

INTRODUCTION

THE TWELFTH book of *The Greek Anthology* compiled at the court of Hadrian in the second century A.D. by a poetaster Straton, who like most anthologists included an immodest number of his own poems, is itself a part of a larger collection of short poems dating from the dawn of Greek lyric poetry (Alcaeus) down to its last florescence, which survived two Byzantine recensions to end up in a single manuscript in the library of the Count Palatine in Heidelberg—hence its alternative title, *The Palatine Anthology*, usually abbreviated to *Anth. Pal.* This particular, indeed special, collection contained in Book XII subtitled *The Musa Paedika* or *Musa Puerilis*, alternately from the Greek word for a child of either sex—and girls are not wholly absent from these pages—or the Latin for “boy,” consists of 258 epigrams on various aspects of Boy Love or, to recur to the Greek root, paederasty. Some of these poems are by the greatest poets of the Greek language, such as Alcaeus and Callimachus; many are by less well known but nonetheless polished writers, such as Meleager, Asclepiades, Rhianus, and Strato himself; many, these not the least worthy, are anonymous. Their tone varies from the lighthearted and bawdy to the grave and resigned. The overall effect is one of witty wistfulness rather than rampant, reciprocated lust, of longing—what the Greeks called *pothos*—rather than satisfaction, and also of regret. As happy, let alone domestic, love has occasioned very little poetry at any time, as passion almost always sounds a plaintive note—here at least seldom rising into the desperate wail we hear, for example in Catullus—we might well seek an explanation in the nature of desire itself, on the Platonic model envisaging a forever unattainable, divine object, of which all earthly affection is merely a mirror, however

delightful and sometimes delusive. That this undercurrent of spiritual *pothos* is far from conscious in these poems needs no comment; but it is implicit in the very nature of Love or Eros itself—or, as so often familiarly personified, Himself.

That the objects of such passion were masculine and for the most part at least comparatively juvenile is an historical fact and, like all facts, an accident. The fact that other later poets in another though not wholly dissimilar Christian, heterosexual tradition, such as notably Dante, Petrarch, Chrétien de Troyes, and Goethe, to mention only a few, found transcendence in the eternal feminine instead is also of but incidental interest. Fashions in passion change, like fads in anything else, and while we are given to thinking our own modes and norms of conduct both universal and solely acceptable, the merest glance at history, literature, and anthropology will show us otherwise, as will a peep behind the façade of respectable behavior. The family unit, however defined, is itself a comparatively recent invention or convention; for whereas the bond of mother and child remains for our kind as for each of us the earliest form of attachment, among adults—and we should never forget that adulthood began much earlier in earlier times—it was the group, the horde, or that most decried yet most prevalent group, the gang. Gangs, first I suppose for hunting game, are to be found not only on streetcorners but in board rooms, the most common and powerful type of the gang being the committee. The group for and within which these poems were composed and circulated was neither a gang nor a committee—itsself a martial term originally—but a court, neither an academy nor yet an institute; these rather than those high-flown heterosexual fantasies of the twelfth century represented the first form quite literally of courtly love.

Love, surrounded by the simpering Graces,
And Bacchus are ill-suited to straight faces.

Love, love, love, Eros, personified and impersonal, bitter yet sweet, now an infant on his mother's lap, now an adolescent boy winged with fanciful desires and armed with the playthings of youth, his arrows less fatal than those of Apollo and Artemis but also less painless, inflicting an incurable festering wound, is the paramount deity and pervasive, prevalent spirit of these poems. Even almighty Zeus is seldom mentioned save as the grasping, aquiline lover of Ganymede, the paradigmatic catamite. Eros at this period, always, at least in his origins, physical, figured as Aphrodite's son, fatherless, older in some respects than She, urge or demiurge, impulse and illusion, never absent yet often unnamed in these lines, prevails: *Amor omnia vincit*. Yet love not only conquers; he, she, or it oppresses, teases, and torments. Unfavorably compared by some flattering suitors to certain of his lovelier mortal incarnations, Eros is sometimes also said to suffer from the passion he provokes. From time to time, if only hopefully, the tables may be turned on the mischievous little monster, in a role reversal with obvious implications:

This is the boy to be enamored of,
Young men, a new love superior to Love.

LIX [Meleager]

Thief of hearts, why jettison your cruel
Arrows and bow and, weeping, fold your wings?
Invincible Myiscus' looks must fuel
Repentance for your previous philanderings.

CXLIV [Meleager]

Our modern sense of such things is if anything more graphic, yet we will ask in vain what, exactly, these people did, sexwise. Ambiguous hints and metaphors are all we are given. The divine yet very real generative impulse—for the notion of an immaterial divinity, though hardly unknown, if as mathematically conceived by

Plato, seemed altogether strange to popular religion and our authors alike, at once down to earth and highfalutin—infallibly overwhelms both its object and its vessel, even as it informs its verbal medium. The sentiments of these juvenescent expressions are, within a persistent convention alien to us, as conventional as those on any Valentine card, though more ingeniously and frankly couched.

Besides Eros himself and his mother, the divinized entities most mentioned are Dionysus (Bacchus)—Drink—and the Graces, physical and social, surrounding and supporting Beauty.

Alcoholic beverages, best known in the form of wine to the peoples of ancient Greece (though some, like Callimachus as resident of Ptolemaic Egypt, might have been familiar with the ancient Egyptians' everyday liquid refreshment, beer), were, like everything else important to life, celebrated as the gifts of god and were themselves godly. The ancients had no specific designation, unless Eros himself, for life or the life force. On the other hand they did pay realistic if reluctant homage to the gods of the underworld, beginning with Zeus' brother Hades, once or twice mentioned here with other animistic deities of sea and land. Yet we would be wrong, I believe, in imagining such beings or concepts as wholly allegorical. They were very real, often attached to a real or imaginary place as Zeus was to Olympus or the sky; the Muses, themselves established on or near Olympus as well as on the mountains or hills they were thought to frequent, were, with the Graces and Hours, part of that wider, more ancient, and originally local class of beings, the nymphs who lived in trees and water, and all the other many divine beings of fresh water and salt, Poseidon, Thetis, Amphitrite, and the rest—not all feminine—so that the ancients inhabited a world itself divine where every act and substance had divine import, at a time when Christianity was a cheerless underground sect repudiating all these beings under their accepted names, while retaining in the Sacrament the transubstantial elements of Wine and Bread, Dionysus and Ceres.

Of course gods could be created as well as accepted; the most striking example at the period in question being, perhaps beside the divinized wonderworker from Palestine Himself, Antinous, the beloved of Hadrian, who stood in relation to him as Gany-mede to Zeus or Hyacinth to Apollo. Posthumously decreed divine honors, like many of the Roman emperors, and worshipped by imperial decree throughout the empire, Antinous abides as the type of the *eromenos*, absent in name but present by association and implication throughout these pages.

A CONDITION also implicit here though unnamed, slavery, was as universal in the world in question as paederasty. Some but certainly not all of these desirable lads were slaves, as is clear in this verse by the anthologist himself, the least sentimental of boy-lovers:

Were you a novice I'd tried to persuade
To vice, you might be right to be afraid;
But since your master's bed taught you a lot,
Why not treat someone else to what you've got?
Called to your post, your duty done, without
A word, your sleepy master throws you out.
But here are other pleasures, free speech and
Fun by solicitation not command.

CCXI [Strato]

But such are the rules, indeed the reality, of such attachments that it is the lover not the beloved who is enslaved, even when, as often seems to have been the case, the boy is a whore. Strato, again:

What now, my pet, depressed, in tears again?
What do you want? Don't torture me! Speak plain.
You hold your palm out! I'm disgusted at
Your asking payment. Where did you learn that?

Seed cakes and conkers will not make you merry
Now, that your mind has grown so mercenary.
I curse the customer with his perverse
Lessons who made my little rascal worse!

The object of such love is always, his civil state notwithstanding, free and generally elusive. Therefore the character of his actual condition, whether slave or not, is never mentioned, as it is in fact irrelevant. A very great man once said, when asked what he thought of Free Love, that if it wasn't free it wasn't love. And so we find it here; any enslavement is that of the lover and like so much in these poems, half imaginary, even voluntary, willful. A convention as much as a predicament, playful even when despondent, the affection and desire of an older man for a younger though frequently far from hopeless, must be tinged as so many of these poems are with a resigned sadness, sometimes amounting to bitter consciousness of evanescence. As youth is the indispensable desideratum of paederasty—although in several verses the loves of young boys for each other are mentioned—it is naturally fleeting, almost immaterial, while of course evinced by specified physical traits. “Just wait,” the poet-lover seems to say, “soon you will be as old and unattractive as I, but never so clever.” The generation gap will be closed when it is too late. If, as more than one unsympathetic critic has complained, all this is mere “high-school stuff”—surely more current in private than public schools? (though even there such arrangements and derangements are not unknown) and doubtless in other all male institutions—we may be sure that the epigrams, written for boys of school age, were composed rather by their elders, masters, or teachers. Moreover it is also likely that, no matter whom they were ostensibly addressed to, their actual audience would have been the authors' coevals and/or colleagues, other older poets and lovers. The lads here named, many of them not altogether illiterate (cf. CLXXXVII), may never have read or even

heard their praise, dispraise, and gratuitous, unwanted, and probably unacceptable advice.

As to the diction, benedictions, or maledictions of the epigrams, which I have tried to carry over into English, let me make a few preliminary perhaps premonitory remarks. The Greeks, like us, spoke not just one language but several, often without knowing so. Poets in particular, wishing to exploit all the possibilities of their language—and a poet can only convincingly write in his native tongue, however elaborated or diluted by education—can either stick to what they suppose is standard speech, or, like Shakespeare, vary their discourse for surprising but appropriate effect. Goethe said that anachronism was the essence of poetry, and it plays a great part in the different kinds of diction that meld, both in everyday usage and in poetic contrivance, into what we perceive as comprehensible if sometimes odd if not inappropriate language. Anachronism, by the way, is merely a form of paradox, truly a basic poetical resource as well as a logical one, and much in play here—as, for instance, in the conception of the sweet bitterness or the bitter sweetness of love.

Without embarking on the complexities of Greek dialects, from the earliest times in which every city, then every area, spoke its own peculiar form of what was still recognizably the same language, to the latest period when on one level the vulgar spoke what is called *koiné* (“common”), the language of the New Testament, whereas the better educated had also their own less common and reductionist but even more ostentatiously mixed lingo or “*lingua franca et jocundissima*,” one might simply observe that the main language groups were all employed in poetry, each according to an of course unwritten convention by which, for instance, Ionic, the language of Homer and Hesiod (with even at that early date some admixtures), was reserved for epic, Aeolic for melic or lyric verse (after Sappho and Alcaeus), and Doric or Boeotian for bucolics,

like those of Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion. Attic was used primarily for prose and the stichomythic dialogues of tragedy: but while there was a Muse of tragedy—Calliope—there could not be one for prose, as that highly evolved and artificial literary form so long antedated the conception of the Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne or memory; it seems no accident that while the fundamental excuse for verse is its memorability, prose is scarcely memorable at all—as any schoolchild forced to memorize the Gettysburg Address or the speeches of Tacitus or Cicero will attest. Let us just agree that the language of the poems in the *Anthology* is more or less a mish-mash, like that of this paragraph.

One peculiar dictionary challenge in some of these poems is their use of words that, while we might regard them as obscene, or at best impolite, the Greeks may well not have. Obscenity is a result of repression, and it is difficult to see signs of repression anywhere in Greek life or art. The terms in question, some unique—*hapax legomena*—particularly in the many poems (too many, really) by Strato, the perhaps self-appointed court poet of Hadrian, are simple, crude, incomprehensible except in context, and like all such language, in essence childish. For what we repress, while hardy forgetting it, is much of our childhood along with its vocabulary of *pee-pee* and *kaka*. In the case of one poem (III) in which these terms are exploited for comic effect, I have used the commonest counterparts in English—fortunately at last printable. For further elucidation the reader may consult lexica in vain, but for the many mythological references should have recourse to Bullfinch's (or as I like to call it, Bullfeather's) *Mythology*.

Oral poetry was the primary means of communication in this old world, besides conversation, but written prose was a late invention brought to its highest perfection by Plato. Prose must by definition be written down, whereas poetry was for ages meant to be memorized or extemporized and recited: one may easily imagine these epigrams being bandied about at symposia, dinners, and

drinking parties, again, for men only. Few people could write, and some of those, like Vergil, did not care to, and would dictate their verses, as blind Milton and in our day Jorge Luis Borges did out of necessity. The dissemination and dilution of literacy in our time has led not to a wider let alone a deeper appreciation of the best efforts of the past and present, but to a widespread appetite for and consumption of tripe. The poems in *The Greek Anthology*, admittedly trivial, are not tripe. Literature owes as much to illiteracy as it does to blindness; Homer (probably a misnomer) was reputed both blind and preliterate. We are fortunate, since as it is said, *littera scripta manet*, “the written letter remains so,” that *The Odyssey* as well as these fugitive, occasional pieces were written and copied and edited. Aratus, one of the light-versifiers here included, also edited Homer, as did Callimachus and Apollonius Rhodius, and wrote, besides other, lost works, a poem on astronomy, *Phaenomena*. The pre-Socratic were not the only serious and speculative persons to commit their lucubrations to verse: Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* may be mentioned, derived largely from the prose writings of the earlier post-Socratic, prose philosopher Epicurus. Epicureanism in its more popular sense, rather than Stoicism pervades the poems of the *Musa Paedika*. Though it is tempting to think of prose as Stoic and poetry as Epicurean, this is not in fact always so.

Oral—and aural—verse, which is to say virtually all poetry written before the last and, as far as literature is concerned, rather lamentable century, just what is still generally regarded as poetry, and which still manifests itself in popular music, for instance “rap,” at once rhymed, rhythmical, and as extemporaneous as jazz, has its own unspoken rules and rights-of-way.

The metrical form of the originals I have rather represented than slavishly imitated, as I tried to in my purely accentual dactylic versions of the *Idylls* of Theocritus (Atheneum, 1982), *The Homeric Hymns* (Atheneum, 1972), and Hesiod’s *Works and Days* and *Theogony* (University of Chicago Press, 2000). There the form was

stichic, and as seemed to befit unrhymed single lines following each other in ever varied succession, I have used not the commonest, indeed only ordinary such stichic English meter, blank verse, but chose to echo the sound of the Greek more directly, allowing for the differences between quantitative and stressed verse (the ambiguities and subtleties of which would require a larger and longer digression than this short preface would allow) in six stressed lines, basically dactylic but permitting as much spondaic pseudo-resolution as the matter suggested and our language permits. The predominant, almost the only, form here is not stichic but strophic: an unrhymed couplet repeated *ad libitum*, consisting of the commonest meter in Greek and Latin, the dactylic hexameter, followed by a line composed of its first two feet, plus one syllable, of that metrical unit the so-called hemieps, repeated, thus forming the second most popular classical unit, the elegiac couplet, which may be roughly thumped out thus:

tumpidy tumpidy tumpidy tumpidy tumpidy tumtum
tumpidy tumpidy tum tumpidy tumpidy tum

Replacing the longum with an ictus—the long syllable with a stressed one—we would get something like the following English elegiac couplet:

Nor are some authors the only anonymous blooms in this
garland:
Most of the boys might as well be heteronymous too.

While this seems not only fairly accurate as representation, but not unpleasing, the effect, much-repeated, is rather sedative than, as an epigram should be, piquant, surprising and evocative, in its basic sense of a wake-up call. Therefore the reader should do as I did after much experimentation with the above model: more or less abandon it altogether in favor of a more familiar native meter, the rhymed couplet or quatrain, such as I used to represent the ele-

giac couplets in Ovid's *Heroines* (Yale, 1991). Rhyme, though it certainly does exist in Greek as in all languages in the crudest manifestation as assonance and consonance, was not deployed unless for special, subliminal effect (see the rhyming pun in Callimachus: XLIII); the morphology of the language made terminal rhyme, which is all most of us hear as rhyme at all, undesirable as too easy: hence all these quantitative evasions thereof.

The language into which a poem is translated must be of more interest and importance to the reader of that language than the original tongue, and certainly should be so to the translator. A verse translation is not merely a trot or paraphrase of the original; to succeed it should, and must, be a wholly convincing and pleasurable poetic experience in its own right. Therefore guided by Aristotle's criterion of effect above all, I have plumped for what I deem the most effective means of simulacry, as shown in my versions. In a few cases I thought the tone and subject matter more suited to a limerick form than the staid couplet: as the limerick is the most popular indeed vulgar verse form in contemporary usage, it seemed to fit some of this badinage better. Here I might offer the reader two versions of the same elegiac couplet and ask him or her to chose a preference, if he or she can:

V STRATO

Pale skins I like, but honey-colored more,
And blond and brunette boys I both adore.
I never blackball brown eyes, but above
All, eyes of scintillating black I love.

[Limerick]

Are pale skins my favorite, or
Honey-hued adolescents? What is more,
Liking blond and brunette,
I love brown eyes—and yet
Scintillating black eyes I adore.

As I am no textual scholar but a poet who knows which texts make sense and are aesthetically preferable I shall abbreviate a long excursion into the wilderness of textualism by thanking the Muse—here Erato, for the ancients had muses for everything, even for smut—for preserving this bouquet of real and artificial flowers in a comparatively unified and simplified form. In the case of rare lacunae and gaps in the text I have silently bridged the gap, remembering that asyndeton and non sequiturs are also rhetorical devices. Throughout, my aim has been not archaeological but almost authorial, to produce rather than reproduce with all the resources of our resourceful language, something that I hope will surpass a mere simulacrum. I trust that these epigrams, so often but pleasantries, will stand as valid poems in their own light: not symphonies like the Homeric poets and all their imitators, but bagatelles.