only be partial. A more complete story of the genesis the *Homage to Sextus Propertius* would include an examination of how the jumbled nature of Propertius’ text relates to Pound’s interest in fragments in general. It might also examine his evolving theory and practice as a translator at this time, and how his translations related to his employment of the device of persona. It would also treat Pound’s political thinking in this period more fully. This is all beyond the scope of this article however. What I intend to present here is an intervention into the conversation about how Pound’s poem relates to the text of Propertius as presented in Müller’s edition. I will argue that Pound found in Propertius a mask which allowed him to explore a nexus of aesthetic, political, and intellectual positions, among which opposition to a certain tradition of philology was key. Like the professional philologists with whom he had clashed as a younger man, Pound found in Propertius a text that was perplexing, discontinuous, and aesthetically challenging. However, Pound’s response to the same set of perceived difficulties was radically different. For Pound, Propertius was an anti-Augustan apostate, the heroic innovator of an alternative aesthetic that opposed authoritarianism and defended the poet’s commitment to private matters and to beauty. Pound discovered in Propertius’ elegies a tendency towards repeated *recusatio*, a trope arguing in favour of a more subjective type of poetry of love and against the writing of a certain type of militaristic epic, as well as an ironic transference of military language into the domain of the individual lover. He would reformulate these effects as he perceived them, in combination with the problematic state of Propertius’ text, as a means of forging a voice for his own opposition to an oppressive tradition which he placed at the heart of the war in Europe — the tradition of classical philology to which both Pound and the text of Propertius had been heavily subjected.

contempt for England’s wartime rhetoric in 1917. Sherry reads aspects of the *Homage*’s parodic tone against this background (2003: 111–20), and it is clear that, despite his larger sympathies in the conflict, Pound did not spare British authorities the irony to which his Propertius subjects Augustus. However, the political significance of the poem’s anti-philological and, by proxy, anti-German irony has gone under-recognized in the search for anti-British and anti-imperial sentiments.

26 On this issue, see Kenner (1971: 54–75) and Childs (1986: 57–70). Based on a preview I have seen at a conference, Goldschmidt (forthcoming) promises to be illuminating.

27 See Xie (1999), Maerhofer (2000), and Reynolds (2011).


30 The poem has been read as a response to philology before, as briefly by Kenner (1971: 285). Judge (2004) reads the poem and its reception by scholars through the lens of a competition over who has the right to speak about Propertius.

31 The elegaic *recusatio* takes on a new aspect when we consider that Pound was in the early stages of his own epic project, *The Cantos*, at this time.
‘Philological’ technique in the Homage

While it is clear that Pound was quite familiar with the practices of classical philology as exercised in his days as a student, the extent of his immediate familiarity with any particular movements in Propertian textual criticism may ultimately be lost to the domain of speculation. However, one need look no further than Pound’s own edition of Propertius to see that even a non-specialist consulting the paratextual materials on the page would have been confronted with the presence of editorial interventions. With Lachmann, Müller divides book II after poem IX, and his text contains many of the transpositions and redivisions of poems that are familiar from any modern edition of Propertius. What distinguishes Müller’s edition is how fastidiously these alterations are represented on the page. Whenever transposition, division, or recombination has produced major changes in line numbering, one margin shows the editor’s proposed numbering while the other reflects the traditional manuscript numbering. Whenever book or poem number has been affected, Müller prints the original numbering in brackets next to his new numbering. The result of all of this is that many of the poems in Müller’s edition display some sort of numerical contradiction and highlight the tension between the transmitted and the reconstructed texts. Pound’s admittedly sparse annotations on his personal copy of Propertius seem at times to record his interaction with the editor’s decisions, as when a pencilled mark on page 50 appears to note the transposition of lines 11 and 12 of III.XXI [2.26]. To a poet of Modernist sensibilities, such a proliferation of textual fluidity and fragmentation must have been highly suggestive. There can be little doubt that the sense of Propertius’ text as one especially open

32 It is unsurprising for Pound to have interacted with the formatting of this edition given his general interest in the physical presentation of printed texts as documented by McGann (1997: 33, 62). Pound’s corrections to the proofs for the 1934 Faber edition of the Homage, preserved in Beinecke YCAL MSS 43 106.4449, are a good example of his attention to detail in such matters. His penciled remarks display his concern for the exact indentation of the lines as well as the size and placement of the capital Roman numerals before each section, another feature of the poem possibly suggested by Müller’s edition. For Pound’s personal copy, see n. 14. Citations to Pound and Propertius follow this scheme:

II.III=Müller (1870), book two, elegy three.
v.ii=Homage to Sextus Propertius, Section five, part two.

Book and poem numbers in Propertius are always cited twice for convenience of reference to both Müller and Heyworth (or any other comparable modern edition). Separate line numbers have been supplied only in those cases in which Müller’s lineation differs from Heyworth’s. Since Homage to Sextus Propertius is not generally printed with line references, I have cited Pound’s work by section number only.
to intervention is part of what drew Pound, like so many textual critics, to the task of interpreting it. Pushing further than this, however, we can observe that many techniques employed by the classical scholar — including annotation, renumbering, and transposition of the text — are at play in Pound’s activities as a translator.

The following remark by Hooley will prove highly useful in seeking to understand Pound’s deployment of these techniques: ‘It is perhaps more interesting that the tone of ennui and stupefying inertia is present not only in the language and phrasing Pound uses, but even in the very process of his translation — as if the jaded persona Pound infers from the text were itself translating the poem’ (1988: 46). Expanding on Hooley’s idea that Pound is not only translating a persona but translating as a persona, we can suppose that Pound treated the text of Propertius as he imagined that his irreverent Propertius persona, equipped with philological apparatuses, might have treated his own text. Pound’s protean concept of ‘Propertius’ would then encapsulate not only the author of an irreverent text and an irreverent translator of that text, but also an irreverent academic critic of the text. Pound’s frequent jabs at the practice of commentary are among the most immediately obvious forms in which this philological tendency manifest itself. While Pound often omits toponyms and specific mythological allusions found in the original, he occasional expands on Propertius’ text significantly in the voice of an annotator. The most discussed locus for this phenomenon, noted as early as Hale’s infamous review (1919: 54), is Pound’s insertion of glosses in the following passage from Section i of the Homage:

quod non Taenariis domus est mihi fulta columnis,
    nec camera auratas inter eburna trabes,
    nec mea Phaeacas aequant pomaria silvas,
    non operosa rigat Marcius antra liquor;
At musae comites et carmina cara legenti,
    et defessa choris Calliopea meis. (IV.1.49–54 [3.2.11–16])

Though my house is not propped up by Taenarian columns
    from Laconia (associated with Neptune and Cerberus),
Though it is not stretched upon gilded beams;
My orchards do not lie level and wide
    as the forests of Phaeacia
    the luxurious and Ionian,
Nor are my caverns stuffed stiff with a Marcian vintage,
My cellar does not date from Numa Pompillius
Nor bristle with wine jars;
Yet the companions of the Muses
    will keep their collective nose in my books,
And weary with historical, data they will turn to my dance tune.
Pound has imaginatively supplemented *Taenariis* with information he found in his dictionary under *Taenarus*, adding ‘Neptune’ from a temple of Neptune found on cape Taenarus and Cerberus from that location’s association with the underworld. He has done the same by adding ‘the luxurious and Ionian’ to *Phaeacas*. What has garnered the most attention is his expansion of *Marcius . . . liquor* to ‘my cellar does not date from Numa Pompilius’, apparently glossing *Marcius* as a reference to Ancus Marcius and *liquor* as liquor. Interestingly, Pound acknowledged this as one of his only real mistakes (Paige 1951: 212), but he downplayed Hale’s erudition in the process, contending that he spotted the error ‘not from his own intelligence or from knowledge of Latin but from using an annotated edition’ (Paige 1951: 309). Hale neglected, however, to discuss another element not found in the Latin: the reference to ‘historical data’ as a source of ‘weariness’, in contrast to the poet’s ‘dance tune’. It seems odd, then, that Pound admitted to his mistake around *Marcius*, since it is entirely besides the point: namely, that tiresome glosses are insufficient instruments for capturing the poet’s mercurial ‘dance’. Pound not only refused to correct the *Marcius* error in subsequent printings of the poem, but added perhaps the most glaring anachronism in the *Homage* to this passage for the 1926 reprinting in *Personae*: ‘My cellar does not date from Numa Pompillius/Nor bristle with wine jars,/Nor is it equipped with a frigidaire patent’. A subtler manifestation of Pound’s engagement with the practice of glossing is his substitution of less common epithets for the original’s *Venus*, as with ‘Cypris’ in Sections iii and vi and ‘Cytherean’ in Section xi.ii, or his use of the more explicit ‘Helen’ for the original’s *Lacaena* in vii. One could even point to his translation of *Horatia pila* as both the more-or-less correct ‘Horatian javelin’ and the grammatically impossible ‘Q.H. Flaccus’s bookstall’ as a refraction of the scholarly practice of glossing.

Pound’s employment of philological techniques in this poem extends far beyond these sorts of line-by-line glosses, however. If we construct an implied text of Propertius behind Pound’s poem, we find that it is clearly derived from Müller,

34 It has been noted as early as Hale (1919) that Pound used some version of the ‘Lewis and Short’ Latin dictionary to prepare the *Homage*. In the epigraph to *Lustra*, Pound (1916) cites the *Elementary Latin Dictionary of Charlton Lewis*, an abridged edition which does not contain the entry on ‘Taenarus’ which Pound evidently consulted for the *Homage*. For a history of this dictionary, see Sypher (1972). Pound’s practice here is very similar to the ‘lexical insert’ discussed by Davidson (1997).

35 Ruthven (1969) *ad loc.* notes these insertions and the fact that they may be read as a parody of philological glosses, and points to the similar treatments of *Lycio . . . deo* (IV.I.38 [3.1]) in Section i and *Acheloi* (III.XXXII.33 [2.34]) in Section xii. Pound’s ambivalent attitude towards glosses and his attempts to incorporate them in the text of the *Cantos* are discussed by Nadel (1997: 151, 152) and Byron (2014).

36 At this point we might recall Pound’s definition of ‘logopoeia’, which he claimed to have uncovered in Propertius: ‘the dance of the intellect among words’ (1954b: 25).

37 Again derived directly from Lewis and Short, s.v. *pila*. This is noted by Rudd (1994: 122).
but departs significantly throughout, and not simply through the well-noted ‘mis-translations’. One of the most obvious departures is the addition of quotation marks. Pound uses this device as a means of ironizing the rhetorical stance and language of certain lines from Propertius, but the practice is reminiscent of the textual editor’s power to add punctuation of all kinds to the Latin text, to decide which words belong to which speakers, and even to set certain lines aside as possibly spurious and therefore not part of the text proper. Beyond this, if we move to consider the broader structure of the *Homage* and the sequence of passages from Propertius which underlies each of the sections within it, we observe that Pound employed a practice of redvision, recombination, and transposition of the poems in Propertius which mirrors and parodies the treatment to which the manuscript text was subjected in Müller’s edition.  

Simply to note these transpositions, and their similarity to philological practice is, however, to miss the poetic stakes of this practice. To better understand what sort of vision of Propertius Pound offered in employing these transpositions, it will be helpful to examine alongside Müller’s Latin one of the most interesting instances of this practice in the *Homage* as it occurs in Section vii:

errat, qui finem vesani quaerit amoris:  
verus amor nullum novit habere modum. 30  
terra prius falso partu deludet arantes  
et citius nigros Sol agitabit equos,  
fluminaque ad caput incipient revocare liquores,  
aridus et siccus gurgite piscis erit,  
quam possim nostros alio transferre dolores:  
huius ero vivus, mortuus huius ero. 35  
quod mihi si secum talis concedere noctes  
illa velit, vitae longus et annus erit.  
si dabit haec multas, fiam immortalis in illis:  
nocite una quivis vel deus esse potest. 40  
[...]

tu modo, dum licet, o fructum ne desere vitae.  
omnia si dederis oscula, paucis dabis. 50  
ac veluti folia arentes liquere corollas,  
quae passim calathis strata naturae vides,

38 While this point has not been explored at length in published work of which I am aware, it is anticipated by Comber, who notes in passing that ‘Pound was only doing what [classical scholars] had been doing: transposing and rearranging the text’ (1998: 53, n.109), and by Kenner, who notices ‘how freely Pound has turned to Propertius’ pages for suggestions; not without a grin at the wholesale transpositions attempted by several editors in quest of rationale for a badly mangled text’ (1951: 149). The facing English–Latin text in Sullivan (1964a) and especially the list of correspondences between the *Homage* and Müller (112, 113) will make clear the extent of Pound’s transpositions and where they occur in the poem.
sic nobis, qui nunc magnum speramus amantes,
   forsitan includet crastina fata dies.

(III.VII [2.15])

Fool who would set a term to love’s madness,
For the sun shall drive with black horses,
   earth shall bring wheat from barley,
The flood shall move toward the fountain
   Ere love know moderations,
   The fish shall swim in dry streams.
No, now while it may be, let not the fruit of life cease.
   Dry wreaths drop their petals,
   their stalks are woven in baskets,
   Today we take the great breath of lovers,
   tomorrow fate shuts us in.
Though you give all your kisses
   you give but few.
Nor can I shift my pains to other,
   Hers will I be dead,
If she confers such nights upon me,
   long is my life, long in years,
If she give me many,
   God am I for the time.

A side-by-side comparison of the Latin and Pound’s English makes immediately clear the fact that in this passage Pound has introduced a dramatic series of transpositions which have the effect of fundamentally altering the structure of images and meanings in Propertius’ verses as presented in Müller. All of this disruption, created out of no necessity and with no obvious prompting in the Latin text, must serve some purpose. Pound’s early drafts of the poem contain a much more linear and literal treatment, and he evidently arrived at his final version through a process of literal cutting and pasting. Indeed, if one reads through Pound’s text without thinking of the Latin behind it, it works perfectly well as a piece of carefully composed, thoroughly modernist poetry. It begins with a lyrically articulated but nonetheless half-hearted rehearsal of the standard *adynata*, worn tropes of classical poetry, before interrupting itself, as though jolting out of a stupor with ‘No’, punctuating the idea of the foolishness of trying to limit love with a pithy formula drawn from elsewhere in the Latin: ‘while it may be, let not the fruit of life cease’. Having taken up the organic image of the ‘fruit’ of life, we skip a line in the Latin to reach the flower wreathes. These, in their dryness, look back to the impossibility of the fish in the dry streams, while developing a contrast between the juicy vivacity

39 See Beinecke YCAL MSS 43 126.5200.
40 See Beineke YCAL MSS 43 126.5201.
conjured by the ‘fruit of life’ and the slender aridity of the dying, woven flowers. These images of life and its transience in the natural world, with perhaps a suggestion of the consolation provided by art in the ‘weaving’ of baskets, give way in turn to reveries about human transience and the urgency it lends to love and to a lover’s withholdings. Life and death, love and loss then lead to a vision of apotheosis, a vision cut with the notion that while love and beauty may be the essential antidotes for mortality, even all a lover’s kisses will amount in the final tally to ‘but few’, and even the divine status of the beloved can last only ‘for the time’.

One way of understanding Pound’s alterations to the text in this passage would be to place them in the context of his larger poetic project, and explore his practice here in relation to some of the notoriously difficult terms that he coined to describe his aesthetic program, including ‘Imagism’/‘Vorticism’ and ‘logopoeia’.41 Doubtless one could go far with this approach; however, for my purposes, what is more interesting is how Pound’s use of the device of transposition places his text in dialogue with the tradition of nineteenth-century interventionist textual criticism. This school of philological practice viewed discontinuity and logical contradiction as problems to be solved, not operative aesthetic elements of a text. Its goal was to produce, through reasoned inference, an idea of the text as it could have been originally written in classical antiquity. We must remember, however, that Pound’s Propertius was an anti-Augustan and, as I have argued, anti-philological iconoclast. The text of such a Propertius would naturally not conform to the expectations of ‘the classical’ derived from mainstream authors such as Horace and Vergil. In this vision of the ancient poet, discontinuity runs to the heart of his poetics and its alliance with the project Pound was shaping for modernism. Such discontinuity would be both an aesthetic and a political gesture, a rejection of the bland versifying which Pound associated with poetic and social stupefaction in favour of a jarring, challenging immediacy created by a bare-bones juxtaposition of elemental verbal images — an immediacy which Pound hoped would not only serve his famous injunction to ‘make it new,’ but would also cut through somehow to what he felt was ailing his age socially and politically by providing an antidote to the dry philological treatment of texts.

Thus, behind the superficial similarities between Pound’s technique in the Homage and the practices of nineteenth century textual critics lies a fundamental difference in the conception of how poetry can and should function. In the section of the Homage discussed above, Pound obtains poetic coherence, the goal underlying the practice of transposition in textual criticism, but the sutures of this coherence are not remotely those which were pursued by the Latinists who since Scaliger had sought to transpose and emend Propertius’ text. Rather than undertaking to force logic and unity on the text of Propertius, Pound embraced and even exaggerated the abrupt transitions found in the transmitted text, positing a new, distinctly modernist

sort of unity approached through disjuncture. The radicalism of this poem, both as a response to Propertius and as an important document in the history of Modernist aesthetics, lies in this gesture as much as in the more obvious ‘errors’ of translation on the line-by-line level.

**Conclusion: the Homage and Pound’s philology**

Two observations, apparently contradictory, ought to have emerged from the above discussion of Ezra Pound’s *Homage* and its relationship with his philological training: first, that Pound’s mind was heavily preoccupied with philology; second, that he repeatedly made gestures towards a rejection of philology, and that his *Homage to Sextus Propertius* can be included among these. To phrase it differently, it can appear that Pound was at once Modernism’s most philological and anti-philological poet. This contradiction can only be resolved by looking past the somewhat casual way in which Pound condemned all philology as ‘an abomination’ (1954a: 298) and attempting to imagine what a Poundian philology might look like.

In this view, Pound’s desire was not so much to reject philology entirely as to reform it — to ‘make it new’. He must have been feeling his way towards something like a ‘new philology’ in 1911 when he wrote of a ‘new method in scholarship [...] the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of today—that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalization. The latter is too inexact and the former too cumbersome to be of much use to the normal man wishing to live mentally active’ (1973a: 21). For Pound, the key characteristics of this new scholarship would be vitality, ‘luminosity’, communication, and accessibility. Pound maintained that ‘the scholar’s ultimate end is to put the greatest amount of the best literature [...] within the easiest reach of the public’ (1973b: 168), and he could not escape acknowledging that philological work ‘could be of some use to facilitate the reading of lost literatures’ (1973b: 167). Above all, Pound prized a view of literature as a vital, energized presence which demanded a public audience and a central role in society. He sensed that some form of philology would be necessary for placing poetry ancient and modern in such a position, but felt that the German university model, with its emphasis on detail and specialization, was woefully ill-equipped for such a task.

The *Homage to Sextus Propertius* constitutes an important stage in Pound’s critique of this system in general and of classical philology in particular. The *Homage* has always been open to the criticism that it requires too much knowledge of Latin to interpret and thus does not stand on its own as an English poem. The reading

---

42 For an influential general discussion of philology and Modernism, see Kenner (1971: 94–120). For a more recent treatment, see Pryor (2016). For Pound as anti-philological poet, see Rainey (1991: 66–69) and McMullan (2017). For examinations of Pound’s appropriations from philology, see Li (1986) and Smith (2011).

43 Birien (2012) makes this case effectively.
advanced here, which attempts to situate the poem in the history of classical scholarship more broadly, would seem to make matters worse, to argue that the poem’s audience was always classical scholars, individuals whom Pound was evidently eager to be heard by, and who, at least in Pound’s day, were altogether unwilling to listen. As inconvenient as this will seem to the reader of Pound who is not a specialist in Latin literature, in evaluating this poem we must bear in mind that with it Pound acted, at least in part, on a very a real desire to participate in the academic discourse around Propertius’ text.\textsuperscript{44} In 1919, he wrote: ‘as for my service to classical scholarship, presumably nil, I shall be quite content if I induce a few Latinists really to look at the text of Propertius instead of swallowing an official “position”’ (Pound 1919: 83). For all the upset that Pound’s Homage has caused among classicists, in his goal of reaching ‘a few Latinists’, he has undeniably succeeded.\textsuperscript{45} Consensus about the Homage’s value as a criticism of Propertius will likely never be reached, but this is precisely because the poem’s value has always lain, as Pound himself saw, in provocation more than in the formation of consensus. Not all may agree with Pound’s ideas about how to ‘cleanse Helicon’ (v), but, whenever his work is confronted, ‘there will be, in any case, a stir on Olympus’ (vii).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge his debt to Stephen Harrison and Joshua Billings for their insightful comments, as well as to the editor, Constanze Güthenke, and the anonymous reviewers provided by this journal.

References


\textsuperscript{44} For more on Pound’s ambitions as an academic, see Ruthven (1990: 1–39).
\textsuperscript{45} For examples of classical scholarship on Propertius explicitly informed by Pound, see Benediktson (1989) and Comber (1998).


——, Canzon (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911).

98

