

1985

## From "Laborintus"

Edoardo Sanguineti

Lawrence R. Smith

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moment παθητικόν  
I understand καὶ κρίνουσιν ἄμεινον he always  
wants to signify physical things and ALPHABETICAL NOTIONS  
diseases  
of the body: as in beatings  
torments it's as if I had stripped away my mortal wounds  
before you

et de ea commentarium reliquit  
(de λ) etc. de morte I understand  
that I never had (they who weren't neglected!)  
RADICAL IRRADIATIONS here: had nothing  
and I found (in that moment); what can you find  
if you've never had anything?

EVERYTHING; and ARCHETYPAL

IDEAS!  
this immensely varied subject-matter is expressed!  
et j'avais satisfait le goût baroque de mes compatriotes!

*translated from the Italian by Lawrence R. Smith*

#### A NOTE ON EDOARDO SANGUINETI

A glance at the Sanguineti text, as exemplified by these three selections from *Laborintus*, assures us that he too has read Ezra Pound's *Cantos* attentively. Edoardo Sanguineti, however, is no imitator. To use Pound's terminology, he is an inventor not a diluter. We might more usefully compare the two rather than argue influence. Like Ezra Pound forty years before him, the Sanguineti of the fifties was a boy genius; his early work established him as the father of the post-World War II avant-garde in Europe, just as Pound had turned things upside down for Americans earlier this century.

The key to the new European avant-garde is a revival of interest in surrealism and futurism. The same kinds of influences which had been so stimulating to Pound, when they first appeared, were behind this new burst of literary radicalism. But it wasn't just a second run at the same old stuff. The old influences were viewed from a new perspective. Al-

fredo Giuliani, one of the chief theorists for the new poets, coined the term “schizomorphism” to explain what he and his friends were doing. Schizomorphism is a projection of the individual subconscious, but it portrays the schizophrenic nature of modern society as well. So, when Cesare Vivaldi accused him of creating “philological collage,” just a variation on an old technique, Sanguineti replied that his works had more affinity to abstract expressionism, to action painting in particular. These Italian literary radicals, who were to nickname themselves the *novissimi* or “new guys,” were not going to let anyone call them old-fashioned or derivative. Whatever the best descriptive phrase for Sanguineti’s style may be, he “modernized himself on his own,” as Pound once said of T. S. Eliot. During the period from 1951 to 1954, when the rest of literary Italy was struggling between neorealism and the hermetic revival, Sanguineti wrote *Laborintus* and with it created the program for a generation of the new European avant-garde. He did all this at least five years before any of his French or Italian colleagues made a move in this direction.

The work of both Pound and Sanguineti depends on an extensive knowledge of the distant literary past. Whereas Pound’s scholarship has often been called into question, Sanguineti is a well-known classicist and one of the most respected Dante scholars in Italy. Regardless of academic credentials, both writers make their frontal attacks on poetic language through classical and medieval literature, rather than by ignoring those literatures under the pretext of modernity. In describing *Laborintus*, Giuliano Manacorda makes the Pound connection:

In the manner of Pound, Sanguineti takes all the linguistic elements he has at his disposal—Latin interpolations, an erudite “latino terrifico e medioevale” (Zanzotto), Greek, French, German, English, slang expressions, punctuation marks—and he flings them on the page with a crescendo that begins moderato and sweeps to the absolute linguistic disorder of the final sections.

The use of these fragments by both Pound and Sanguineti is the sign of an expansive vision rather than pedantry. Pound became obsessed with the interconnection of art, poetry, and music. But Sanguineti actually participated in collaborations which crossed those lines. In fact, he collaborated with Luciano Berio to put *Laborintus* to music. Sanguineti doesn’t hear the

same music Pound did, but it is clear that he is serious about the fusion of poetry and music.

Even though political opposites, Pound to the right and Sanguineti to the left, these two writers are parallel in commitment. Both have been notoriously tenacious in their adherence to political doctrines long after those doctrines have ceased to be fashionable. The personal disaster which resulted from Pound's loyalty to Benito Mussolini needs no comment. Sanguineti's loyalty to traditional Marxism is similar. Although such enthusiasm was entirely acceptable during the early and middle fifties, there was a massive turning away from the Party by writers and artists after the Russians crushed the Hungarian Revolt in 1957. Sanguineti was almost alone among sixties avant-gardists in arguing the old political line. The rest had become suspicious of ideology as such; most accepted politics as simply another object in the collage. In the Palermo conference of the "Gruppo 63," after asserting that an attack on rationalist bourgeois linguistic structures would pave the way for Marxist liberation, he was rebuked by the other participants. They pointed out that Marxism was a rationalist philosophy too, and that it would also collapse under irrationalist pressures. Nonetheless, Sanguineti's commitment remains firm. He has left the university and become a *senatore comunista*.

Finally, both Ezra Pound and Edoardo Sanguineti express a faith rare among twentieth-century writers. Pound believed that a new order would arise from the collapse of the old, that there would be a "rose in the steel dust." Sanguineti's faith in such a triumph is equally strong. In an essay appended to the *Novissimi* anthology of 1961, he speaks of the new poets throwing themselves

into the labyrinth of formalism and irrationalism, right into the Palus Putredinis, into anarchy and alienation, with the hope, which I persist in not believing illusory, of later coming out of it, having traveled its whole length, with dirty hands, but also with the mud behind us.

*Lawrence R. Smith*