

Acoetes rendered: Ovid in Pound's *Cantos*

The links between Ezra Pound and Latin poetry are certainly known to Classical scholars. The *Homage to Sextus Propertius* is Pound's best-known translation of Roman poetry, and has thus far been the most closely examined work of Pound, in part because it is so well known. J.P. Sullivan's work on Pound and Propertius was ground breaking and allowed for an examination of Pound as a translator, a role he was not often granted before. But Pound worked on Horace and Ovid as well, and his versions of these poets has received less attention than they are due.

In this paper, then, I examine the stylistic links between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 3 and Ezra Pound's *Canto II*. Pound admired Ovid and considered the *Metamorphoses* a seminal text in Western literature. Pound's objective in translating, as can be seen in his own letters and Sullivan's work, was to convey the meaning (as he saw it) or the spirit of the text, not a literal translation. His borrowing of Acoetes from Ovid for *Canto II* is an excellent example of this premise at work. Pound renders Ovid's scene, incorporating it in *Canto II*, but at the same time he changes it and adapts it to fulfill his poetic needs.

Although Pound alters the emphasis of the passage, his rendering of the Acoetes episode is done in such a way as to mimic Ovid in three specific stylistic areas: diction, compression, and narrative. Pound follows Ovid's lead in this *Canto* by creating compound words and juxtaposing them with archaisms; both authors create new compounds in their narration of the episode (such as *naviform* and *racemifer*), but also employ older words or phrases to off-set their neologisms. Ovid's presentation of the episode in the *Metamorphoses* is a compression of Euripides' *Bacchae* and the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*; Pound imitates this compression in his own narrative to highlight a specific aspect of the action. Both Pound and Ovid also employ ring composition around Acoetes' retelling, while Pound adds his own touch by rearranging Ovid's narrative. Through both his compression and rearranging of the narrative, Pound chooses to emphasize the manifestation of Dionysus' power. While the Acoetes episode in the *Metamorphoses* is meant to serve as a warning to Pentheus about disobeying Dionysus, an equally important event is the transformation of the sailors into dolphins. Pound, however, foregrounds the god's abilities, powers, and his divine appearance. Pound's mimicking of Ovid in diction and compression, while simultaneously reworking the passage, allows him to "translate" Ovid's passage and make it his own.

Bibliography

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