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**Gertrud Bing  
erede di Warburg**

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Engramma

**177\***

novembre 2020

# Gertrud Bing erede di Warburg

a cura di  
Monica Centanni e Daniela Sacco

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*redazione*

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# Gertrud Bing 1892-1964. In memoriam

edited by Ernst Gombrich

## Premessa

Monica Centanni

L'opuscolo *In memoriam Gertrud Bing 1892-1964* fu pubblicato a Londra l'anno seguente la morte dell'ex direttrice dell'Istituto. La pubblicazione comprende: una *Introduction* di Ernst Gombrich (1-3); il necrologio uscito anonimo sul "Times" del 6 luglio 1964 (pp. 4-5); la riproduzione del testo di Delio Cantimori (pp. 6-10: si tratta del taglio di un brano di una lettera che lo stesso Cantimori aveva inviato al direttore della rivista "Itinerari"); uno scritto di Donald J. Gordon (che aveva curato con Bing l'edizione degli scritti di Saxl) che prende spunto da una serie di immagini fotografiche di Bing e degli ambienti della sua casa, riprodotte nell'opuscolo, per ricostruire il suo stile di vita e di pensiero (pp. 11-22: una riedizione dello splendido omaggio di Gordon è in questo stesso numero di Engramma, a cura di Chiara Velicogna); la riproduzione anastatica di un biglietto del musicista Otto Klemperer, datato aprile 1965 (p. 23); la riproduzione di uno scritto di Arnaldo Momigliano, già pubblicato nella "Rivista Storica Italiana" LXXVI, 3 1964 (pp. 24-28); una breve nota di ricordo di Edna Purdie (pp. 29-30). In calce, una succinta *Bibliography of Gertrud Bing* che registra le quattro curatele a lei ascrivibili – le *Gesammelte Schriften* di Warburg, con Saxl del 1932; l'edizione delle *Lectures* e degli *Studies of the Warburg Institute* di Saxl del 1957-1963; l'edizione degli *Oxford-Warburg Studies* del 1963 – e un elenco di otto pubblicazioni, compresa la tesi (si veda invece la ben più ricca Bibliografia di scritti e curatele di Gertrud Bing che pubblichiamo in questo numero di Engramma). Si tratta di un volumetto di poco più di una trentina di pagine, comprese le immagini, nel quale soltanto i contributi di Gordon e di Purdie risultano scritti appositamente per l'opuscolo commemorativo.

A riprova dell'esiguo impegno profuso per mettere insieme l'opuscolo commemorativo, si noti che, ad esempio, la riproduzione del testo di Cantimori (che abbiamo ripubblicato integralmente in Engramma) consiste nel taglio di un brano di una lettera che lo stesso Cantimori aveva inviato al direttore della rivista "Itinerari": la lettera fa parte di un gruppo di "strane epistole" in cui lo storico sceglie il formato della missiva per ragionare di metodologia degli studi storici (la serie di queste lettere sarà raccolta e ripubblicata *post mortem* nella raccolta *Conversando di*

storia, uscita per i tipi di Laterza nel 1967). Il brano dell'epistola è riprodotto senza neppure eliminare l'intestazione "Caro Rossi". Allo stesso modo, anche nella riedizione dello scritto di Arnaldo Momigliano, si rileva che in un passaggio lo storico fa riferimento al "profilo di Warburg, da lei [Bing] pubblicato nel 1958 e apparso in una nuova versione nella nostra Rivista", dove evidentemente per "nostra Rivista" Momigliano intende la "Rivista Storica italiana" in cui Bing aveva pubblicato il ritratto di Warburg (Bing 1960); nella riedizione per l'opuscolo *In memoriam* dell'anno seguente, però, il riferimento, riprodotto tal quale rispetto alla sede di pubblicazione originale, risulta incongruo e fuorviante, dato che la sede della nuova pubblicazione non era più la rivista diretta da Momigliano. Una conferma che Gombrich ha ritenuto che la striminzita ed economica pubblicazione assemblata nel 1965 come omaggio a Gertrud Bing, non meritasse neppure una ripassata minima di editing per aggiornare i riferimenti interni.

In sostanza, si può affermare che l'opuscolo che sarà prodotto dal Warburg Institute nel 1965 - e che costituisce l'unica pubblicazione che il Warburg Institute dedica a Bing, allora e nei decenni a venire - fu messo insieme con poco sforzo e con scarsa cura. E anche dal punto di vista dei contenuti, da notare che il contributo di Gombrich - che apre come *Introduction* quella che lui stesso definisce una "small anthology" - è focalizzato sul ruolo 'di servizio' di Gertrud nell'ambito delle attività dell'Istituto, sulla sua disponibilità a dare consulenze e suggerimenti a tutti gli studiosi che frequentavano l'Istituto, sul fatto che - come riportato in apertura dell'*Introduction* da un passaggio del biglietto di Klemperer - "Über alles konnte ich mit ihr sprechen". Di fatto, la stessa Bing è presentata più come una persona culturalmente vivace e molto generosa, nonché come la solerte e appassionata custode di un passato glorioso, che come una intellettuale a tutto campo. Gombrich per altro non elude, neppure in questo contesto celebrativo, il profondo disaccordo che lo separava da Bing sul fronte metodologico e concettuale, prima e piuttosto che umano:

"The subject of my book *Art and Illusion* lay somewhat outside her main preoccupations; with her love of the concrete and the individual she may even have slightly disapproved of my concern with the theory of style. But it was she who brought me the cutting from the *New Yorker* of the cartoon I used for the opening of the argument" (Gombrich 1965, 1).

Riproduzione anastatica dell'Opuscolo  
Gertrud Bing 1882-1964, London 1965

The Warburg Institute, by Ernst Gombrich



GERTRUD BING  
1892-1964



THE WARBURG INSTITUTE  
LONDON 1965

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IN MEMORIAM

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## INTRODUCTION

*Ueber alles konnte ich mit ihr sprechen.* 'There was nothing I could not discuss with her'. The simple words from the great musician Otto Klemperer in these pages sum up the memory and the grief of Gertrud Bing's friends in every field. I still catch myself wanting to turn towards her room to discuss with her a letter that has just arrived, an offprint that would interest her, or just an item of news or gossip from the world of scholarship. Not that she was one of those sympathetic listeners who would merely encourage the other to talk. She was always an active partner in any conversation, and it was this firm response that made her such an indispensable colleague and companion. She had strong views and intense interests of her own, but she always knew how to relate them to the topic under discussion. When one gave her a manuscript to read one could be sure of her unstinted collaboration; she would not mince words where she disagreed, nor would she easily forget then or in the future to draw one's attention to any information that had a bearing on the problem in hand. The subject of my book on *Art and Illusion* lay somewhat outside her main preoccupations; with her love of the concrete and the individual she may even have slightly disapproved of my concern with the theory of style. But it was she who brought me the cutting from the *New Yorker* of the cartoon I used for the opening of the argument.

Where human problems were at issue, her immediate response was never lacking. She had witnessed much mental and physical distress at close quarters and had a deep fund of sympathy for the difficulties and frictions that can beset and frustrate creativity. But her value as a friend lay precisely in the knowledge that there were limits even to her forbearance. She never tolerated the relaxation of moral or intellectual standards, and the moment might come when her indulgence came to an end. If she ever decided to write off a former friend that decision was final.

I

Indeed when I first met Bing early in 1936—that is when she was forty-three—the initial impression was one of severity, of uncompromising dedication to the guardianship of Warburg's life-work. This austerity certainly mellowed during the twenty-eight years I was allowed to know her. But how much did I know her, despite the fact that I too could say that there was nothing I could not discuss with her? She had great skill in keeping herself out of the picture. There are hardly any snapshots of her. Her masterly sketch of Fritz Saxl, whose life she had shared for so many years, is also a masterpiece of self-effacement. Many of us found after her death, as D. J. Gordon did, that we really knew less of her than we ever suspected. She rarely talked about her youth and early aspirations, though she did once mention that she had had a passing ambition to become a singer. She was twenty-two when the First World War broke out, twenty-nine when, after a spell of school-teaching, she took her doctorate in philosophy, thirty when she joined the library staff of the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* in Hamburg and when—as she once told a colleague—Saxl assigned her the bewildering task of cataloguing a pile of books on Arabic science that had just arrived. The only event in her early life I remember her describing to me was the moment when she first encountered Aby Warburg on his return from his illness, and felt as if his sad, deep-set eyes were looking right through her. There was something in the nature of a conversion in this encounter which determined her whole subsequent life. It was Warburg who initiated her into his ideas and thus shaped her outlook and interests. When she accompanied him to Rome, where he presented his interpretation of the Renaissance in a lecture at the Hertziana in 1929, she shared his work and his thought at every stage, preparing formulations for his use as a starting-point, and writing to his dictation. Our last plate shows her at that time in the hotel room in Rome where Warburg had set up his study with his working library and his screens of photographs. Her edition of Warburg's collected works, expanding his laconic annotations and following up every one of his hints, must have carried her over the shock of his death. The growing urgency of political issues, the rise of Hitler and the realities of emigration, frustrated her intention to reconstruct and edit Warburg's literary

remains with the same loving care. These preoccupations had to yield to the pressures of practical problems and the alleviation of human tragedies. I know that it was with a heavy heart that she put aside her editorial plans, promising herself again and again that she would return to them at the first opportunity. But the more time passed the greater were the difficulties that stood in the way of her treasured project. She would now have to address readers of a new generation and of a different academic tradition, unversed in and even sceptical of that *Kulturwissenschaft* within which Warburg's problems had matured. To restore that *profondità di visione* of which Arnaldo Momigliano speaks, to make her mentor's personality and philosophy as compelling to others as they had been to her, was her dream. It was for this that she worked so hard up to her death on a book of her own of which every fragmentary draft dissatisfied her because it still fell short of her vision. If we mourn her failure to complete this task, we should also acknowledge that in a deeper sense she yet succeeded. It was from Warburg that she had absorbed that sense of mission, the attitude that saw issues of scholarship in human terms and human problems frequently in their relation to the advancement of learning. It was here that she had found the centre of her own existence and a faith that enabled her to offer that inspiration and support to which this small anthology bears witness.

LONDON

E. H. GOMBRICH

Professor Gertrud Bing, who died on Friday after a brief illness, was the animating spirit of the Warburg Institute which she had served with single-minded devotion for more than 40 years. She was the Institute's director from 1955 to 1959.

Born in Hamburg on June 7, 1892, she first turned to school teaching and then read philosophy and German literature at the Universities of Munich and Hamburg, where Ernst Cassirer was a formative influence. At the age of 30 she joined the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg* as a librarian and found her vocation in this rich and growing collection of books. When Aby Warburg had returned to his Institute after a long illness she became his assistant in 1927, and these years when the aging scholar initiated his helpmate into his ideas and researches were decisive for her life. She accompanied Warburg on his last journeys to Florence and Rome, where she acquired that understanding of things Italian which was always appreciated by her Italian friends. After Warburg's death in 1929 she became his literary executor, and the two volumes of his *Gesammelte Schriften* richly annotated and supplemented by her are a monument to her self-effacing discipleship. Assistant Director of the Institute under Fritz Saxl's administration, she represented the element of continuity in its multifarious activities.

During the dark years of Nazism when the Institute and its staff found refuge in England, Gertrud Bing revealed miraculous reserves of strength and human warmth. An ever-increasing stream of homeless and bewildered scholars and refugees sought her advice, and few can have left her little office in the makeshift rooms of the expatriate library without having received comfort and solid help.

When in 1944 the Institute was incorporated in the University of London, she cheerfully shouldered the burdens of administration and public relations, thus freeing Fritz Saxl and later Henri Frankfort for their teaching and research that meant so much to her. What she

achieved and also what we missed through her sacrifice may perhaps be gathered from her biographical essay on Fritz Saxl (in the volume of Memorial Essays edited by D. J. Gordon), a rare gem of literary portraiture that displays both her grasp of intellectual history and her gifts of psychological intuition. It makes one mourn the fact that apart from a memorial address given in Hamburg and published in Italy she did not complete her work on Aby Warburg, on which she had been engaged during her last years. Her years as Director and Professor of the History of the Classical Tradition (1955-59) coincided with the Institute's move to its permanent quarters in Woburn Square that consolidated her life work.

Throughout these years colleagues from the most diverse fields turned to her for help with their work; she read their books and papers in draft stages, advised and criticized, always with an eye for the essential and with a genius for sympathy. Her accuracy, her sense of style and her patience made her the ideal editor, and there can be few publications of the Warburg Institute and by its friends which do not owe a substantial debt to her interventions. But invaluable as were these tangible contributions, such as her edition of Fritz Saxl's *Lectures*, they were far transcended by the catalytic effect of her unquestioning faith in the value of scholarly pursuits and by her understanding, never obtruding, of human problems past and present. She will be missed by countless friends and scholars in many fields and many lands. Her influence will continue among the young, whom she always sought out and inspired.

6 JULY, 1964

THE TIMES

Caro Rossi,\*

come Le ho promesso, continuo a scriverLe di queste curiose epistole. Mi costa un po'. Stamane, sei luglio 1964, mentre rinnovavo la promessa, benché stanco, ero d'animo sereno, perché avevo parlato con alcune di quelle persone giovani e intelligenti che han voglia di studiare e lavorare sui temi e nel modo che mi son cari: e ciò è argomento sempre di gratitudine e di meravigliata contentezza per un vecchio insegnante, che ha ormai, assieme a molto scetticismo, qualche senso della realtà delle cose; se certe persone, delle quali si intuisce e si capisce il valore genuino, lavorano volentieri con noi, e credono che possiamo dir loro e dar loro qualcosa, ebbene, si può essere contenti e ci si può sentire non inutili. Questa contentezza, e la serenità che ne veniva, sono state turbate, quando, tornando a casa, ho ricevuto la notizia della morte d'una persona amica, che è stata una delle menti più vive e vigili della cultura di questi ultimi tempi, benché il suo nome non figuri nelle bibliografie delle scienze storiche nel senso più ristretto e convenzionale della parola. Se non fosse per la presenza di quelle strane gioventù, si soccomberebbe alla malinconia, allo sgomento nel constatare il fatto che i nostri anziani e i nostri coetanei se ne vanno, e alla voglia d'andarcene anche noi, o almeno di starcene zitti. Ma, — non saprei darne ragione ragionata, eppure è così — agli occhi di queste gioventù, uno sente di dover rispondere: e poterlo fare è l'unico, primo e vero conforto. Certo, lo spirito battagliero s'attenua un po', s'oscura per un momento l'intelletto e la malinconia ci porta ai ricordi. Permetta dunque, caro Rossi, che prima di continuare il discorso sulla questione della storia contemporanea e del suo insegnamento, Le parli un po' della personalità scomparsa ai primi del mese.

Del resto, siamo in non pochi a sapere come Gertrud Bing sia stata

\* From a series of letters to the Editor of *Itinerari*, published under the general title of 'Avventure di un devoto di Clio', Vol. XI, Nos. 79-80, 1964, pp. 89-92.

una persona veramente molto benemerita degli studi storici. Credo di poter affermare ciò anche se come studiosa poteva sembrar molto lontana dagli studi di storia come s'intendono comunemente: il titolo del suo insegnamento all' Università di Londra era « Storia della Tradizione Classica ». E poi, il nome dell'Istituto Warburg di Londra, da lei per alcuni anni diretto, evoca momenti e aspetti della storia piuttosto lontani da quel che sogliamo chiamare « età contemporanea » o anche « moderna »; ma soltanto chi abbia una concezione molto angusta della storiografia potrà dubitare dell'importanza di quell'Istituto e di quella Biblioteca per gli studi di storia. Come nome di specialista, il nome di Gertrud Bing è conosciuto da pochi altri specialisti; ma molti studiosi dell'umanesimo e del rinascimento, di storia dell'arte, di archeologia, di storia della cultura, sparsi in tutto il mondo, ricordano il volto così intelligente della infaticabile e coltissima persona, anima e animo dell'Istituto Warburg, ospitalissima per tutti, prodiga di consiglio, di indicazioni bibliografiche, di aiuti. Qualche lettore della *Rivista Storica Italiana* ricorderà la commemorazione di Aby Warburg che la Prof. Bing vi pubblicò nel 1960, concludendola con il motto autobiografico, del Warburg, scritto dal Warburg stesso in italiano: « Ebreo di sangue, Amburghese di cuore, d'anima Fiorentino »: e molti forse ricorderanno il cenno biografico di Giorgio Pasquali su quel grande studioso che fu il Warburg stesso.

Chi abbia avuto la fortuna di poter lavorare nella Biblioteca fondata dal Warburg e ampliata e riorganizzata poi da F. Saxl, sa che non c'è iperbole in quel che dico: dalla accessibilità di tutte le parti della biblioteca, all'aiuto dei vari bibliotecari e membri dell'Istituto, al loro interessamento per il lavoro degli studiosi, tutto è pensato in quell'Istituto per far lavorare liberamente e seriamente chi sappia e voglia: conosco chi ha ricevuto la chiave dell'Istituto, per poterne uscire più tardi e per potervi entrare più presto delle ore d'ufficio regolamentari, quando il troppo breve soggiorno londinese spingeva a utilizzare tutto il tempo. Gli scaffali dei libri, disposti secondo un piano organico e preciso, che risaliva al Warburg, sono stati resi accessibili agli studiosi proprio per il valore riconosciuto agli accostamenti derivanti da un ordinamento sistematico di quel tipo, e perché si pensava che la biblioteca doveva

avere la funzione di offrire non solo materiali, ma anche suggerimenti per la ricerca. Credo che quella biblioteca sia una delle poche non private che tenga anche i libri più rari non sotto chiave, ma al loro posto nel contesto storico che loro spetta. Il Warburg non aveva avuto timore di mettere i francobolli postali nella stessa serie degli *Emblemi* dell'Alciato e del Giovio, di mettere i giochi delle « sorti » accanto ai libri che trattano di pronostici e del modo di comporli, le superstizioni assieme alle dottrine religiose e filosofiche. Così, uno storico che arrivava per studiare, poniamo, un problema di periodizzazione, trovava negli scaffali apposti tutti o quasi i libri generali e particolari: e anche qualcuno che nessun'altra biblioteca avrebbe tenuto, e sembrava messo lì per ammonire del pericolo delle generalizzazioni dogmatiche e superficiali inerenti a tal sorta di problemi. Le mattine seguenti, poi, trovava sul suo tavolino un mucchietto di libri o di riviste, con articoli o capitoli o riferimenti importanti per il suo tema: erano i membri dell'Istituto, bibliotecari, direttore, che portavano così il loro saluto al nuovo arrivato. Se uno studioso avesse avvertito in tempo, per esempio, che voleva esaminare la pedagogia del Quattrocento, quando arrivava trovava sul tavolino la bibliografia, e i libri, anche presi a prestito altrove: dai testi agli studi critici. È noto come il Farinelli, mentre preparava l'edizione del viaggio in Italia del padre di Goethe, ricevesse tutte le note informative ed esplicative dall'Istituto (allora ad Amburgo) in poche settimane: e come, inoltre, i ricercatori dell'Istituto scoprissero per proprio conto che il *Viaggio* non era affatto opera originale, ma una compilazione tratta dalle *guide* o *annuali del viaggiatore* del tempo. Questo spirito universale, questo senso vivo della storicità della vita culturale, dell'importanza di materiali anche come i libretti astrologici e le effemeridi più elementari, in quanto documentazione storica utile alla comprensione di certi nessi e di certe situazioni, e soprattutto giovevole per comprendere i processi di trasformazione subiti dalle tradizioni proprio nel loro tramandarsi e perpetuarsi, e per intendere le situazioni di tendenze, opinioni, credenze, non appariscenti perché non ufficiali ma non perciò meno operanti, è stato impersonato e incarnato per noi nella presenza vivace, attivissima, cordiale, di G. Bing: ninfa egeria modernissima, — pronta a rifare, mentre accompagnava amici a casa guidando con perizia l'automobile, i cal-

coli che avevano potuto indurre il tale astrologo a un dato pronostico, a discutere dei romanzi di Zola, a consigliare sui precedenti lontanissimi del « contrasto fra il ricco e il povero », a informare o a chiedere particolari sull'opera del tal diplomatico dell'altr'ieri come dei simboli niellati sull'armatura d'un antico cavaliere: e non Le parlerò della vivacità della conversazione, della sua generosità semplice e immediata, dell'ironia — sempre precisa e atta a risvegliare menti addormentate, mai pungente o aspra, — della lezione implicita nel suo chieder consiglio e informazioni a tutti come era pronta a dare informazioni e consiglio a tutti. Queste, e altre doti personali, sono difficili da descrivere: solo chi ha avuto la fortuna di conoscerla, può sentire quanto si sia perduto. A volte sembrava di parlare con un volterriano di alta levatura, a volte si sentiva nel suo discorso come un'eco del positivismo naturalistico. Non era un'« anima bella »: il suo gusto per l'arte e le cose belle e genuine non aveva nulla di estetico o decadente; ma era certo una di quelle personalità che fanno sentire immediato il fascino del cosmopolitismo umanistico, che fanno capire cosa possa voler dire essere cittadino della *respublica literarum*. Soleva dire gli italiani ignari di lingue: « non si preoccupi, qui parliamo italiano o lo capiamo, perchè chi non sa l'italiano non è una persona civile »; ma era di cultura e di interessi veramente cosmopolitici e umanistici nel senso pieno e storico della parola. Ebreica d'Amburgo, aveva studiato a Monaco e ad Amburgo, poi era diventata bibliotecaria dell'Istituto Warburg (1922-27), assistente del Warburg nel periodo del suo insegnamento (27-29); aveva seguito l'Istituto e la biblioteca nella loro emigrazione a Londra, nella riorganizzazione ad opera del Saxl, aveva partecipato alla direzione dell'Istituto e degli *Studi*, assumendo poi la direzione dell'Istituto stesso. Non scrivo un necrologio; perciò non racconterò ai Suoi lettori della sua attività, nè dirò qui in quanti e quali comitati G. Bing fosse presente, attiva e lucida consigliera o guida: editrice delle opere del Warburg, di molte opere del Saxl, aveva commemorato il Warburg ad Amburgo, ma aveva tenuto a farne tradurre l'opera in italiano, curando la nuova edizione in tutti i particolari. È morta senza aver potuto rivedere le bozze della traduzione italiana della propria introduzione: controllava tutto, sempre, con scrupolo attentissimo, cercando di rendersi conto di ogni sfumatura di significato e di

ogni immagine nuova usata dal traduttore, correggendo errori tipografici ed arbitri del traduttore (o quelli che le sembravano arbitri) con la medesima serena acribia di quelle grandi e lontane generazioni di studiosi positivi che erano convinti, e non avevan torto, dell'importanza della precisione tipografica quanto dell'esattezza filologica, quanto della pulizia nella scelta delle parole e delle paroline.

Dal Burckhardt al Warburg al Saxl al Frankfort alla Bing, — per nominare solo i trapassati — c'è una linea ininterrotta: come scriveva la Bing sulla *Rivista Storica Italiana*, « i lavori del Warburg si ricollegano al Burckhardt, e nessun apprendista può essere stato più chiaramente consapevole del proprio debito di riconoscenza verso il maestro della sua arte, di quel che sia stato il Warburg nella sua ammirazione per Burckhardt ». Naturalmente, gli studi, le ricerche, l'invenzione storiografica hanno camminato, e l'immagine del Rinascimento tracciata dal Warburg è differente e più ricca, più approfondita e più completa di quella creata dal Burckhardt. Altri i problemi storiografici e critici dei tanti altri studiosi che da quell'Istituto han preso le mosse, o che entro di esso hanno fatto la loro strada, come il Saxl. La Bing non ha prodotto certo tanti libri e articoli: tuttavia nella sua conversazione, nella sua attività di direttrice, di bibliotecaria, nei suoi consigli, nelle sue discussioni, si sentiva il grande respiro intellettuale e morale del Burckhardt e del Ranke, del Warburg e del Cassirer, dello Schlosser e del Wölfflin: una ricchezza umana fatta non di bei sogni, ma di lavoro quotidiano filologicamente preciso, di curiosità inesauribile per fatti e per idee, per figure e per segni, per uomini e per cose. Si sente di rimanere più poveri, quando questa gente ci lascia. . . .

FLORENCE

DELIO CANTIMORI

One of the few photographs of Bing that seems right—there are very few, anyhow—shows her sitting at the garden table in Dulwich, the french window behind her, a cigarette in her hand, her hair slightly dishevelled. She always seems to have been behind a table—memory suggests—that desk in the tiny room in the Imperial Institute, or in the genteel new building she scarcely cared for, the huge black post-Bauhaus desk (with the bust of Warburg, and the collection of paper-back detective stories) in her room in Dulwich, later at Saxl's desk in the study there after dinner or, always, it seems, at the round dining table with the white cloth; or at a café table in the *piazzetta*, on her last visit to Venice, completely exhausted and very happy (her hair slightly dishevelled), a cigarette in her hand, being firmly explicit about why she was looking away from various *cari amici* who kept crossing the scene, and whom she did not want to talk to.

At the garden table she was, of course, pretending to be in Italy; temperature did not matter; only firm refusal could save you from the chill of an English June and the melancholy of too many greens in the too-long twilight. The landscape she saw? The contrived vista was, for my taste, too heavily framed and closed: too many bushes, too many trees, too many greens. A German friend from Hamburg, a distinguished gardener who was often consulted, complained that the garden was 'too picturesque' for its space. The effect desired was English, an English landscape garden: imagined first by Saxl; and very dear to both ('I would rather look after a garden than a grave', once, in a most unusual moment, as she looked down from the study window). But did Saxl garden in Hamburg? (He began characteristically in England by subscribing to the Royal Horticultural Society's journal.) Or did Bing?

I do not know; and I do not really know the meaning of that English garden (the screen, dense though it was, never shut out the presence of

the correct tennis players, calling, in white, into the suburban summer darkness; and, conspicuous, asymmetrically, in the lawn, to your right, was a cherished acanthus—yet, indeed, full-scale English vistas have always demanded a dark exotic: ilex or cedar). All of which is a way of saying how much I never knew or understood; and how very odd that one should, for a quarter of a century, have taken incomprehension for granted and the oddness of the whole affair.

The sense of the house, anyhow, never was and was never intended to be English. For aliens who wished to wear an English mask Bing reserved scorn: growing, if anything, more forthright with the years. I doubt how far Bing was really *interested* in England, historically, culturally, visually. Or, what interest there had been grew less. Those conventions about English institutions, class-structure, families, the reading of memoirs (which had been Saxl's more than hers) stopped—though a flash of curiosity would strike her. She would come back from a rare foray into the more expensive suburbs requiring to know who all the people were she had been talking to and why they lived as they did and talked as they talked; her knowledge of this, as of other kinds of English life was very limited; and she did not care to extend it. The English works of polite literature in the garden room were a queer enough collection: gifts from friends and fairly casual acquisitions from second-hand bookshops: but all this really represented an early phase (even buying Dickens). English landscapes had moved her; but it became very difficult to get her to travel—in England—from London. This was hardly just the effect of age and failing curiosity: because it was Bing's persistence in curiosity that was so striking. Nor was it entirely because after 1949 Italy was open to her; and Italy was real to her in ways that England never was. That was a relationship, however, easier to understand. To return, in that sad period after Saxl's death, was difficult for her: there were many resistances. But, returning, she was not only re-enacting the history of the Warburg Institute; but—the shock of pleasure constantly renewed pointed to it—re-enacting that so familiar yet always true story which so many Germans and so many Englishmen have acted out through so many centuries. Italy was both home and holiday. It meant monuments (on that last visit to Venice in

1962 she was deeply absorbed in the Titian St. Lawrence in the *Gesuiti*), yes, of course, but also a style, milieu, people, a sense of enlargement.

If the relationship with England is problematical and the relationship with Italy more intelligible, the relationship with Germany is almost a plain blank. This is a very severe limitation, for there was still a Bing who spoke German. Several sorts of ignorance are involved. There is the absence of witnesses, and there is Bing's reticence, strong here as in other matters. That so little seems to be known by her friends and colleagues of her life before she went to the Institute (or of her early life there, for that matter) must surprise. I was not alone, for example, to be taken aback, rather, to learn, only after her death, about her period as school-mistress. And someone should record that there must have been a remarkable strain in her family; Siegfried Bing of *L'Art Nouveau*, along with Morris and Liberty one of the great creative shop-keepers of his time, was an uncle: she did not know very much about him, but something about his first contact with Japan (and enough to put right, kindly but firmly, I am sure, an American scholar who had written inaccurately about him in one of the recent articles on *Art nouveau*); and she recalled regretfully that in her austerer youth she had destroyed a great pile of the Japanese prints he issued; and she had tried, unsuccessfully, to find records or papers in Paris.

But Bing kept her friends in compartments: and she may have talked more freely about her family and her German life in contexts that I, and others, did not know. And she certainly had the idea that her English friends were not interested in and did not want to hear about Germany ('Now that Warburg is being translated into Italian our English friends won't have any excuse for not reading him'—touched a particular sensitive point, but was characteristic enough of a wider feeling). In my case it was partly true. There was a miserably limited knowledge of the German language, and no real desire to read or speak German. Apart from temperament or laziness, this could happen to someone growing up in the thirties: doomed preoccupation with Germany could lead to a blank refusal to go there or have to do with any Germans except refugees—who for the most part had no wish at all to speak German with us. Then—as I came to realize later—an ignorance of a very special

German milieu, Hamburg: of which Bing was so very conscious; Berlin and Munich (except, lately, for the Gallery) she would have nothing to do with; as for Vienna, that she had little patience with, and she came back from her 1963 visit (her second only) confirmed in the decisions she had made before she went ('I don't see what there is to make a fuss about. Very boring.'). And what did I ever know—I realize now—about German-Jewishness—of what it had been like to grow up in those places at that time. How strange, reflecting, never, in so many years, to have spoken to someone in her native tongue (but would she have wanted it?). And perhaps my question about Bing and England is only a special form of a generalized question, renewed after it had been allowed—first, deliberately, and then from habit—for so long to lapse: what did they, really, what have they, made of it all? Then, in 1938–39, and at that age, it was the present of German Jewry that was here, with us. The historical questions went unasked.

With that present I had grown up. In the spring of 1933 when I went to Edinburgh to take an entrance scholarship examination I bought a copy of the undergraduate magazine and found in it a piece on the burning of the books. That autumn the first German Jewish students appeared. The session 1938–39 I spent in Florence: on my first or second night there I saw a lorry load of young men breaking the windows of a large shop: a Jewish shop, I was told next day, when I asked what could have been happening. That winter and spring the evidence accumulated in the bookshop windows and the nervous interest of my landlady in Jews; and in the salons and cafés of the dissident poets and intellectuals, and the solemn ugly dark brown studies of professors, the stories multiplied of what was happening in the universities, and of the new or the renewed or the attempted flight of German, Austrian, Czech, Italian: a dissolving society. And many cities had dissolved to furnish those figures in café or *salotto*: expatriate, tourist, refugee? Who knew any longer who anyone was or what anyone might be when the dying friend of Oscar Wilde's paused for a moment on the fifteenth-century steps, and the American poet ('*il miglior fabbro*' he had been called) said how splendid *Fascismo* was because the *gerarchi* could quote Catullus, and a forgotten little man talked of evenings with Kafka in Prague and

the man behind the counter shrugged at a proffered cheque and said 'Ma l' Austria non c'è più', and the famous poet's mistress, hysterical, the wireless screaming among her English chintzes under the huge di Chirico (ruins and faceless figures) said 'We are waiting to hear the bombers', and the gentle devout official Englishman had written in praise of the régime, and one of the dissident professors was turning in his regular weekly report to the police? In Cambridge there was Auden reading his *Spain*—(there had been Spain for so long): 'Tomorrow the bicycle races / Through the suburbs on summer evenings: but today the struggle . . . We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and History to the defeated / May say Alas but cannot help or pardon'. And in the same house an Austrian who every evening required consolation for the fresh insults and persecutions he found during the day and whose father, mother, fiancée and furniture had, somehow, to be got out of Vienna.

This bit of *curriculum vitae* is here only for one reason: to remind ourselves, for the record's sake, of that context into which came the encounter with Saxl, the Warburg Institute, Dulwich and Bing (and my first memories of Bing are mostly linked with Dulwich). That encounter, was part, emphatically, of growing up in the thirties, of being twenty-four in 1939. Excitement and acceptance, curiosity, and the limits of that curiosity, were part of that liquid world of presages and dooms, migrations, transitions, exiles, and surprise behind the suburban door. Saxl's greatness—I would still use the word—and fascination, and all that Institute and library had to offer would have been less powerful but for the ways they went with that situation. There was newness and a grateful surprise, and a kind of familiarity: all combined, so that books and scholarship and persons and places all went together in one experience. Brought up in schools of literature in the traditions of nineteenth-century 'positivist' history, and in the polemics about the 'new criticism' (of which I was already tired: though much in their debt) much concerned (as we already were) with the 'image', and not happy about the ways we had of talking about it: most interested in that and in the new 'history of ideas', which was coming to the schools from—mostly and directly—America—and not very happy about that either;

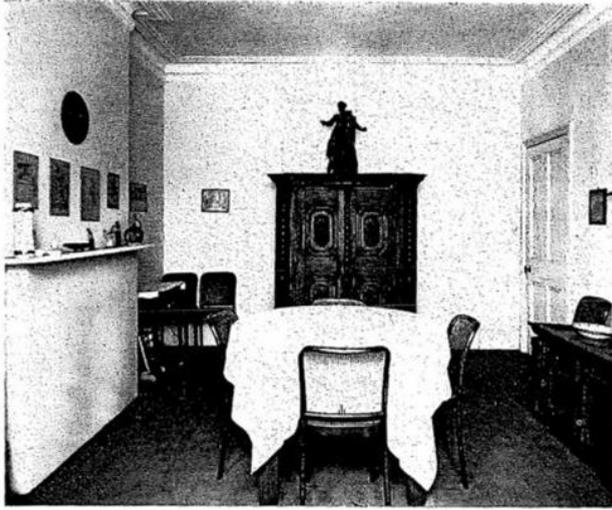
and deeply involved with Italian things (and in Italy offered Croce, when I much preferred Marx)—I was very ready for the library and for Saxl. Strict methods of historical enquiry, I had, after all been taught, and well taught. What was new was the kinds of texts and documents, the juxtapositions of material that were offered (that startling arrangement of the library), new kinds of questions. All this reinforced by the mere physical presence of those books, and those people. Exiled scholars, yes, I was familiar with, scholars, intellectuals, poets, moving: but here, part of, but standing against the flow (in those hideous rooms, in that monstrous derelict Imperial monument, beside the point even when it was put up), was a whole great chunk of inventive Europe, carrying both present and the infinitely complex past that made it. Here were dramatized the flux, the precariousness, the dangers: in this familiar, when the unexpected and the provisional were what you lived with: at the same time *solid*, an environment you could work in, without drama, except the drama of new books and new questions, the wished for drama you had been brought up for. Here was, more valuable at that moment, almost, than anything else, the example of persistence: persistence, in reading, in asking, in working. An example more valuable than I, and many more, found in Cambridge, where persistence too often was only blandly unexamined habit or a determined parochialism, better calculated to affront than fortify the young; where gardens and buildings spoke with a more moving voice.

The solidity was, of course, an illusion, a master-conjurer's piece of sleight-of-hand, or mimetic magic which had to be there before the reality could follow. It corresponded to something in the natures of both Bing and Saxl; and was conjured up in Dulwich too. Bing spoke of Saxl's elusiveness, his acceptance of the provisional, his wish to be free: and indeed the image of the wanderer was characteristic of him: yet, and always yet, there was that garden designed and planted and cherished not for this season's flowers but for a maturity that would take years to come. I must have been invited to Dulwich perhaps the second time we met. W. B. Yeats said of the staircase of a sufficiently unassuming country house that Balzac would have taken a hundred pages to do it. Several histories might be made from descriptions of the contents



The Garden in Dulwich 1962





The Dining Room



The Garden Room



The Study



1962



and arrangement of that high, ugly, narrow, commonplace affair in its anonymous street. But no one can write them now. There was a time when one could not ask questions; and a time when one forgot to because all had become so familiar. At that time what impressed was the combination of austerity and miscellaneous and downright clutter, of 'advanced' and bourgeois, and Saxl's magpie's nest accumulations (which he did like to talk about). Saxl liked the humble, the forgotten object, not out of any cult of the 'peasant' or the neo-primitive, but because they were fragments of a large history, touching evidence of the survival and durability of large images and schemes (like the piece of Indian cotton on the wall behind the divan in the garden-room which he bought, Bing told me, because he saw in it a last and true descendant of late antique models). I am not sure how much of all this really corresponded to Bing's taste; I think that an environment she had herself created might have been more austere: there was the contrast between the room she first lived and worked in (the great black desk) and the clutter of Saxl's study; the black Sung vase was what she wanted. And in the event, though she loved both Rome and Venice it was Florence she always wanted to go back to.

Bing certainly accentuated, memory insists, one of the notes struck by both Institute and Dulwich, in those early visits: this was, to put it plainly, alarm. There was the terrible problem of living up to Saxl. My first series of what turned out to be intensive tutorials with Saxl went on there at intervals until the summer of 1940—sessions when Bing poured coffee that got colder and colder (I remember wondering whether cold coffee was a German habit, or just an idiosyncrasy of the house) and that lasted long after she had gone to her room, and meant that what few hours were left of the night were mostly sleepless. (Anyhow there was the problem of the *plumeau*, which I first met then, and never could be happy with.) But if Saxl alarmed me, Bing frightened me. She was the image of severity: in what seemed a recognizable way; dark cropped hair, the endless cigarettes, the dark austere clothes, the use of surnames, her quickness, the sharpness of her questions: all to me, even at that age, suggested the advanced woman of the twenties. That she had ever carried a red flag is probably an embroidery of mine, though

I think a pleasing one: that she had participated, on the side of the left, in political disturbances in Germany at the end of the first war is certain: she recalled this and her 'revolutionary youth' with amusement but no displeasure. Whatever the scope of her beliefs and activism may have been, those first impressions of mine were not wholly wrong. Something of the air of that generation of women Bing had with her to the end. With the years, of course, the manner relaxed; and the image of severity receded to be replaced by that general aspect of benignity which accompanied the very marked changes in her appearance in late middle age and in old age. The wheel seemed to have come full cycle when a pupil of mine who met her, in an unofficial context, about a year before her death said to me afterwards, 'What a dear old lady'.

I was hard put to it to respond. Bing was benign, it is true, and very kind to personable, intelligent young men who responded quickly and sensitively but did not talk too much, and very ready, now, to amuse and be amused, yet even so I could hardly believe that an hour's conversation could yield that particular English cliché, with suggestions so wholly inapposite that I was jerked at that moment into realizing a world of language and experience which I could not possibly fit Bing into, which was neither hers nor mine.

Not the greenest of gardens or the stillest English suburbia could accommodate her to it (and yet the young man was by no means obtuse). Some note of the stern, of the fierce, even, was still needed for definition in that benign old age; and some phrase, if it could be found, that insisted on the not-English. (My ear suggested that part—symptom and cause—of the 'slowing down' apparent towards the end of her life was linguistic, that the language came less readily.) Her capacity for scorn was undiminished, though it had been increasingly linked with an appreciation of the absurd, the simply comic, in human behaviour. Scorn for bureaucracies, 'establishments', machines, pretences, social and intellectual, for talents corrupted for money or advertisement: of, and always, disloyalty; and that apart from the great treacheries of the thirties, which she never forgot. (Often harsh judgements would be mitigated by memories of conduct during those years.)

A continuous moral energy was one of the sources of her strength.

To miss this would be as wrong as to envisage her as continually sitting in judgement. The image that memory insists on of Bing behind a desk or a table does not mean that; any more than it implies the simple notion of a managing woman of that particular generation. Manage she could and did, and had to. But she did not always want to. Beyond a certain point she was not willing to make people's decisions for them; or to judge. It is here that her famous phrase—uttered in whatever language was appropriate—comes in. 'Why not', she would say, or 'There is no law that says you must'. She was recalling you to the concreteness of the moment: to your freedom (and your duty) to decide: and she could apply it to herself: 'After all, why not' is what she said that evening when she decided to open up Saxl's study and sit there after dinner (his pipes were still on his desk, and the copper cooking pot he used as a tobacco jar). Empirical and pragmatic, she distrusted large formulations about history or experience or conduct, and all 'over-interpretation', whether of a text or an image or a situation. Her attention to a manuscript was of a piece with her attention to a situation. Reason and the plain facts (as far as they could be ascertained and exotic as they might turn out to be); and elegance (as the mathematicians understand it) of exposition and expression, were what she wanted you to arrive at. Not that 'rationalist' describes her. The sources of that memorable fortitude must elude us: but a belief that reason, truth and justice will prevail was not among them; nor any belief in a final ground of reason or divine unreason. I do not think the world made much sense to her, and certainly no transcendental sense ('That way is closed to us', she said firmly, sharply refusing a discussion). She knew about the limits of reason in human affairs. Her life had brought her to know, poignantly enough, haunted minds and to watch the anguish of the irrational; and in such situations she was perceptive and strong. Yet I have the feeling that it was all alien to her and that, though she knew, she never very willingly admitted that sometimes the wound had to go with the bow. Pre-occupation with the irrational worried her. Some years ago when I was immersed in the world of magic and the 'little religions' in the eighteen-nineties she rebuked me for spending so much time on 'nonsense'; and reacted very sharply when I suggested that such concern for the symbol

in Europe in that time, in that half-world, must have had something to do with the formation of Warburg and the direction of his enquiries. This point she was, latterly, willing, and quite equably, to concede; but she still preferred to consider, for example, Darwin (she developed a great enthusiasm for *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*). Distaste remained. She would have liked to see more sense.

Only in her last year did I hear her complain she was bored. My surprise at the time seemed disproportionate; yet, thinking back, I was right to be disconcerted. With Bing this was very serious. That she had ceased to take or read the newspapers, mattered little: many younger than herself were in the same position ('What law is there that says . . .'). While many too shared her dislike of much that is happening in the academic world and her fear that we are in danger of forgetting what we are supposed to be doing, of the erosion of traditional fields of knowledge and modes of enquiry (she had now evolved a formula to preface news of a piece of work that interested her: 'If it is important for anyone to know, then . . .'). A general complaint about being bored was something else. Because the point about Bing is that she was not bored. Exhausted at times, oppressed, worn down at times (even she), bored often enough and indignantly enough on particular occasions, but not radically bored. The centre of her strength, of that moral energy and critical power, and defining their range and application, was, I suppose, here: in, but the words are vague, when what is wanted is the opposite of vagueness, and definition by contraries would be easier, a continuous unintermittent sense of life: of here and now, place and time, of being here, past precipitated in present. The actual world was endlessly real to her: a multifarious world of individuals and their experiences and what they make and the various surface of the solid earth they live on. It is a very rare gift. Hence the vivid eagerness and curiosity that we are going to miss so much. This grasp showed in many ways. In, for example, her remarkable power of feeling and evoking place, shape and colour in landscape or city. Or in, I think, her preferences in literature and marking perhaps their limits (of all my early friends at the Warburg Institute only Bing had a real care for modern literature; Saxl said his favourite novel was the *Hypnerotomachia*, which was, I am sure



true, but hardly helped). With the literature of the twentieth century her sympathies were imperfect, and in what written in English that has most engaged us she was little interested (except Conrad and some Forster), but in German there was Thomas Mann (Hofmannsthal she detested, and she did not greatly care for Rilke: about Kafka she was apt to shrug her shoulders); in the nineteenth century, there was Dickens, whom, after Shakespeare, she most admired of English writers, there was Zola (an admiration of her later years which I did not share) and, perhaps first, Ibsen, to whom she had a true devotion (you would hear in the theatre the explosive 'ach!' that came when she was deeply moved). What she was looking for, I think, was boldness of search and execution, a substantial rendering of milieu, psychological veracity. 'Solidity of specification' she was after, in Henry James's phrase—not that she would have anything to do with him.

One could turn the phrase this way and that. And, returning to Dulwich in 1939-40, ask again, why 'solid' seemed, paradoxically, in that fluid world, a word for it. This did not have to do only with the completeness of the *milieu*: that might just as well have emphasized exile and transit, as other 'refugee' houses and flats crammed with furniture from Germany and Austria did; that Saxl and Bing were stretched at work had much to do with it, but how was it that they had been able to make this transfer? That they had already been here for six years was little to the point: others in that position had not managed (and many never were to). The upshot of all this is, of course, that, it is clear now, I never thought of Saxl and Bing as 'refugees' at all. The unmistakable smell of exile was never in that house. Basic for the making of house and garden as for the establishment of the Institute in working order was Saxl's 'inspired opportunism', and this was not unconnected with his gifts and goals and methods in scholarship, with his apprehension of the 'moment', and also Bing's patience (which she had had, perhaps, to learn) and closely related sense of the actual. Not exiles, but not English. I could accept them, the house, the Institute (ignorant, and to remain so, of so much of what lay behind in Bohemia, Vienna, Hamburg or Brunswick) as part of an experience of Europe that was

urgent and necessary. The words may be too big. Saxl and Bing came increasingly to hate big words like 'Europe', 'the West', 'tradition', 'international' because of the uses they were put to, the pretences, falsities, trivialities or worse they masked, yet, with every hesitation, the word Europe and the word tradition (however imperfectly understood) *will* suggest themselves in connexion with her as meaning something real and tangible and experienced, for enrichment and strength as well as suffering, and wholly necessary: and here when she was here. And Bing (however—or, for all I know, because—remote and secret so much of her life) was always here. That is why the images of desks and tables offer themselves, and what they really suggest. The world was actual to her and she was actual. Most of us are present only by fits and starts, intermittently; Bing (whatever the cost) was always, incontestably, here. Dialogue with her guaranteed, not safety, not comfortableness, but actuality, of moment, of experience, of tradition, community.

READING

D. J. GORDON

Ich hatte das Glueck Gertrud Bing in den letzten Jahren naeher treten zu koennen. Da ich nicht in der Lage bin ueber sie als Kunsthistorikerin zu sprechen, kann ich nur sagen, dass sie als Mensch eine aussergewoehnliche Erscheinung war. Ueber Alles konnte ich mit ihr sprechen. Musik war ein Teil ihres Lebens, besonders die Werke von Verdi hatten es ihr angetan. Jede Unterhaltung mit ihr war fuer mich eine Freude, denn ohne dass sie je didaktisch wurde, kam ich immer bereichert daraus hervor. Ihre grosse Hilfsbereitschaft, ihr feiner Takt und ihr Humor werden mir unvergesslich bleiben.

*Otto Klemperer*

Otto Klemperer

Zuerich, April 1965.

« Emeritus Professor » Gertrud Bing, già vice-direttrice (circa 1929-1955) e poi direttrice (1955-1959) dell'Istituto Warburg (che nei suoi primordi ad Amburgo era noto come Biblioteca Warburg), è morta in Londra a 72 anni il 3 luglio 1964. È morta, come abbiamo sperato sarebbe morta, senza aver conosciuto la vecchiaia. La misteriosa malattia che la uccise in meno di cinque settimane non le diede tempo di soffrire. E così Bing è sparita dai nostri occhi con il passo rapido e un po' pesante, lo sguardo fermo e scrutatore, il sorriso tra l'affetto e la sfida che le furono caratteristici fino all'ultimo.

Ma il vuoto che ha lasciato sarà, per la nostra generazione, incolmabile. Ella non era solo l'ultima sopravvissuta di quella che per ischerzo talvolta chiamavamo la seconda Trinità del Warburg (Warburg - Saxl - Bing; la prima sta nel sigillo stesso dell'Istituto: Mundus - Annus - Homo). Era nella vita quotidiana una eccezionale iniziatrice e animatrice di lavori nuovi, una critica allo stesso tempo generosa e formidabile di lavori in corso; e un'amica che si sarebbe precipitata a portare aiuto, se necessario, dall'altra parte del mondo.

Le sue radici furono nella borghesia commerciale ebraica di Amburgo, dove era nata. All'Università di Amburgo si laureò nel 1921 con una tesi ben tipica dell'ambiente a cui apparteneva: *Der Begriff des Notwendigen bei Lessing. Ein Beitrag zum geistesgeschichtlichen Problem Leibniz-Lessing*. Solo un estratto dattiloscritto della medesima è conservato presso l'Istituto. Dalla scuola di E. Cassirer alla Biblioteca di A. Warburg il passo era breve, e Bing fu assunta come assistente bibliotecaria nel 1922. A. Warburg era allora assente per malattia mentale. La nomina fu dunque dovuta a chi già allora reggeva la Biblioteca, F. Saxl. Ma quando poi nel 1924 Warburg tornò risanato al suo posto di lavoro, Bing ne diventò la più diretta assistente e lo accompagnò nel viaggio in Italia

\* From *Rivista Storica Italiana*, Vol. LXXVI, 3, 1964, pp. 856-858.

del 1927 e poi in quello, durato quasi un anno tra il 1928 e il 1929, che doveva di poco precederne la morte. Nessun altro ebbe di Warburg, studioso e uomo, la conoscenza che aveva Bing. Uno dei più vecchi amici e discepoli di Warburg poteva dichiarare: « Als ich im Frühling 1939 Gertrud Bing zuletzt in London gesprochen habe, war es uns manchmal, als stünde Warburg selbst leibhaft neben uns » (C. G. HEISE, *Persönliche Erinnerungen an A. Warburg*, 2. ed., Hamburg, 1959, p. 12). Di Warburg Bing curò la raccolta degli scritti già stampati in una edizione esemplare nel 1932.<sup>1</sup> Le vicende successive dell'Istituto impedirono la pubblicazione, se non in minima parte, del materiale inedito. Ma su uno studio attentissimo di questo materiale era fondata la preparazione della biografia di Warburg a cui Bing stava lavorando da anni. La biografia, purtroppo, non vedrà più la luce: un profilo di Warburg, da lei pubblicato nel 1958 e apparso in nuova versione italiana nella nostra Rivista (LXXII, 1960, pp. 100-113), dà la misura di quello che l'opera maggiore sarebbe stata.

Ma sebbene Bing fosse, e giustamente amasse chiamarsi, la custode della tradizione dell'Istituto Warburg, la sua importanza nella cultura contemporanea sta nell'aver cooperato con F. Saxl ad allargare gli scopi di ricerca originari, creando le condizioni per cui l'Istituto poté poi trapiantarsi e prosperare in Inghilterra. A Saxl, già sposato e con figli, Bing si legò presto per la vita in una collaborazione scientifica e domestica totale, che impose rispetto a tutti. Con Saxl procedette a esplorazioni sempre più diversificate dagli attuali temi di ricerca di Warburg. Pochi sono gli articoli in proprio di Bing. Accanto a uno concernente « A. F. Doni, Nugae circa Veritatem » (*Journal of the Warburg Institute*, I, 1937, pp. 304-312) noteremo soprattutto per la virtuosità tecnica significativa il saggio « The Apocalypse Block-Books and their Manuscript Models » (ivi, 5, 1942, pp. 142-158). Ma tutte le ricerche di Saxl sono inscindibili dalla collaborazione di Bing. Dopo la morte di Saxl nel 1948 ella raccolse, annotò e in un caso ricompose le *Lectures* che Saxl aveva lasciate manoscritte. La biografia di Saxl da lei scritta

<sup>1</sup> Una scelta di scritti di A. Warburg con nuova introduzione di G. Bing sarà pubblicata in traduzione italiana dalla Casa Ed. La Nuova Italia di Firenze: la introduzione fu approntata da Bing poco prima della morte.

come introduzione ai *F. Saxl Memorial Essays* (usciti nel 1957) tace di questa collaborazione, ma la presuppone nella stessa penetrante descrizione che dà del lavoro di Saxl.

Warburg, congiungendo la tradizione cosmopolita dell'aristocrazia mercantile di Amburgo con l'ansia religiosa dell'Ebreo illuminista, aveva deciso di fare della sua casa un centro di ricerca obiettiva per gli incontri e gli scontri nel mondo occidentale tra idee ed emozioni pagane (per lui equivalenti a primitive) e idee ed emozioni giudeocristiane. Da ultimo nella sua esplorazione personale era venuto a rendersi sempre più conto della posizione preminente dell'antisemitismo tra le passioni dell'uomo occidentale, ma non perciò aveva rinunciato al convincimento che dal paganesimo al rinascimento il processo era stato di progressivo controllo delle emozioni più oscure: « per monstra ad sphaeram » (cfr. E. Panofsky in *Das Johanneum*, 3, 1929, pp. 248-251). Saxl e Bing erano da un lato meno impegnati in questa esorcizzazione di demoni che per Warburg erano stati una realtà quotidiana, ma d'altro lato erano anche meno sicuri che l'esorcizzazione fosse possibile. Avevano inoltre del paganesimo una nozione meno « primitiva » che non Warburg, e diedero presto un posto preminente nel programma di lavoro dell'Istituto alle ricerche sul Platonismo. Ma soprattutto tendevano a fare della iconografia un metodo di ricerca per la storia della cultura in generale. Se qualcosa andava indubbiamente perduto della profondità di visione di Warburg, le decine e decine di volumi — nonché tutto il *Journal* — dell'Istituto stanno a dimostrare la fecondità e varietà della ricerca impostata da Saxl e Bing.

Warburg morì prima di dover prendere decisioni estreme per salvare l'Istituto dalla distruzione a cui lo condannava il Nazismo. Saxl, che veniva da Vienna, dove Hitler era cresciuto, era l'uomo da trarre immediatamente le conseguenze della situazione. Egli trovò gli aiuti per il trasferimento di sorpresa in Inghilterra, e Bing non solo si assunse la responsabilità del trasporto materiale, ma curò la ricostruzione dell'*ethos* patrizio di Amburgo nelle nuove circostanze della vita londinese. A lei, come a Saxl, era ovvio che l'Istituto a Londra doveva essere anzitutto un centro di rifugio, di aiuto, di smistamento per coloro (in enorme maggioranza ebrei) che nazisti e fascisti cacciavano dalle proprie case,

dalle proprie terre. La fortuna di aver trovato ospitalità e relativa sicurezza in Inghilterra non fece che rinsaldare il senso di solidarietà di Saxl e Bing verso gli altri perseguitati. Carità palese e segreta per i rifugiati fu all'ordine del giorno dal 1934 in poi per l'Istituto Warburg e ne costituisce un titolo di onore. Ma fu altrettanto ovvio a Saxl e a Bing che l'Istituto non dovesse perdere in Inghilterra le sue caratteristiche di manifestazione di cultura ebreo-tedesca. Pur inserendosi nella cultura inglese e diventando parte della Università di Londra, il Warburg rimase e rimane tuttora un istituto che deriva le sue idee dalla Germania, dall'Austria e dalla Svizzera di Burckhardt, Warburg, E. Cassirer e in senso più lato di Usener, Nietzsche, Freud, Riegl. In un punto centrale l'eredità di A. Warburg era mantenuta gelosamente, con rinnovata consapevolezza: nell'Istituto uomini di fede e di nazione diversa dovevano incontrarsi e collaborare, non sopprimendo o riducendo ciò che di ciascuno è proprio, ma facendone la base per la intelligenza di quanto è comune. Il liberalismo di Saxl e Bing era così spontaneo e fresco da sembrare innato.

La morte sùbita e immatura di Saxl nel 1948, seguita a non molta distanza dalla morte tragica del suo amico e successore nella direzione dell'Istituto, l'ebreo olandese H. Frankfort (1954), impose su Bing pesanti responsabilità amministrative; ma ella continuò a rivedere per la stampa praticamente tutto quanto l'Istituto venne pubblicando e mantenne un interesse attivo per l'acquisto e la classificazione dei libri. Rimarranno famosi i suoi viaggi in Italia con il bibliotecario O. Kurz per organizzare scambi di periodici con istituti italiani. L'attività editoriale non cessò nemmeno dopo l'andata a riposo; stava attualmente curando la nuova serie di *Oxford-Warburg Studies*.

All'Inghilterra Bing si era profondamente affezionata, e si muoveva con rara sicurezza anche negli ambienti più ostici: nella società inglese si guadagnò devote amicizie. Ma se Warburg aveva descritto se stesso come « ebreo di sangue, amburghese di cuore, d'anima fiorentino », non dissimile tricotomia era riconoscibile in Bing. Ristabilire contatti con la cultura tedesca dopo la guerra non le fu difficile, anche se a certi individui non perdonasse. Ad Amburgo era tornata ripetutamente con commozione; e quando le era stata offerta una decorazione tedesca

aveva osservato che non era nella tradizione dei cittadini della libera città di Amburgo di accettare decorazioni prussiane. Nell'amore e nella conoscenza dell'Italia era pari a Warburg e Saxl: a Firenze era di casa. Ma anche si trovava bene in Svizzera, centro di contatti europei. Negli ultimi anni aveva scoperto la Spagna e la Grecia. Nei suoi viaggi, che godeva avidamente, come nel suo lavoro quotidiano — che dopo la morte di Saxl non era mai senza malinconia — Bing rimaneva la studiosa scrupolosamente informata, attenta al particolare, eppure intesa a chiarirsi la natura della cultura europea, rendendo consapevoli le componenti irrazionali, eliminando i pregiudizi. Quando scuoteva la testa sdegnosa in un « perché no? », una foglia secca della bigotteria o della vanità cadeva da qualche parte.<sup>1</sup>

LONDON

ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. il ricordo di D. Cantimori, *Itinerari*, 79-80, 1964, 89-92 [ora più sopra, pp. 6-10].

Everyone who knew Gertrud Bing must have become aware of her remarkable gift for retaining old friendships with undeviating affection and welcoming new ones with spontaneous zest. I was fortunate in being accepted, in 1945 (when the Committee of Management of the Warburg Institute was formed), into the second category. And from then onwards our official intercourse was supplemented by a personal relationship which grew closer with the years, and which I greatly valued.

Two features in her personal life soon came to stand out for me as characteristic and essential: hospitality, and judgment. The first of these meant not only the generous welcoming of friends to her home, but also an equally welcoming attitude to ideas and experiences. Her domestic hospitality had an individual charm; to its happy informality she imparted in some way a formal grace—was this perhaps a not unimportant strand in the web of her Italian friendships? And for the ideas, experiences and plans of others she had an eager and continuing interest, combining wide-ranging sympathies with strict and stable standards, and thus sharpening both the desire to achieve and the realization of what had to be achieved. To be her guest in this sense also was to enlarge one's own experience.

It was I believe to a great extent the underlying stability which lent a special value to her judgment of things and people. There were some qualities she looked for, and recognized with certainty. She set a high value on clarity and nobility of purpose, on intellectual and artistic integrity. Within this broad range her tastes were catholic. That she loved the music of Schubert was perhaps because his course is so clear, his humanity so transparent, his translation of experience into sound so coherent in its own range. But just as the clear-cut heroic lines of Mediterranean landscape satisfied her—more than the softer outlines of the Highland hills—so her ear was in a special measure open to great

symphonies (among which she included those of Mahler) with their reverberating echo of a complex but coherent world. In music, as in literature and life, she seemed to me to value above all this quality of consistent and directed energy; it was not surprising that she found such abiding satisfaction in Klemperer's interpretation of great works.

Nor was it ever surprising to me that her first independent work on a literary subject should have been concerned with Lessing. Of all the classical German writers (and she knew them well), he seemed the one who was most clearly a formative influence. There was an affinity, which may well have stimulated her choice in the first instance and in turn have contributed to her whole outlook upon life. The difficult interlocking of tolerance and intolerance, of freedom and order, the intricate processes of supporting feeling by reason and informing reason with feeling—such problems, so often latent or manifest in Lessing's writings, were problems of which she had an immediate apprehension, as one apprehends things to which one is by nature attuned. Reflecting on the steady judgment which she exercised through many changes of circumstance and fortune, I call to mind the concluding phrase of the parable concerning truth and its revelation which lies at the heart of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*—when to the baffling problem of authenticity the wise judge has offered a humane and practical answer, and referred all else to a wiser judge in a far distant future: 'So sagte der bescheidne Richter'. The adjective, with its twofold implication of wisdom and modesty, seems strikingly appropriate to Gertrud Bing.

LONDON

EDNA PURDIE



Rome, 1929

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## English abstract

The booklet *In memoriam Gertrud Bing 1892-1964* was published in London the year following the death of the former director of the Institute. The publication includes: an Introduction by Ernst Gombrich (pp. 1-3); the obituary published anonymously in the Times of 6 July 1964 (pp. 4-5); the reproduction of the text by Delio Cantimori (pp. 6-10: from a letter that Cantimori himself had sent to the editor of the magazine "Itineraries"); a memoir by Donald J. Gordon (pp. 11-22); the anastatic reproduction of a note by the musician Otto Klemperer, dated April 1965 (pp. 23); the reproduction of a text by Arnaldo Momigliano, previously published in the "Rivista Storica Italiana" LXXVI, 3 1964 (pp. 24-28); a brief reminder note by Edna Purdie (pp. 29-30). At the end, a succinct Bibliography of Gertrud Bing which records the four editions ascribable to her (Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*, with Saxl of 1932; the 1957-1963 edition of Saxl's *Lectures and Studies of the Warburg Institute*; the 1963 edition of the Oxford-Warburg Studies) and a list of eight publications, including her PHD thesis.

*keywords* | Gertrud Bing; in memoriam; Warburg Institute; Ernst Gombrich.

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