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Creative Translation and Classical Reception:

The English *Pervigilium Veneris*

Stuart Gillespie

In the most familiar forms of reception history, the object of attention is the way in which, over time, a cultural artifact of the past has been constructed by the responses of those who have encountered it. The more fully we understand this phenomenon for any given artifact, the better we shall understand the norms and limits - the horizon of expectations, as Jauss called it - of our own response to the artifact in the here and now. So, for example, a full reception study of the *Pervigilium Veneris* in the anglophone world would begin with Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* (itself a kind of celebration of Venus) and perhaps the *General Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, in both of which have been discerned one or two verbal echoes of this unique late Latin poem.¹ It would move on to English writers such as Robert Sidney (brother of Sir Philip), Mary Wroth, and later in time William Jones.² For the modern era, T. S. Eliot's well-known quotation of four words from the poem at the end of *The Waste Land*, 1922, would command attention,³ as would John Fowles' enigmatic quotation of its refrain at the end of *The Magus*, 1965. *The Magus* is a widely read novel, and *The Waste Land* a seminal English poem of the twentieth century, but much more obscure sources can be relevant; they might, for one thing, have once had many more readers than they do now. Nor can it be assumed *ipso facto* that apparently fleeting echoes like Chaucer's have nothing to tell us about the construction of the *Pervigilium*: for example, it might be argued that Chaucerian poems or parts of poems in related genres paved the way for its English reception.

Any and all constructions of the artifact or any aspect of it, whether brief or elaborate, whether modern or ancient, whatever we perceive as their intellectual or

aesthetic merits, are potentially relevant. The thrust of such investigation is in the first instance historical; in terms of reception, our interest in these responses is not for themselves, but for the effect they have, or have had, on interpretation of the artifact in question, or for evidence they can offer about its interpretation. This means that a certain levelling tendency is inevitable in Reception Studies: a video game or comic strip can seem to call for the commentator's attentions just as much as a Shakespeare play.

On the face of it, even the most prestigious translations are just another aspect of reception, in principle no more decisive than any other. In practice, historical translations are often incorporated into reception histories of an author or work on this basis. Yet there have been calls for assigning translations a special place in reception contexts. This is one part of Charles Martindale's agenda of thirty years ago which has not been fully adopted in Classical Studies, so that this passage in *Redeeming the Text* in which he argued for 'enquiry into translation [as] an important part of the hermeneutic process' does not seem to require much updating. Martindale argued that 'direct study of translation – including those translations which have been especially influential or which, for a variety of reasons, we may especially admire - ought to assume a greater importance within the pedagogic procedures of Classicists than is usually the case at present'. He went on to observe that if translation is conceived (as it still often is) merely as providing guidance as to a 'single, stable meaning' texts are assumed to have, the value of translations will be limited to providing what we can acquire by other, philological, means. On an alternative model, however (he continues), a model 'involving a more radical untying of the text', translations 'determine what is counted as being "there" in the first place, and good translations thus unlock for us compelling (re)readings which we could not get in any other way'. 'One could argue', he concludes, 'that translation makes a poem readable *as a whole* in a way that commentary alone cannot.'⁴

Perhaps the generalization should be more selective, and the words ‘good translations’ be replaced by ‘great translations’. And great translations, as Charles Tomlinson argues, may be as rare as great poems.⁵ Whatever the appropriate degree of selectivity, though, my investigation of responses to the *Pervigilium Veneris* suggests that it is indeed possible for translations to offer us something we ‘could not get in any other way’. It also suggests, perhaps paradoxically, that this applies to the English translations of the poem farthest away from us in time, not the more recent. That is because the more recent (those of the last century or so) fall so thoroughly under the sway of what Martindale calls ‘commentary’ that it determines their parameters, leaving them unable to provide anything it cannot.

English translations of the *Vigil* are by today very numerous, but they have appeared at a very uneven rate over time. I will first attend to the three which constitute the full record of English verse renderings to the mid-nineteenth century. They are by Thomas Stanley, 1647; Thomas Parnell, 1722; and Charles Prowett, 1843. No other translations in English verse are known down to this date.⁶ Two more appeared in succeeding decades and many dozens have arrived since 1900, their frequency in no way diminished since the rise of the internet, but a second half of this discussion will deal with just two of them: those by Ezra Pound, 1910, and Allen Tate, 1943.⁷ For this era I seek to move from individual examples of *translatio* to something larger, namely the place the poem was accorded in constructions of a wider history of European literature. These constructions are also a culture history, and the ‘watershed moment’ from which they stem is in a work by a considerable practitioner of culture history, Walter Pater. I show how Pater’s novel *Marius the Epicurean*, 1884, not only lies behind individual later translations, but, through routes both direct and indirect, underwrites ‘the English *Pervigilium Veneris*’ much more widely understood. Exploring these ramifications helps

us to see how closely re-readings of an ancient work by translators and other writers may be related to classical scholarship ('commentary' in the widest sense).

A few words about the Latin poem might first be in order. The *Pervigilium Veneris* presents itself as a literary hymn to Venus, its scene set in the Sicilian spring. The occasion is a festival in Venus' honour, which will also celebrate the blossoming of maidens into women through marriage. It has in parts a strong erotic undercurrent. Unlike almost all earlier (antique) Latin poetry, metrically it is governed by a stress pattern more than by syllabic quantity.⁸ Metrically speaking, it thus has something important in common with nearly all verse written in English. As found in the four extant manuscripts, its ninety-three lines comprise self-contained stanzas or strophes of varying length, accompanied intermittently by a refrain that appeals for universal love: 'cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet!' It has been dated to the second century AD, and also to as late as the fourth or early fifth. Its authorship has never been considered settled, and the candidates previously proposed, such as Florus and Catullus, are not thought credible today.⁹ Thanks to the apparent disorder of the text appearing in the two manuscripts through which it first surfaced in the sixteenth century, its editors have been making more than minimal adjustments to it ever since the *editio princeps* of 1578, mainly by rearranging the lines to help their order make better sense. What translators over the centuries have taken as their source has in effect been an ever-moving target, accounting for many divergences between translations.



The first *Pervigilium Veneris* not only in English but in any modern language appeared in the *Poems and Translations* of Thomas Stanley (1625–1678) in 1647.¹⁰ The translations in

this volume may have been written by 1643, the year Stanley turned eighteen. They were printed with the Greek or Latin text on facing pages and a Latin commentary appended, six pages long in the case of *The Vigil of Venus*. The commentary devotes most of its space to pointing out allusions and parallels to particular lines and phrases in other ancient poets both Greek and Latin.

Stanley was a good scholar who before attending Cambridge University in 1639 was tutored by a gifted linguist and Latinist, William Fairfax. His relatives included several successful gentlemen of letters such as Richard Lovelace, translator of Catullus, and he became a fairly prolific translator from modern as well as ancient languages. In his own time his reputation was high, and he was no peripheral figure in its literary world, fragmented though that world was by the exigencies of the civil wars and the several forms of disruption, exile, and retirement they imposed upon writers, especially royalists like Stanley. After his own time, the high proportion of translation in his *œuvre* did not help to retain him a place among the more prominent English poets.¹¹

Although the *Pervigilium Veneris* had been available to readers and translators since 1578, Stanley's translation is responding to more recent activity in the scholarly world. In 1638 Petrus Scriverius had brought together both the codices in which it originally resurfaced (*Thuaneus* and *Salmasianus*) with most of the important scholarship on the poem. This was followed in 1644 by the similar edition of Rivinus. Stanley made use of both, his notes incorporating many of those by Lipsius and others which Scriverius had printed with his own commentary. It has been ascertained that Stanley's translation was made, with a few deviations, from the Codex Salmasianus (as presented in these editions), the most recently recovered manuscript of the *Pervigilium*.¹² Despite the poem's having been available for a couple of generations, something of the air of fresh discovery

seems to attend Stanley's work. Many of Stanley's translations in the 1647 volume are firsts – the first published English translations of his chosen authors.

The Latin text Stanley printed enface is supplied here to precede quotations from his version.¹³ The first thing the reader observes about the English poet's work is its subtitle: 'Venus Vigils *Paraphras'd*' presumably means something other than 'translated'. The second is that it makes no serious attempt to suggest (let alone preserve) the Latin verse form, and instead uses octosyllabic couplets:

Cras amet, qui nunquam amavit;

quique amavit, cras amet.

Ver novum, ver jam canorum,

vere natus Orbis est.

Vere concordant amores,

vere nubunt alites.

Et nemus comam resolvit

de maritis imbribus.

Cras amorum copulatrix

inter umbras arborum

Implicat casas virentes

de flagello myrteo.

Cras Dione jura dicet

fulta sublimi throno.

Love he to morrow, who lov'd never;

To morrow, who hath lov'd, persever.

The Spring appears, in which the Earth
 Receives a new harmonious Birth;
 When all things mutual Love unites; 5
 When Birds perform their nuptial rites;
 And fruitful by her watry Lover,
 Each grove its tresses doth recover;
 Loves Queen to morrow, in the shade
 Which by these verdant trees is made, 10
 Their sprouting tops in wreaths shall bind,
 And Myrtles into Arbours wind;
 To morrow rais'd on a high throne,
Dione shall her Laws make known.

Love he, &c 15

Stanley's adjective 'harmonious' (4) is prompted by 'concordant' in 'Vere concordant amores' (5), and represents a sort of transposition; this is indeed some considerable distance away from word-for-word translation. The opening few lines do not have the exuberance of the Latin, but this is not, we feel, the prologue to a wholly conventional composition. It seems it will, like its original, be verbally nuanced: 'tresses' (8) are shoots or tendrils, but does 'recover' mean 'regain' or 'cover once more'?

Soon Stanley moves up a gear in the description of the roses in the morning dew. The contemporary lyric poetry of fleeting beauty had created, and was still creating, a distinctive English poetic idiom which he could draw upon here.¹⁴ Andrew Marvell's 'Upon a Drop of Dew', written a little later in time in 1681, is one of the best-known examples. Stanley was evidently at home with the matrix of dew, tears, and roses; both the

‘orb’ (34) the dewdrops form and their ‘Orient brightnesse’ (31) are part of the still expanding English idiom (at the start of Marvell’s poem, ‘orient dew’ forms a ‘little globe’):

Ipsa gemmeis purpurantem

pingit annum floribus.

Ipsa surgentes papillas

de Favonî spiritu

Urget in nudos penates.

ipsa roris lucidi,

Noctis auraquem relinquit,

spargit bumentes aquas.

Lacrimæ micant trementes

de cadivo pondere;

Gutta præceps orbe parvo,

sustinet casus suos;

Hinc pudorem florulentæ

prodiderunt purpuræ.

Humor ille, quem serenis

astra rorant noctibus,

Mane virgines papillas

solvit humenti peplo.

With flowry Jewels every where

She paints the purple colour’d year;

She, when the rising bud receives 25
Favonious breath, thrusts forth the leaves,
 The naked Roof with these t'adorn;
She the transparent dew oth' morn,
 Which the thick Air of night still uses
 To leave behind, in Rain diffuses; 30
 These tears with Orient brightnesse shine,
 Whilst they with trembling weight decline,
 Whose every drop, into a small
 Clear Orbe distill'd, sustains its fall.
 Pregnant with these the bashful Rose 35
 Her purple blushes doth disclose.
 The drops of falling dew, that are
 Shed in calm nights by every Star,
 She in her humid mantle holds,
 And then her Virgin leaves unfolds. 40

Although some of the vocabulary is drawn from the common stock, some is not: 'humid' (39) never became one of the standard words used within this topos.¹⁵ 'Leaves' for 'petals' (26, 40), however, seems simply to be a usage that does not survive today.¹⁶ Stanley varies the lines' rhythms to nice effect, for instance by providing for enjambment (25, 29, 33, 37), or by departing from the dominant iambs: the spondee in 'a small | Clear orbe', 33-4, creates a miniature climax within its couplet. The adjective 'Orient' (31) is especially rich in this context: its primary meaning is 'eastern', apt for effects of the dawn light, but its figurative meaning of 'brilliant', 'radiant', is also in play. A more conventional kind of

wordplay appears (momentarily – the wit is never spun out, as with the Metaphysicals’) at the end of this passage:

She to her spouse shall married be
 To morrow; not asham’d, that he
 Should with a single knot unty,
 Her fiery garment’s purple dy. 50

In the paradoxical-sounding ‘with a knot unty’, the noun has the sense Shakespeare’s Lord Capulet uses, of wedlock: ‘Go tell the County ... For I will have this knot knit up tomorrow’.¹⁷

The lens is in sharp and narrow focus in a passage like this. Its adjective-heavy phrasing, measured cadence, and rhetorical balance (‘these shine ... they decline’, 31-2) are delicate. This is not the only kind of descriptive verse in Stanley’s poem. He also captures Venus’ ubiquitous power in what have often been seen as the *Pervigilium*’s Lucretian moments. Here the imagery of the Latin is magnificent:

Ipsa venas atque mentem
 permeantis spiritus
Intus occultis gubernat
 procreata viribus,
Perque cœlum, perque terras,
 perque pontum subditum
Pervium sui temorem
 seminali tramite

Inbuit, jussitque mundum
nosse nascendi vias.

But so is the music of Stanley:

She all there swayes,
By a hid spirit, which by wayes 120
Unknown diffus'd, through soul and vains,
All things both governs and sustains.
Piercing through the unsounded Sea,
And Earth, and highest Heaven, *She*
All places with her power doth fill, 125
Which through each part *She* doth distill;
And to the World the mystick wayes
Of all production open layes.

The English lines proceed through sinuous syntax and metrical variations (such as powerful spondees, 122, and double caesura, 124) to resolve in a perfectly regular iambic tetrameter. Like the rest, these lines are, of course, an expansion (or paraphrase) on the Latin, but the sense units remain roughly intact and in order. These are by no means simply free variations: Stanley's effects are closely tied to the Latin. Thus although the anaphora of 'Perque coelum, perque terras, perque pontum' is only weakly emulated in the corresponding line 124, repetition is used to even grander effect than in the Latin by diffusing it through the whole passage in 'all there swayes ... All things ... All places ... all production' (119, 122, 125, 128). English readers of the great, if partial, translation of

Lucretius by Dryden might well hear the key Stanley is writing in here as that of the exordium of the *De rerum natura*:

All nature is thy gift, earth, air and sea;
 Of all that breathes, the various progeny
 Stung with delight, is goaded on by thee.¹⁸

In spite of the obvious formal differences, the surging rhythms of these two English translations take us far beyond the notes a commentator might provide on relationships between the *De rerum natura* and the *Pervigilium*. This is to say that readers experience an affinity, rather than merely being informed of a similarity. Stanley's reader, to make this crucial point as explicit as possible, is able to experience a Lucretian dimension in the *Pervigilium*. This is because Stanley is offering not a guide to meaning (what translators are usually said to do) but, in Martindale's terms, 'a compelling re-reading', one which is in its nature creative because a new work of English poetry is thus formed.

<1 line #>

In his survey of English versions of the Latin poem, Hilton-Young awards the palm to Stanley, rightly praising his 'easy yet substantial flow' and 'sure handling'.¹⁹ For him, the next English version to appear, at a distance of seventy-five years from Stanley's, can be characterized as 'individualist'. Thomas Parnell (1679-1718) was a Dublin-born, Trinity College-educated clergyman whose verse fills a sizeable volume. He was, notwithstanding, only an occasional poet, and probably never intended to publish a complete edition of his poems. Some were published in his lifetime; most appeared posthumously, in large part through the offices of his much better known contemporary Alexander Pope, with whom Parnell associated when, as often, in London. His *Vigil of*

Venus belongs in the posthumous category: it first appeared in the volume Pope edited in 1722, Parnell's *Poems on Several Occasions*, the collection by which Parnell was chiefly known until more of his work was published in 1758. The translation would, therefore, have been familiar to readers through the course of the eighteenth century. Readers might also have known other translations of Parnell's both into and out of Latin and Greek, including several playful Pope-related pieces: a version of the *Batrachomyomachia* in the style of Pope's Homer (with notes supposedly by Zoilus), or a translation of a passage from Pope's mock epic *Rape of the Lock* into Latin ('after the manner of the ancient monks').

Since Parnell composed no introduction or notes, our knowledge of the circumstances of his version of the *Pervigilium* must be inferred. We know that a draft of the translation was in existence by 1716. If it was made after 1712, the most likely edition for him to have used would have been the anonymous one published in Amsterdam in that year and usually attributed to Jean Le Clerc.²⁰ This contains:

1. A reprint of Rivinus' 1644 edition, with a text based on the Thuaneus MS and copious notes collected from Pithoeus, Lipsius, Weitzius, and Douza
2. A Latin text based on the Salmasianus MS, with the notes of Salmasius and Schriverius
3. Rivinus' commentary, with his conjecturally restored text
4. An edition of Ausonius' *Cupid Crucified* (a poem elsewhere translated by Parnell)
5. Indices

We cannot say for sure whether Parnell reconstructed the Latin text he used from the three available in this edition. Parnell's modern editors provide an enface version of Rivinus'

Thuanus text made to correspond with what Parnell looks to have been translating. This will be used for quotation below.

Parnell's version contains enough borrowings from Stanley's for us to be certain he used it, and so to recognize the beginnings of an English translation tradition for the *Pervigilium Veneris*. Two examples are:

Stanley: Then the round Oceans foaming flood,
 Immingled with Celestial blood
 (16-17)

Parnell: 'Twas on that Day which saw the teeming Flood
 Swell round, impregnate with celestial Blood.
 (17-18)

Stanley: She in her humid mantle holds,
 And then her Virgin leaves unfolds.
 (39-40)

Parnell: Close 'till the Morn, her humid Veil she holds:
 Then deck'd with Virgin Pomp the Flow'r unfolds.
 (37-8)

The extra syllables Parnell's longer lines have available do not seem to be used to add anything essential. 'Twas on that Day which saw', 'deck'd with ... Pomp': here as

elsewhere, Parnell is further away from the sense of the Latin than Stanley. Elsewhere, however, Parnell's embellishments can be more appropriate.

Parnell's *Pervigilium* has attracted its admirers over time. Even so, perhaps it comes as something of a surprise to find that such a work, of such a date, figured in 2011 as a *Guardian* 'Poem of the Week', praised by Carol Rumens for its 'rhythmic excitement' and for the 'succinct and memorable' refrain which has 'an epigrammatic quality not completely alien to the deftness of the Latin, and a rhyme that doesn't force the thought too far'.²¹

Let those love now, who never lov'd before,

Let those who always lov'd, now love the more.

Parnell's refrain is indeed much superior to Stanley's syntactically convoluted one (quoted above). This is, however, the sole reference to the Latin in the *Guardian* article. Some classical scholars have been much less positive: Hilton-Young calls Parnell's version 'splendidly slapdash' and suggests that in his enthusiasm Parnell 'seem[s] hardly to have had time to look at it again'.²²

Although Parnell's version tends to be freer than Stanley's, these are manifest exaggerations. Moreover, Parnell's work should be interpreted as what he and his readers would have called an imitation or (as Stanley explicitly called his) a paraphrase. These labels are no longer in use today, or if so then 'imitation' is pejorative in implication, but it can be helpful to bear in mind that the modern English term 'translation', with its conventionally associated discourse of 'accuracy' and 'fidelity', was not the only available term in the time of Stanley or Parnell.²³ The concern of Parnell, as of his friend Pope, was, as they would have put it, to follow the 'spirit' and 'genius' of an author. To achieve this,

in Parnell's technique, 'all is expanded, amplified, and transmuted'.²⁴

Parnell's procedure as well as his idiom becomes much clearer when compared with Stanley:

Rura fœcundat voluptas: rura Venerem sentiunt.

Iipse Amor puer Dionæ rura natus dicitur.

Hunc ager cum parturiret, ipsa suscepit sinu,

Ipsa florum delicatis educavit osculis.

Stanley:

The fields are fruitful made by pleasure;

The fields are rich in *Venus* treasure;

And love *Diones* son fame yields 145

For truth, his birth had in the fields:

As soon as born the field reliev'd him;

Into its bosom first receiv'd him;

She bred him from his infant bowers

With the sweet kisses of the flowers. 150

Parnell:

In rural Seats the Soul of *Pleasure* reigns;

The Life of *Beauty* fills the rural Scenes;

Ev'n *Love* (if *Fame* the Truth of *Love* declare)

Drew first the breathings of a rural Air.
 Some pleasing Meadow pregnant *Beauty* prest, 135
 She laid her Infant on its flow'ry Breast,
 From Nature's Sweets he sipp'd the fragrant Dew,
 He smil'd, he kiss'd them, and by kissing grew.

Characteristic of Parnell is elaboration, as for example in 'the Soul of *Pleasure*' (131) for *voluptas*, or in the final line. The Latin uses the word *rura* three times in two lines, but elegance for Parnell means variation, so whereas Stanley is content with three appearances of the unqualified noun 'field(s)', Parnell combines the adjective 'rural' with a different noun each time (131, 132, 134). Perhaps Stanley overdoes the repetition by translating *ager* as 'field' as well (147); Parnell moves in the other direction in another elaboration/variation: 'pleasing Meadow' (135). Parnell's parenthesis in line 133, a 'playful note of urban scepticism'²⁵ and highly eighteenth-century in flavour, might easily be preferred to Stanley's hard-to-follow syntax in 145-6 (perhaps some editorial commas around '*Diones* son' would help). Overall, Parnell's poetic idiom is very different from, but not necessarily less attractive than, Stanley's.

I have already quoted Stanley's very successful handling of the budding rose and the dewdrops. Parnell draws on Stanley at this point, but has different aims in view. To show the slow build-up of the rhythms in this passage a quotation of some length is needed:

She paints the purple Year with vary'd show, 25
 Tips the green Gem, and makes the Blossom glow.
 She makes the turgid Buds receive the Breeze,

Expand to Leaves, and shade the naked Trees.
 When gath'ring damps the misty Nights diffuse,
 She sprinkles all the Morn with balmy Dews; 30
 Bright trembling Pearls depend at ev'ry spray,
 And kept from falling, seem to fall away.
 A glossy Freshness hence the *Rose* receives,
 And blushes sweet through all her silken Leaves;
 (The Drops descending through the silent Night, 35
 While Stars serenely roll their golden Light,
 Close 'till the Morn, her humid Veil she holds;
 Then deckt with Virgin Pomp the Flow'r unfolds.
 Soon will the Morning blush: Ye Maids! prepare,
 In rosy Garlands bind your flowing Hair 40
 'Tis *Venus*' Plant: The Blood fair *Venus* shed,
 O'er the gay Beauty pour'd immortal Red;
 From *Love*'s soft Kiss a sweet *Ambrosial* Smell
 Was taught for ever on the Leaves to dwell;
 From Gemms, from Flames, from orient Rays of Light 45
 The richest Lustre makes her Purple bright;
 And she to morrow weds; the sporting Gale
 Unties her Zone, she bursts the verdant Veil;
 Thro' all her Sweets the rifling *Lover* flies,
 And as he breaths, her glowing Fires arise. 50

Here, as well as the ‘humid’ of line 37 (as already discussed), Stanley has prompted the ‘trembling Pearls’ of line 31, from the ‘trembling weight’ making Stanley’s ‘tears ... decline’ (Stanley 32). Yet the feeling of the two passages is quite different. Stanley’s slow motion is sped up by exchanging complex syntax with many subordinate clauses for simple conjunctions (‘And ... While ... Then’), but there is indeed a mounting ‘rhythmic excitement’ as the sentences lengthen: first two lines long, then four, building up through six (33-8) to the intricate twelve-line sentence at the close. The consonantal crispness of Parnell’s sound palette (‘blushes sweet through all her fallen leaves’, 34) replaces Stanley’s stately open vowels (‘the naked Roof with these t’adorn’, 27). The key has changed; *Il Penseroso* has modulated towards *L’Allegro*; the wonderment is still there. Some of the bolder metaphorical vocabulary of the Latin is expanded at the end: we might recall the several-times-reprinted eighteenth-century English version of Jean Bonnefon’s French verse-collection under the title *The Pleasures of Coition; or, the Nightly Sports of Venus: Being a Translation of the Pervigilium Veneris*.²⁶ As in Stanley there is scope for not-quite-puns, words admitting two slightly different meanings, as in line 48. In the *Iliad* translation by Parnell’s friend Pope, the garment Hera wears on Mount Ida in Book 13 is a ‘zone’, but the word was also (*OED* 4a) in use for anything that ‘encloses or encircles, girdle-like’.

<1 line #>

Parnell’s poems, as I have noted, were familiar enough to eighteenth-century readers, but his translation did not have the effect of making the *Pervigilium* a permanent acquisition for the English reading public. Nor did either Stanley or Parnell spark off a substantial sequence of further translations in the long-term way that, say, Christopher Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* did. In fact the record is blank until 1843, when *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* published an anonymous translation in rhyming octosyllabic

couplets.²⁷ It was next printed in 1882, in *Translations and Original Pieces by the late Charles Gipps Prowett, M.A., formerly Fellow and Lecturer of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge*, pp. 239-54. This is the source of the ascription.²⁸ Prowett (1818-1874) was not only a Cambridge don, but also the proprietor-editor of the *John Bull* newspaper, and a regular contributor of poems and other material to Victorian periodicals like *Blackwood's*.

Prowett's presentation of the poem is discontinuous with his predecessors', but in significant ways continuous with some of his successors'. A Preface, unsigned but evidently the translator's, proposes that the festival the *Pervigilium* celebrates is not the Veneralia at the start of April but the Floralia at the end. This is of importance to Prowett because he urges 'the close similarity which this poem shows to have existed between the customs of the Romans and those of our fathers', that is, the customs of May Day. On this basis he embarks on an extraordinary flight of fancy as he imagines

the time when man and nature met to rejoice together on May-day ... the time before the days of the workhouse and factory; when the length and breadth of the land rung to the joyaunce and glee of the holiday-rejoicing nation, and the gay sounds careered on fresh breezes even where now the dense atmosphere of Manchester or Ashton glooms over the dens of torture in which withered and debauched children are forced to their labour, and the foul haunts under the shelter of which desperate men hatch plots of rapine and slaughter.

(p. 715)

Hence for Prowett the *Pervigilium Veneris* has to do with the prelapsarian joy of 'Merry England', an expression found in his Preface's first paragraph. He is proffering a myth of

cultural fall, and he outlines two opposite historical trajectories: Rome was able to smile in the later days of the Empire (the poem is later rather than earlier in date), whereas England is dark and unsmiling in her continuing greatness:

There is good reason to suppose that this poem was written in the declining times of the empire; if so, it seems that, amidst the public misfortunes that followed one another during that age, the people were not woe-worn and distressed; that they were able to forget, in social pleasures, the gradual decay of their ancient glory. Rome 'smiled in death.' England is still great and powerful, but she is no longer Merry England.

(p. 715)

These ideas about the Roman Empire seem to have as their main foundation the *Pervigilium* itself. The poem possesses a joyful atmosphere, therefore 'the people' must have been capable of joy. Prowett's word is 'joyaunce', which has an appropriate undertone of 'merrymaking', but, being a poeticism, also unintentionally reveals how literary his conception of the poem is, for all his stated belief that it 'seems to have been composed with a view to its being sung by a choir of maidens in their nocturnal rambles beneath the soft light of an Italian moon' (p. 715). While readers may indeed imagine such a scene, the internal conflict of the speaker in the final stanza tells us there is more to the poem than this description implies.

Some weight is placed in Prowett's exposition on the expression 'Merry England', an expression which proves hard to pin down historically. As early as c.1400 it meant 'pleasant England', but much later in time came to imply 'joyous England' (*OED*, 'Merry England', *n.*). Judging by the initial capitals as well as the context, the second is Prowett's

meaning, and the record suggests this sense, with its attendant nostalgia, arrived only in the nineteenth century. This golden age seems, however, most often to be identified with Elizabethan times, whereas Prowett's eye is elsewhere: he adduces (p. 715) 'Maid Marian and her comrades' from the much earlier Robin Hood legend. By 1585, Prowett is able to show, at the height of the Elizabethan era, Puritan condemnation of May Day had set in. It is an important feature of later responses to the *Vigil* which make claims about its place in English or European cultural history that they associate it with the Middle Ages. In this respect Prowett seems to be in the vanguard.

As English poetry, the couplets of Prowett's translation trip lightly and uniformly along. One problem is that there are departures from the Latin and other kinds of awkwardness where rhyme and metre have been forced to fit. In the refrain, 'o'er and o'er' is simply not the sense of the Latin:

He that never loved before,
 Let him love to-morrow!
 He that hath loved o'er and o'er,
 Let him love to-morrow!

In the following passage the rhyme-word 'gore' (45) is admittedly a word used for 'blood', but usually only in the context of carnage. It is here because it makes a rhyme with 'yore':

Then the bride-flower shall reveal,
 What her veil doth now conceal,
 The blush divinest, which of yore

She caught from Venus' trickling gore, 45
 With Love's kisses mix'd, I trow,
 With blaze of fire, and rubies' glow,
 And with many a crimson ray
 Stolen from the birth of day.

We may choose to let 'trow' pass in line 46, but this is not the only example of the type of poeticism Prowett may have thought evoked a past era. In a further specimen passage a few lines later, another is 'rede' (60; 'advise', 'counsel'; the word is found in Chaucer). 'Love goes a Maying' (57) generates the connection so important to Prowett. 'Ye' and 'e'en' (60, 63) are at this date conventional verbal forms for evoking times past. 'Panoplied' (64; 'clad in armour') is uncommon but not, as it happens, antique:

Come, ye nymphs, Love goes a Maying.
 His torch, his shafts, are laid aside -
 From them no harm shall you betide.
 Yet, I rede ye, nymphs, beware, 60
 For your foe is passing fair;
 Love is mighty, ye'll confess,
 Mighty e'en in nakedness;
 And most panoplied for fight
 When his charms are bared to sight. 65

Prowett is a versifier and not a poet. His translation cannot compare with Stanley's or Parnell's. The low pressure of a passage like the following, the almost mechanical

syntactical inversions, and the metrical mess in line 116, are enough to show why Charles Prowett's name, unlike theirs, has never appeared in any history of English poetry:

She old Troy's extinguish'd glory
 Revived in Latium's later story, 115
 When, by her auspices, her son
 Laurentia's royal damsel won.
 She vestal Rhea's spotless charms
 Surrender'd to the War-god's arms;
 She for Romulus that day 120
 The Sabine daughters bore away.

This translation has its moments. It catches some of the wit of its original; near the close, 'gallant rams' (148, for the already anthropomorphized 'maritis') is nice. The temperature, however, remains low to the end, and the final line, trying too hard to link swallow and poet, is a disaster:

The flocks of ewes, beneath the shade,
 Around their gallant rams are laid;
 And Venus bids the birds awake
 To pour their song through plain and brake. 150
 Hark! the noisy pools reply
 To the swan's hoarse harmony;
 And Philomel is vocal now,
 Perch'd upon a poplar-bough.

...

She sings, but I must silent be: -

When will the spring-tide come for me? 160

When, like the swallow, spring's own bird,

Shall my faint twittering notes be heard?



There is no doubting the aesthetic appeal of the *Pervigilium*. ‘Isn’t it the most beautiful thing that was ever made?’, an elderly Ford Madox Ford asked Allen Tate.²⁹ The poem’s most recent editor, William Barton, suggests that the attention paid to it over time is ‘largely on account of its singularity, mysterious origins and enigmatic final stanza, in which the poet suddenly bursts into the piece lamenting his “lost muse”.’³⁰ Of these features, English poets are not usually all that interested in its origins and authorship, and in this we might register a contrast between scholarly and literary responses. Its perceived ‘singularity’ lies for the two English poet-translators next addressed partly in its metrical form. But in other respects the narrative which follows is one of striking convergence between scholarly and literary responses. It is possible, in fact, to show how they feed off one another for the best part of a century.

The three versions of the *Vigil* discussed above represent the complete publication history of English handlings down to 1843. For an accessible Latin poem of under 100 lines in length, it is by no means an extensive record. Prowett’s version partly anticipated the presentation of the *Pervigilium* in Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean*, 1884, which I have called a ‘watershed moment’ for the poem. Abundance followed dearth, since Pater’s novel stimulated very considerable new interest in the anglophone world, and we shall

turn to it shortly. We shall first ask what the *Pervigilium*'s status was before Pater.

None of the three widely-spaced translators addressed so far was an English writer traditionally accorded high standing. Among them only Parnell was ever included in the multi-volume compilations of the corpus of English poetry which appeared from the time of Samuel Johnson until late in the Victorian era. However good their translations, none of the three would ever have been well enough known to establish a place for the *Pervigilium* in the affections of Latinless readers. As for the Latin poem's place in the scholarly world of the nineteenth century, positive verdicts are hard to find, and negative ones easily assembled: it is 'rhetorical and often sentimental' (Teuffel), it 'lacks repose, harmony and clearness, and the style is inclined to be turgid and affected' (Schanz).³¹ The text itself was not included in standard sources such as Walker's and Postgate's editions of the *Corpus Poetarum*. The first respectable text published in Britain seems to have been S. G. Owen's, in his edition of Catullus of 1893.³² It must have been in part a renewed appreciation of Catullus (in earlier times one of the candidates for its authorship) that made the reversal of the poem's fortunes possible.

But this was far more the effect of Walter Pater's 1884 novel *Marius the Epicurean*. This is where many English readers from the late nineteenth century onwards first encountered it, including, it can be shown, many of those who went on to translate it.³³ It is enough to list a few years'-worth of the Edwardian versions to see how quickly the number mounts:³⁴

R. C. K. Ensor, 1910

Ezra Pound, 1910.

Cecil Clementi, *Pervigilium Veneris: The Vigil of Venus. Edited, with ... Verse Translation*, 1911. Translation versified, but 'not ... elevated ... to

poetry'.³⁵

Elizabeth Hickman du Bois, 1911.

John Clark, 1911.

Arthur Quiller-Couch, *The Vigil of Venus ... By 'Q'*, 1912; first published in part in his novel *Brother Copas*, 1911.

J. W. Mackail: Latin text edited, rearranged, and supplemented, first printed 1910 (see note 54 below). Translation (prose, as *The Eve of St Venus*) first published 1912.

L. H. Grundy, privately printed, 1913.

It has been reported that in the early part of the twentieth century a new version appeared, on average, every year, with twenty English translations between 1900 and 1930.³⁶ What had Pater's novel aroused?

We have seen how Charles Prowett in his mid-nineteenth-century translation sought to associate the May Day of what he liked to think of as 'Merry England' with the *Pervigilium's* celebration of Venus. Temporal links across different eras are key to Pater's presentation of the *Vigil* and the appeal of that presentation to many readers, including the next English poet to take up the poem. In a reading not so far removed from Prowett's, Pater makes the poem proleptic (indeed 'almost prophetic') of the poetry of the 'middle age, just about to dawn'. His character Flavian, fevered and dying in Pisa, composes the lines and dictates to Marius as he does so:

The note ... was to Marius like the foretaste of an entirely novel world of poetic beauty to come. Flavian had caught, in fact, something of the rhyming cadence, the sonorous organ-music of the medieval Latin, and therewithal something of its

unction and mysticity of spirit. There was in his work, along with the last splendour of the classical language, a touch, almost prophetic, of that transformed life it was to have in the rhyming middle age, just about to dawn. The impression thus forced upon Marius connected itself with a feeling, the precise inverse of that, known to every one, which seems to say - *You have been just here, just thus, before!* - a feeling, in his case, not reminiscent but prescient, which passed over him many times afterwards, coming across certain people and places; as if he detected there the process of actual change to a wholly undreamed of and renewed condition of human body and soul. It was as if he saw the heavy yet decrepit old Roman architecture about him, rebuilding on an intrinsically better pattern ... the haunting refrain, with its *impromptu* variations, from the throats of those strong young men, floated in at the window.

Cras amet qui nunquam amavit,

Quique amavit cras amet!

- repeated Flavian, tremulously dictating yet one stanza more.³⁷

The poem thus looks forward in time to the Middle Ages, but it also looks back: it is 'the last splendour of the classical language'. Pater's conception of the poem as facing in both directions was not confined to its language. Its mythology too was notable for its freshness as well as its antiquity; 'mythology, which, coming at so late a day, had still a wonderful freshness in its old age'.³⁸ Indeed, his whole reception of the *Pervigilium* sees it as caught in time between the archaisms of late-antique literature and the novelty of the ideas promulgated in a new age.³⁹

Pater offers no translation of the poem, but his effect on subsequent translators is palpable. The place he gave it within this sketch (abbreviated here) of the history of European culture was influential on the two poets we are about to consider, if indirectly so. Pater had a follower at the centre of the Classical Studies establishment who powerfully mediated his reading to Pound and Tate as well as many others. That follower was J. W. Mackail.



Ezra Pound's *The Spirit of Romance*, 1910, was an early book which drew on his studies in Latin and Provençal. (Pound turned twenty-five in 1910; one of his teachers at Hamilton College, New York, is thanked in the Preface.) Pound's monograph, subtitled *An Attempt to define somewhat the charm of the Pre-Renaissance Literature of Latin Europe*, seeks to explain that well before the rise of the Romance languages 'there had been in the written Latin itself a foreboding of the spirit which was, in great part, to be characteristic of the literature of the Middle Ages'.⁴⁰ His leading example in Chapter 1 is Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, specifically the tale of Cupid and Psyche; Apuleius, Pound suggests, 'writes in a new, strange Latin, at a time when the language of the Roman court was Greek'. Thus 'there was in Latin an "unclassical" style, from which certain qualities in "romance" literature may be derived'. But even so, he goes on, 'it was not from Apuleius, but from Ovid, that the mediæval tale-tellers took so much of their ornament and inspiration' (Pound, pp. 3, 9, 10). Where, then, is the missing link between late Latin and the poetry of the Middle Ages?

Pound answers with the *Pervigilium Veneris*:

About the time when Apuleius was writing his scurrilous, bejewelled prose, there was composed a poem of some eighty odd lines, which is interesting for several reasons. It celebrates a Greek feast, which had been transplanted into Italy, and recently revived by Hadrian; the feast of Venus Genetrix, which survives as May Day. The metric is noteworthy, because in it are seen certain tendencies indigenous to the Italian peninsula, which had been long suppressed by the imitation of Greek scansion. The measure is trochaic.

(Pound, p. 10)

The last part at least would be accepted today: trochaic metre was used by Ennius and Pacuvius, and remained popular in the Roman world as a half-accentual metre for singing or shouting while ‘classical’ metres imported from Greece acquired prestige and precedence. But what of the connection forward to May Day and the rise of poetry in Romance languages?

The obvious source for this idea might appear, as we have just seen, to be *Marius the Epicurean*. But Pound, as he would later come in part to regret, is more directly under the influence of Mackail. Mackail (1859-1945), well on his way to becoming one of the most distinguished classical scholars of his generation, was an advocate for what had always been a relatively little-known work in Britain until Pater. He had written on it with great eloquence in his monograph *Latin Literature*, 1895, where, eleven years after *Marius the Epicurean*, he offered a version of Pater’s ideas. Mackail’s discussion, whose impact on Pound has previously been pointed out,⁴¹ concludes with this achingly romantic passage (in heavily Paterian idiom, including the key Paterian word ‘strange’):

the whole land sings with the voices of innumerable birds. Then with a sudden sob

the pageant ceases:

Illa cantat, nos tacemus: quando ver venit meum?

Quando fiam uti chelidon ut tacere desinam?

A second spring, in effect, was not to come for poetry till a thousand years later; once more then we hear the music of this strange poem ...

Bels dous amicx, fassam un joc novel

Ins el jardi on chanton li auzel -

so it rings out in Southern France, ‘in an orchard under the whitehorn leaf;’ and in England, later, but yet a century before Chaucer, the same clear note is echoed, ‘byteune Mershe ant Averil, whan spray bigineth to spring’.⁴²

Assuredly, Mackail’s ‘appreciative enthusiasm’ for the *Vigil* here ‘must have driven many students to seek it out for themselves’,⁴³ among them Ezra Pound. This is the passage Pound has in mind when, at the end of Chapter 1 of *The Spirit of Romance*, he writes of the antepenultimate line of the Latin (in his translation ‘Ah, when, as a lyre long silent, shall my silence find its end?’) that ‘Mackail deftly transfers the final question, and replies that song did not again awake until the Provençal viol sounded the dawn’s approaching’ (Pound, p. 12).

In later editions of *The Spirit of Romance* Pound incorporated second thoughts in the form of a Postscript and footnotes. By 1929 he was self-consciously admitting: ‘I have no doubt that the work could be greatly improved ... the mode of the statement ... will

have to stand as a partial confession of where I was in the year 1910.’⁴⁴ Although he passes no comment on the particular passage quoted, or the rest of his discussion of the *Pervigilium*, he is at once both dismissive and defensive about his use of Mackail in this chapter’s treatment of Apuleius. Of one of his points he writes, in a new footnote: ‘I take it this was mere parroting of Mackail. [I] did not *know*; but I had to get through my introduction and in general get to and at the subject of the book I was trying to write.’⁴⁵

Pound’s translation itself is slightly less interesting. It is not quite a complete one. The fact that his discussion continues to be interspersed with the long segments he prints confirms that it is not meant as a stand-alone work, and it never appeared in collections of his poems (or translations). Its layout happens to give it something of the appearance of free verse, but he has not troubled to work out anything metrically consistent, or even to provide the poem with a dominantly trochaic pattern. This is disappointing given that, as we have seen, he judged the ‘metric’ ‘noteworthy’, and of course we would expect what Mackail saw as the troubadour-like musicality of the poem to appeal to him. In fact the translation is more or less ‘literal’:

“Let whoever never loved, love to-morrow,
Let whoever has loved, love to-morrow.”

“A new spring, a spring already full of song,
Spring is reborn throughout the world.
In spring are loves in harmony, in spring the winged ones mate,
And the grove unbinds her locks unto the mated rains.
To-morrow beneath the leafage of the trees the binder of loves will weave green
lodges out of myrtle boughs,

To-morrow Dione from her lofty throne gives forth this high decree,

Let whoever never loved, love to-morrow.

Let whoever has loved, love to-morrow.

Then from the godly blood and the foamy drops of the ocean,

Amid the two-footed steed and the cohorts cerulean,

Came forth the wave-born Dione from beneath the mated rains.

Let whoever never loved, love to-morrow,

Let whoever has loved, love to-morrow.”

(Pound, pp. 10-11)

For the most part this could at least be called taut and modern, and plain, dignified lines can be found throughout: ‘The hoarse swan clamour drifts across the pools.’ Later on in the translation, however, Pound sails too close to a diction he himself normally reviled as ‘Georgian’, associating it with the eighteenth century (under England’s Georges I-IV). By the time we reach the closing lines we are registering the fake-antique verb forms in ‘-eth’ (‘biddeth’, ‘cryeth’), the pseudo-Chaucerian ‘gat’ for ‘got’, the use of ‘yea’ and ‘lo’, and the sub-Miltonic Latinate syntax:⁴⁶

Divine, she biddeth her throne to be decked with the flowers of Hyblis,

She rules and gives the commands and the graces come to her calling,

And the flowers, yea all that the year brings unto Hybla

And more than the vales of Hybla and the fields of Enna yield.

Lo, there come wandering with them, the maidens of field and of forest.
 Such as dwell in the hills, and the fountains and the groves.
 And here ye may see all the herds and the flocks amid the broom plants;
 She, the divine one, biddeth the songful wings to break silence,
 The hoarse swan clamour drifts across the pools.
 Hark! mid the poplar shade there, the Tyrrean maiden
 Cryeth with musical mouth, so that love rather seemeth
 The cause of her song, than that sorrow
 She gat from the sister ill-wedded.
 Yea, hers, hers is the song, and the silence is ours!
 Ah, when shall mine own spring come?
 Ah, when, as a lyre long silent, shall my silence find its end?

(Pound, p. 12)

Arguably a considerably finer response to the poem is in evidence on the two occasions when Pound revisits it in his own poetry: in *Lustra* and in *Canto XXXIX*. Other accounts of these moments are available; they are among the episodes a reception history would take in.⁴⁷



To point out that Pater had his effect on Mackail is not to point out anything very surprising, given the popularity of *Marius the Epicurean*. Pound acknowledges Mackail's influence himself. So, while these overlaps between the worlds of classical scholarship and contemporary letters are not much known, they are not far to seek. The last calling

point on this road is perhaps more unexpected, as the length of Mackail's shadow is revealed by the effect of his work in a new time and place. The 1943 English *Pervigilium* by the American poet (and poet laureate) Allen Tate is highly esteemed today in at least some quarters. George Steiner called it a 'sovereign recasting of the *Pervigilium Veneris*'.⁴⁸ This is no faint praise, and Steiner is not alone.⁴⁹ Such a critical verdict is not, however, unanimous, as we shall see.

Tate's translation came complete with an 'introductory note' establishing, among other things, his approach to the metre:

In the fall of 1942 the refrain of the *Pervigilium* came back to me and for several days kept running through my head; then I suddenly knew that I 'had' it. I had it, that is to say, in language that somewhat resembled English and in a metre that the English language can be written in: plain iambic pentametre, with anapaestic substitutions for the frequent falling rhythms of the original. The Latin is in trochaic septenarii, seven-footed lines with, at the end, an extra syllable which is usually accented, making eight accents; the metre, in fact, of Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, which was actually used by some of the early translators of the *Pervigilium*. Except for certain special purposes it is an impossible metre in English, for unless the extra accented syllable at the end is managed with great skill the line will break down into units of four and three and sound like a Wesleyan hymn - a high price to pay for metrical fidelity to a foreign original.⁵⁰

As my readers will have been able to see, the idea that some early translators used fourteeners is mistaken, but the rest is unobjectionable. Tennyson's poem indeed approximates to the Latin measure, but Tennyson was a great metrist, and Tate is probably

wise to avoid fourteeners himself.⁵¹ He is, though, attuned to the falling cadences of the Latin, and has what he thinks is a way of suggesting their effect.

With what success? It might be fair to judge this translation by its ending, because this is, for Tate, the poem's high point. Tate is not, of course, alone; the change of mood here is something readers seem always to have admired. This is what his introductory note has to say:

Up to the last two stanzas the poem is moving, it has its peculiar subtleties; but it is not brilliant. In those two last stanzas something like a first-rate lyrical imagination suddenly appears.

Observe how it works. The 'maid of Tereus' is the sort of classical parable that we have had throughout the poem; but here it is not a conventional allusion.

The beautiful line:

iam loquaces ore rauco stagna cycni perstrepunt

particularizes the scene about to be presented as no other scene in the poem has been particularized: we feel immediately the presence of a dramatic observer, an ear that listens and an eye that sees. *Terei puella* is more than a classical allusion; she is a real bird singing in a real poplar tree, answering the dissonance of the swans as they strike the lake ...

It is this unexpected and dramatic ending that makes, for me, what were otherwise an interesting ritualistic chant, one of the finest of lyric poems.

(Tate, pp. 146-9)

Accordingly, I give from Tate's version its closing passage:

XXI

Now the tall swans with hoarse cries thrash the lake:
 The girl of Tereus pours from the poplar ring
 Musical change - sad sister who bewails
 Her act of darkness with the barbarous king!

Tomorrow may loveless, may lover tomorrow make love.

XXII

She sings, we are silent. When will my spring come?
 Shall I find my voice when I shall be as the swallow?
 Silence destroyed the Amyclae: they were dumb.
 Silent, I lost the muse. Return, Apollo!

Tomorrow let loveless, let lover tomorrow make love.

(Tate, p. 161)

This passage begins and ends with a very strong line. The inconsistent rhyming (four rhyme words in the second stanza, only two in the first) must be a close-of-poem flourish, since all Tate's other stanzas have just two rhyme words. The double rhyme of 'Apollo/swallow' has been called too 'jaunty' for the tone of 'fearful uncertainty' in 'perdidi musam tacendo, nec me Apollo respicit'.⁵² It seems the antepenultimate line (translating the one quoted in *The Waste Land*) must be read with care to emphasize the

right words: ‘Shall **I** find **my** voice when **I** ...’, and if this is done as Tate intended, perhaps the latitude required for a thirteen-syllable iambic pentameter can be accounted for by ‘anapestic substitutions’. Metrically this seems in principle to be a flexible arrangement which can be varied in many ways. The refrain is, with the exception of the first foot, entirely accentual-anapestic. Readers not familiar with the Latin might have to work hard to make sense of its syntax.

Tate’s introductory note mentions something else: his use of Mackail’s edition. In 1888 Mackail had published arguments for rearranging the text into regular quatrains.⁵³ In 1910 he published such a rearrangement, in what Tate guardedly describes as ‘perhaps a triumph of textual scholarship’ (Tate, p. 149). Mackail’s brilliant, if, to say the least, speculative exercise had produced an avowedly ‘conjectural’ text in twenty-two regular four-line stanzas.⁵⁴ Though not universally acclaimed, this text was adopted by the Loeb Classical Library for one of its earliest volumes in 1912.⁵⁵ No doubt Tate used a reprint of this Loeb edition; there were ten down to 1939.

Mackail’s was by no means the first attempt to reorder the obviously confused Latin text, but it was one of the more drastic ones.⁵⁶ Some editors had been content, when they could make no sense of a line, to leave a lacuna. To achieve the regularity he wanted, Mackail relocated a half-dozen lines, expanded two others, and made up three new ones from scratch. He inserted the refrain after each of his quatrains, at a total twenty-two points, where manuscript authority provided for it to appear at only ten. The result was, as Dudley Fitts wrote, echoing Bentley on Pope’s Homer in the most perceptive of Tate’s many reviews, ‘a very pretty poem’.⁵⁷ We are to recall the rest of Bentley’s verdict on Pope’s Homer, and apply it not to Mackail’s translation but to his Latin text.

By 1910 Mackail had realized the erroneousess of his theory that the words prefixed to the poem in the Codex Salmasianus, ‘Sunt vero versus XXII’, referred to the

number of stanzas, and that the stanzas must therefore be quatrains.⁵⁸ Henceforth he did not attempt to justify his rearrangement into quatrains, but did not revise it either, over its many subsequent reprintings. Why might quatrains have seemed so apt that they survived even when Mackail could offer no reason for imposing them? I have used the word ‘romantic’ to describe Mackail’s presentation of the *Vigil* in his *Latin Literature*. Mackail’s *Vigil* is not not just a medieval poem, but a poem of English romantic medievalism.⁵⁹ The ballad stanza (four lines rhyming *ABCB*), became a central form in that poetry, as in, say, Keats’ *La Belle Dame sans merci*, or even Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*. Mackail, in a clear allusion to the key poem of romantic medievalism, Keats’ *The Eve of St. Agnes*, gave his (prose) translation the title ‘The Eve of St. Venus’. For the avoidance of doubt, he spells things out in the 1912 Introduction to his edition: ‘In the delicately running verses ... there is germinally the essence and inner spirit of the whole romantic movement’.⁶⁰

Returning, then, to Tate, Fitts goes on to explain why in his view what he calls the ‘pat prettiness’ of Mackail’s Latin text was the cause of the American’s relative failure. His argument turns in part on one last passage I will quote from Tate’s introductory note. Tate recalls that he had first looked up the *Pervigilium* decades earlier, after reading *Marius the Epicurean* (like many others). But:

I was still too close to Swinburne in my adolescent revolt against his influence to read properly any poem about pagan love; I read the *Pervigilium* with Swinburne's sensibility, and heard it in his language, having then at any rate neither sensibility nor language of my own; and I disliked it.

(Tate, p. 145)

‘In effect’, Fitts diagnoses, in 1942-3 ‘he *was* hearing the poem in something very like Swinburne’s language; but the reason was not entirely his closeness to Swinburne, and I suggest that the revolt which he calls adolescent is still active in his translation ... compelling him as it were against his will to correct its pat prettiness by harsh uncertain rhythms, by flat diction, and by “doctoring in the 18th Century manner” ’ (Fitts, p. 305). Those last few words are quoted from Tate, and, as Fitts does not neglect to point out, his use of the word ‘doctoring’ seems significant.

Fitts concedes that Tate’s version can be, in parts, attractive. He praises this passage as ‘an admirable instance of translation by intensification’ (Fitts, p. 305n.):

ipsa venas atque mentem permeanti spiritu
 intus occultis gubernat procreatrix viribus.
 ipsa Troianos nepotes in Latinos transtulit,
 Romuleas ipsa fecit cum Sabinis nuptias.

cras amet qui nunquam amavit quique amavit cras amet.

pervium sui tenorem seminali tramite
 perque caelum perque terras perque pontum subditum
 ipsa duxit, ipsa venis procreantem spiritum
 inbuit, iussitque mundum nosse nascendi vias.

cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit cras amet.

(ed. Mackail, XVI-XVII)

XVI

Over sky and land and down under the sea
 On the path of the seed the goddess brought to earth
 And dropped into our veins created fire,
 That men might know the mysteries of birth.

Tomorrow may loveless, may lover tomorrow make love.

XVII

Body and mind the inventive Creatress fills
 With spirit blowing its invariable power:
 The Sabine girls she gave to the sons of Rome
 And sowed the seed exiled from the Trojan tower.

(Tate, pp. 157-9)

In Tate's hands, one would agree, the last line is developed from something flat and vague into something more concrete and evocative ('tower' is Tate's addition).

But for Fitts, in spite of these happier moments, the translation is seriously lacking overall in 'a rhythmic pattern'. Thus he points to the third line:

I

Tomorrow let loveless, let lover tomorrow make love:
 O spring, singing spring, spring of the world renew!
 In spring lovers consent and the birds marry
 When the grove receives in her hair the nuptial dew.

(Tate, p. 151)

This line fails every test, rhythmically speaking. Fitts is again diagnostic: Tate disregards rhythmic unity because ‘he is instinctively rebelling against Mackail’s original’.

What of the diction? Fitts objects to ‘many turns of phrase that approach meanness’, the language of the *Pervigilium* being ‘simple, but never mean’ (Fitts, p. 306).

He adduces the way Venus speaks here:

The mother of the Flying Boy has smiled

And said: ‘Now, girls, beware his naked sting!

(Tate, p. 155)

Fitts is surely right: this Venus is unrecognizable as the awesome but lovely goddess of the *Pervigilium*. Tonally she sounds like a stereotypical scout mistress or school ma’am:

Ite nymphae, posuit arma, feriatu est Amor ...

Sed tamen cavete nymphae, quod Cupido pulcher est:

Totus est inermis idem quando nudus est Amor.

(ed. Mackail, VIII-IX)

Go, girls! Unarmed, Love beckons. You must not shrink ...

Yet, girls, Cupid is pretty, and you must know

That Love unarmed can pierce with naked hand!

(Tate, pp. 153-4)

This was something other reviewers as well as Fitts pointed to. For one, Venus' 'loud voice' was an instance of the 'overpowering lack of joy and wit' in Tate's translation.⁶¹

Tate's *Pervigilium*, if judged a success at all, is a mixed one. Very plausibly, Tate's use of Mackail's recasting - for it is surely to Mackail's work rather than Tate's that this description, *pace* George Steiner, should be applied - was one of the factors that brought this about. Tate was conscious of his youthful dissatisfaction with a romantic-Swinburnian *Vigil*; Mackail's text elicited similar feelings later, but much less consciously.



A further word on questions raised by the work of the translators, imitators, and commentators examined here will take us back to where we began: to reception and translation. Some of these questions are about the interrelationships between the activity of scholars and creative writers. I have outlined how in this case scholarship was influenced by a powerful piece of imaginative fiction (Mackail by Pater), and how the effect appears to work in the opposite direction too (Mackail's impact on Tate).

This history suggests the question whether there is anywhere we might look to find a construction of the *Vigil* that is not easily identifiable as a reflection of its own era's tastes and assumptions. When we find the poem being read in the mid-nineteenth century as an anticipation of the age of Merry England, it will take us no time to make this identification, since the age of Merry England, much beloved of the Victorians, would now be considered an ahistorical construct. But are Mackail, Pound, or Tate any more reliable guides than the remoter Prowett? Or is the *Pervigilium* merely a space into which readers, scholars, and translators have always projected their own tastes and ideas? Its very 'mysteriousness' seems to encourage such projection. We have seen how, from the late nineteenth century,

impressions of what this poem is and does tend to feed on each other. Those tempted to think anything has changed since Tate would have to concede that it took until 1987 for the Loeb Classical Library to replace Mackail's 1912 text and translation,⁶² and that it must still be on many a translator's bookshelf; some of the latest translations I have come across are in quatrains.

My argument would be that it is the English translations more remote from us in time that can take us somewhere new. Do the rhythms of Stanley's rendering reanimate the *Pervigilium Veneris* for us? Does Parnell's continue to attract readers without an independent interest in the Latin poem? I have suggested these questions may be answered in the affirmative. In that case, perhaps we can agree that creative translation is a very special form of reception. 'Creative' implies that the translator has produced no mere replica. 'Response' might be a misleading word, too. What has emerged is a new work of art that takes its place in a literary tradition, which, as that word implies, it draws upon, modifies, and helps to sustain. Like a critical reading or commentary, a creative translation offers, no doubt, a 'version' of the work it translates. Unlike such responses, though, it can re-read and re-imagine that work as an English poem. It embodies, performs, and enacts it. It can in this way seem to show us not what the work once was, but what it still is, or can be; what we might wish to 'count as being "there" '.

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¹ See John Hankins, ‘Chaucer and the *Pervigilium Veneris*’, *MLN*, 49.2 (1934), 80-3; E. Talbot Donaldson, ‘Venus and the Mother of Romulus: The *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Pervigilium Veneris*’, *Chaucer Review*, 14.4 (1980), 313-18.

² For notes on reception of the *Pervigilium Veneris* among these and other writers 1578-1809, see the Introduction to the most recent and best scholarly edition, *The Pervigilium Veneris: A New Critical Text, Translation and Commentary*, edited by William M. Barton (London, 2018), pp. 49-61. Barton discontinues his account at 1809 because, he says, ‘the poem’s reception after 1809 is (relatively) well known’ (p. 49).

³ For Eliot’s quotation (‘Quando fiam uti chelidon?’) see recently Alyson Booth’s *Reading the Waste Land from the Bottom up* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 237-42.

⁴ Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 92-4.

⁵ Charles Tomlinson, *Poetry and Metamorphosis* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 73.

⁶ Cecil Clementi, *Bibliographical and Other Studies on the Pervigilium Veneris* (Oxford, 1913), p. 28, lists an eighteenth-century English verse translation ‘known to me only through the MS copy ... in the British Museum’, but this turns out to be a copy of Parnell’s translation.

⁷ For succeeding decades to 1912 see Clementi’s bibliography, pp. 33-7. A survey of a more considerable number of English verse translations, though not including Pound’s or Tate’s, is made by Wayland Hilton-Young, ‘Translations of the *Pervigilium Veneris* into English Verse’, *Cambridge Journal*, 5 (1952), 339-54. Some of Hilton-Young’s verdicts will be considered below. Their idiosyncrasies include an assessment of a 1951 translation by the now forgotten Lewis Gielgud as the best since the seventeenth century (p. 349).

⁸ More precisely we might wish to follow Allen Tate's description of 'the frequent coincidence of quantity and stress, and even in some instances stress crowding out the quantities of the vowels'. Tate, *Poems, 1922-1947* (New York, 1977), p. 176.

⁹ Barton (n. 2), pp. 10-28, has revived, or strengthened, the claim of the fourth-century Tiberianus.

¹⁰ 'In any modern language': Clementi, *Bibliographical and Other Studies*, p. 20.

¹¹ For further biographical details and an overview of Stanley's poetic oeuvre see my own sub-chapter 'Thomas Stanley', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, edited by Gordon Braden, Robert Cummings, and Stuart Gillespie, Vol. 2: *1550-1660* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 83-6. For the low standing of Stanley's translations in later ages see, for example, Hilton-Young as quoted in n. 20, below.

¹² For Stanley's source text see *The Poems and Translations of Thomas Stanley*, edited by Galbraith Miller Crump (Oxford, 1962), p. 393, on which the rest of this paragraph draws. My text of Stanley's translation, which absorbs a few minor corrections of the author's subsequent to 1647, is taken from this edition, pp. 135-40.

¹³ This is taken directly from Stanley's corrected second edition, *Europa. Cupid Crucified. Venus Vigils* (London, 1649), pp. 36-46, with roman and italic fonts reversed. The way the Latin lines are broken into two appears to be done so that the parallel texts correspond better across the page openings.

¹⁴ The standard study is Gerald Hammond, *Fleeting Things: English Poets and Poems, 1616-1660* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

¹⁵ Spenser uses 'humid' four times in *The Faerie Queene*, but when found in English poetry before Stanley its sense is most often physiological, deriving from humoral medical theory.

¹⁶ See *OED*, 'leaf', n.¹, I.2.

¹⁷ *Romeo and Juliet*, 4.2.24.

¹⁸ *Lucretius: The Beginning of the First Book*, lines 20-2. *Poems of John Dryden*, Vol. 2: 1682-1685, edited by Paul Hammond (London, 1995), p. 310.

¹⁹ Hilton-Young (n. 7), p. 354. He concludes dismissively, however, that (being a translation) ‘the version is poetry, but not in its own right’.

²⁰ Details taken from *Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell*, edited by Claude Rawson and F. P. Lock (Newark, DE, 1989), p. 508. Parnell’s *Pervigilium* is quoted from pp. 146-55 of this edition.

²¹ Carol Rumens, *Guardian*, 20 March 2011.

²² Hilton-Young, pp. 344-5. The verdict on the translation is tied into a summary judgement on its author: ‘His character is known to have been idle and impulsive, and one can see these qualities in his ... rendering.’

²³ The taxonomy of imitation, paraphrase, and translation is a shifting one in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, not admitting of easy summary. One standard starting point is Harold F. Brooks, ‘The “Imitation” in English Poetry, especially in Formal Satire, before the Age of Pope’, *Review of English Studies*, 25 (1949), 124-40.

²⁴ Sean Finbarr Gallagher, ‘No Easie Art: A Study of Thomas Parnell’s Translations’, unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1961, p. 88. Gallagher’s chapter on Parnell’s *Vigil* remains much the most extensive discussion of the work, and has influenced my own reading.

²⁵ Gallagher, p. 68.

²⁶ London, 1721, 1721; as *Pervigilium Veneris: or the Nightly Sports of Venus. Containing the Pleasures of Coition; with all the Love-Poems of Bonefonius*, London, 1746. Although he was a reputable writer of Latin verse, Bonnefon’s work has very little to do with the *Pervigilium*. *The Pleasures of Coition* is an original poem.

²⁷ ‘The Vigil of Venus, Translated from the Latin’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 53, No. 332 (June, 1843), 715-17.

²⁸ This was a posthumous edition having less authority than the 1843 printing. All quotations are therefore taken from the three-page *Blackwood’s* text, with line numbering added.

²⁹ *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, edited by Richard M. Ludwig (Princeton, NJ, 1965), p. 259. Ford also enquires in this letter whether these was ‘any decent translation’ of the poem, an enquiry which forms part of the background to Tate’s version some years later.

³⁰ Barton (n. 3), jacket blurb.

³¹ Both quotations are taken from J. F. Dobson, *A Study of the Pervigilium Veneris* (Cambridge, 1916), p. 1. Writing after Pater’s *Marius* had had its effect, Dobson, a professor of Greek at Bristol University, expresses satisfaction in how far opinion has since moved on.

³² *Catullus, with the Pervigilium Veneris*, edited by S. G. Owens (London, 1893). A second edition appeared in the same year.

³³ Allen Tate is a late example. He writes in the Preface to his translation (n. 9) that he first came across the poem in about 1917 ‘in the usual way’, through Pater.

³⁴ Almost all of these receive a word, though often little more, from Hilton-Young (n. 7).

³⁵ E. K. Rand, reviewing a later edition, *AJP*, 58.4, 1937, 474-8 (p. 474).

³⁶ Alan Cameron, ‘The Pervigilium Veneris’, in *La Poesia Tardoantica: Tra retorica, teologia e politica: Atti del V Corso della Scuola Superiore di Archaeologia e Civiltà Medievali, 6-12 Dicembre 1981* (Messina, 1984), pp. 209-34 (p. 209). These are an underestimate.

³⁷ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, 2nd edn (London, 1885), pp. 114-16.

³⁸ Pater, p. 114. His phrasing echoes, surely consciously, the last sentence of Keats' Preface to *Endymion*: 'I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness (Keats, *Poetical Works*, edited by H. W. Garrod (Oxford, 1956), p. 54)

³⁹ For recent discussion see James Uden, 'Untimely Antiquity: Walter Pater and the Vigil of Venus', in *Reading Late Antiquity*, edited by Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed and Mats Malm (Heidelberg, 2018), pp. 17-32.

⁴⁰ *The Spirit of Romance* (London, 1910; hereafter 'Pound'), p. 2. This passage is itself Paterian in more than one way; with Pound's word 'foreboding' might be compared Pater's 'almost prophetic' (p. 000, above).

⁴¹ It is registered by Peter Davidson, *Ezra Pound and Roman Poetry: A Preliminary Survey* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 16-17, though Davidson for no evident reason identifies Pound's immediate source as a one-page excerpt from Mackail's account printed in an annual compilation edited from Maine, *The Bibelot*, in 1902. Mackail's monograph, a work reprinted at least forty times, is a much likelier source, but the passages are in any event identical in all essentials.

⁴² J. W. Mackail, *Latin Literature* (New York, 1895), p. 246.

⁴³ Dobson (n. 31), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Pound, 'Postscript (1929)', *The Spirit of Romance*, rev. edn (London, 1952), p. 10.

⁴⁵ Pound 1952, p. 12n.

⁴⁶ It is notable that these features are without exception edited out in the revised text in Pound 1952 (pp. 19-20).

⁴⁷ One account is Davidson, *Pound and Roman Poetry*, pp. 18-27.

⁴⁸ Steiner, review of *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation, Translation and Literature*, 9.2 (2000), 227-31 (p. 230).

⁴⁹ See, for example, the contemporaneous Bruce Cicero, ‘The Stand of Allen Tate’, *The Modern Age*, 42.4 (2000), 331-45: Tate’s version is ‘accomplished’ and ‘esteemed’. A 35-line excerpt was included in the *Oxford Book of Classical Verse in Translation*, edited by Adrian Poole and Jeremy Maule (Oxford, 1995), pp. 514-15.

⁵⁰ Tate (n. 8; hereafter ‘Tate’), p. 178. Tate’s translation was originally published in a limited edition by the Cummington Press of Massachusetts in 1943: *Pervigilium Veneris. The Latin text with an introduction and English translation*.

⁵¹ For the metre of *Locksley Hall* and the difficulty Tate describes with it, see Robert Cummings, ‘Tennyson, Trench, Tholuck, and the “Oriental” Metre of *Locksley Hall*’, *Translation and Literature*, 1 (1992), 127-33.

⁵² Tomlinson (n. 5), p. 44.

⁵³ J. W. Mackail, ‘The Pervigilium Veneris’, *Journal of Philology*, 17.34 (1888), 179-91. Indeed pp. 187-90 give a tentative arrangement in quatrains, but it is incomplete because Mackail has not yet ventured to construct the extra lines needed (see below).

⁵⁴ Mackail’s Latin text was first issued with his Introduction in an independent publication of 1910 by the Doves Press, Hammersmith. Both are quoted here from a later reprint: *Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris* (Cambridge, MA, 1976; hereafter ‘ed. Mackail’).

⁵⁵ Sceptics included Dobson (n. 31), p. 6: ‘Was the dislocation in this case serious enough to require such drastic remedies?’, or less temperately Hilton-Young, p. 343: ‘violent and arbitrary rearrangement’. The Loeb edition was *The Poems of Gaius Valerius Catullus translated by F. W. Cornish - Tibullus translated by J. P. Postgate - Pervigilium Veneris translated by J. W. Mackail* (Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 6, London, 1912). Mackail’s text and translation were eventually replaced by G. P. Goold’s work in 1987, although Mackail’s Introduction was retained, and printed in slightly truncated form after his.

⁵⁶ Clementi, *Bibliographical and Other Studies* (n. 6), pp. 39-46, discusses the major attempts at rearrangement in some detail.

⁵⁷ Dudley Fitts, 'Rejecting Swinburne's Sensibility', *Kenyon Review*, 6.2 (1944), 303-8 (p. 304; hereafter 'Fitts').

⁵⁸ See ed. Mackail, p. 344, and further Gladys Martin, 'Transposition of Verses in the Pervigilium Veneris', *Classical Philology*, 30.3 (1935), 255-9 (p. 255).

⁵⁹ Romantic medievalism was, as Charles Martindale points out to me, a distinctive taste of Pater's too.

⁶⁰ Ed. Mackail, p. 346.

⁶¹ Horace Gregory, 'On the Translation of the Classics into English Poetry', *Poetry*, 64.1 (1944), 30-5 (p. 33).

⁶² See n. 55 above.