

In this paper I address how two modern poets, Odysseas Elytis (1911-1996) and Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968), encode their own poetics into their work as translators of ancient Greek lyric. This paper addresses pluralism in two ways. First, there is the matter of how the Hellenic tradition is variously deployed in an ongoing cultural production—a plurality of strategies, we might say, that effectively suggests a pluralism of Hellenisms. Salvatore Quasimodo is of course an Italian poet, but more specifically he is a *Sicilian* poet for whom the remains of Greek antiquity are a marker of the alterity of Sicilian culture from that of mainland Italy. Sicily was, after all, Rome's first province. Reaching to Greek sources for an authentic lyric voice is a complex move on his part, one that draws him into a mainstream tradition while also marking him off from a Roman genealogy and pointing toward the heritage of Magna Graecia. For Elytis, on the other hand, the recourse to ancient Greek lyric (specifically that of Sappho) is the assertion of an Aegean cultural unity, one uniquely tied to the chthonic power of the region as an inalienable possession of its inhabitants, and one that therefore speaks to a secular continuity rooted in the land itself. For Quasimodo, the Greek past is a partial erasure, something repressed under a non-Greek tide of history. For Elytis, Hellenism seems something refulgent and irrepressible, like Aegean sunshine.

This attitude, I contend, conditions their orientation towards the second sense of pluralism in my topic: the “bad pluralism” of the lyric texts themselves, which are terribly fragmented and therefore do not present the reassuring solidity of an organic *corpus*. Quasimodo's famous “hermetic” poetics drew him initially towards embracing the fragmentary as a necessary condition of lyric itself, such that he practices a kind of auto-fragmentation in his own poetry. A famous example is his signature poem “Ed è subito sera,” which is a three-line poem in its final version, the previous versions having been much longer. He seemed most at home initially with the lyrics of antiquity that are similarly fragmented (*Lirici Greci*, 1940) and balked at those that grow too long. But his encounter with Greek lyric was to mark a pivotal moment in his career, as he moved out of Hermeticism into a poetry of engagement and political commitment, trading, we might say, the compression of fragmented lyric for the public voice of committed elegy. So while there is a certain logic to Quasimodo's return to Greek lyric from his earlier poetic project, the result was not a facile act of hermetic ventriloquism, but a transformation of his entire poetic outlook (conditioned of course by the circumstances of World War II). Elytis, on the other hand, was drawn from the start in his *Sappho* towards making wholes instead of celebrating fragmentation *per se*. His method was one of pastiche, quite literally so in the case of the fragments of Sappho. Far from fetishizing the lyrical qualities of the fragment, he wove whole poems out of unrelated fragments that he published with a facing translation, the Demotic version giving a fuller voice and credibility to the Lesbian pastiche that he makes of the original. He further underscored the pastiche aesthetic by providing bright illustrations by his own hand of the poems in the form of collages. *Sappho* is not a pivotal work within Elytis' *oeuvre* as *Lirici Greci* was for Quasimodo's, yet we can see in a sense Elytis' poetics comes home to rest in this highly personal and willful *rapprochement* with Sappho and his ancestral homeland of Lesbos.