Sperone Speroni. *Canace*. *Translated with an introduction and notes by Elio Brancaforte*. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2013. Pp. 151. ISBN: 9780772721402. \$ 19.

Sperone Speroni's Senecan tragedy *Canace* (1542) retells the Ovidian story of Canace and Macareus, the incestuous children of Aeolus, god of the winds. Angry at Aeolus for creating the storm that wrecked her son Aeneas' fleet (memorably described in Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*), Venus punishes the god of the winds by having his twin children fall in love with each other. The tragedy comes to a head in proper Aristotelian fashion on the twins' eighteenth birthday, when in the midst of the festive celebrations, Canace secretly gives birth to her brother's child. Her nurse attempts to remove the infant by hiding him in a basket of flowers, but the child cries out and is discovered. Enraged at his children's sinful union, Aeolus forces Canace and her Nurse to commit suicide, has the baby torn to shreds, and leaves its body for the wolves. Canace's brother Macareus, the innocent child's guilty father, kills himself when he hears of the deaths of his son and sister/lover. Canace and Macareus' mother, the nymph Deiopea, dies appropriately of grief. At which point Aeolus decides he has over-reacted and laments his murderous rage. He swears revenge on Venus, which in Speroni's version takes the extremely belated form of causing a storm in 1541 that wrecked the fleet of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, and thus heir of Julius Caesar, who traced his lineage to Venus through his supposed ancestor Aeneas.

In following neo-classical decorum by having childbirth, murder, suicide, and shipwreck occur offstage, Speroni somehow manages to make this apocalyptic and crazy story seem static and dull. Compared with the heights of classical tragedy, the play lacks both Seneca's verbal energy and the psychological depth of the Greeks and Racine. None of the characters are developed to any extent and much of the play is taken up with speeches by ministers, servants, and counsellors pointing out that something horrific just happened off-stage.

And yet, Speroni's *Canace* is remarkable for its treatment of incest. Aeolus may be furious at his children's forbidden union, but the play as a whole is sympathetic to them. They are presented as innocent victims of Venus' fury rather than as fully responsible moral agents. Though they love each other, both Canace and Macareus regret the sexual passion they feel and are ashamed of having yielded to it. Aeolus' murderous rage is explicitly seen as a far worse crime than his children's incestuous union.

As Elio Brancaforte points out in his excellent Introduction to the play, the incestuous relationship between the siblings in *Canace* cannot but bring up troubling issues of the relation of nature and culture to morality. Though there were initially some plans to stage *Canace*, Speroni's play was publicly read rather than performed, and as one might expect, its treatment of incest provoked a fair amount of controversy. Speroni was attacked for provoking sympathy for Canace and Macareus, whose forbidden passion is, after all, the height of sinful and forbidden sexuality. He defended his characters by saying that while incest is a violation of human law, it is nonetheless a natural act, in the sense that sexual attraction is a natural urge

common to all human and animal life. Echoing the point made in the play itself that forbidden sex is not as heinous as familial violence, he argued that the archetypal tragic hero Orestes is far more guilty in killing his mother than Canace in conceiving a child with her brother.

The play was also criticized for its opening, in which the ghost of Canace and Macareus' dismembered child addresses the audience. How can the ghost be present at the opening of the play when in terms of the dramatic action, the child had not been born yet, let alone killed? Why is a child's spirit played by an adult actor? While there is certainly some illogic in the situation, Speroni's decision to open with the murdered infant's ghost focuses attention from the outset on the questions of guilt and innocence. Aeolus insists that the baby must be slaughtered as the product of a sinful union, but how can it be just to visit the sins of the parents on a newborn baby? Though Speroni's play may seem dull to modern readers because of its formulaic speeches and lack of on-stage action, the issues it raises are some of the most uncomfortable ones imaginable. And the play offers no easy solutions.

Elio Brancaforte has produced an elegant and informative edition of the play. His translation, based on Cristina Roaf's critical edition of 1982, is clear, readable, and accurate. He provides a brief biography of Speroni, an overview of Senecan tragedy in early modern Italy, a discussion of previous versions of the Canace story, and an analysis of the way the incestuous relations at its heart were portrayed in early modern culture. He details the controversy that arose over the play, outlining the major criticisms put forward as well as Speroni's response to them. He also relates the play to Jacobean representations of incestuous relationships, such as in John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). While somewhat historically tenuous, the comparison of the two plays will be useful to many of the translation's readers, whose familiarity with English drama is likely to be greater than with Italian. In short, the volume is a worthy addition to the series of Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation, and does the important work of making a significant text widely available to English language readers.

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Giordano Bruno. *On the Heroic Frenzies*. A Translation of *De gli eroici furori* by Ingrid D. Rowland. Text edited by Eugenio Canone. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 395. ISBN 9781442643895. \$ 95.

No Italian author had a stronger impact on English literature and scholarship than Giordano Bruno. If Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* were indeed important sources of inspiration for masterpieces such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Sydney's *Astrophil and Stella*, and if Machiavelli's *Prince* casted its sinister shadow from the Elizabethan stage onto Hobbes' political theory, none of these works were actually conceived for or first published by English speaking readers and printers. Composed during Bruno's residence in London, and first published