

**Englische Fassung zur Besprechung von NIKLAS HOLZBERG, *Gymnasium* 121 (2014), Heft 6 (<http://www.gymnasium.hu-berlin.de/holzberg.html>)**

**Richard F. Thomas, Jan M. Ziolkowski, eds. *The Virgil Encyclopedia*. With the Assistance of Anna Bonnell-Freidin, Christian Flow, and Michael B. Sullivan. Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. Pp. 1525. ISBN 978-1-4051-5498-7.**

Reviewing *The Virgil Encyclopedia* (henceforth *VE*) has somehow forced me into the role of the cranky fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*. No, not because no one invited me to join the party. No, not because my own *Vergil: Dichter und Werk* is not named once in these three volumes, and that although it has been published in Italian too and the translation at least was reviewed in *BMCRev*. And (to make it an appropriate *ter*) no, not because, while the collection edited by me of articles on the *Appendix Vergiliana* did pass muster, the individual contributors have been ignored, the only exceptions K. Volk (the reason probably being that she teaches in New York) and myself (the reason almost certainly being that my paper has been published elsewhere in English). The omission of the rest, I really have to say, has been to the detriment of the *VE*. The other chapters in the collection, all of which considerably further our understanding of the poems in the *Appendix*—G. Bretzigheimer’s comprehensive article on the *Ciris*, for example, is without a doubt the best study available to date on this epyllion—have had to make way for older and in some cases outdated books or articles, evidently because those were published in English. That, admittedly, seems to be consistent with the declared overall plan for the *VE*, but is also where I come in with my cranky-fairy act. I would like to speak here for all the forgotten Virgilian scholars who may not write in English, but who do produce innovative work, who quite often have more interesting things to say than their English-speaking colleagues, and who have neither been taken into account with a brief mention *ad hoc*, nor are even just named as further reading. I find it hard to understand, for instance, why P.E. Knox, when writing the entry “metamorphosis”, did not at least consult the only existing modern standard work on the subject, Zgoll 2004 (see the bibliographical supplement below) and pick out a few references to recent fascinating readings with which to expand and embellish his perfunctory list of the relevant passages in Virgil. To be fair, however, said entry is typical for the entire three-volume handbook. Most of the contributions with a direct bearing on the texts of the poet tend to offer first and foremost the apparently obligatory lists, above all of apposite *loci*—R.F. Thomas, to name but one, devotes three columns in the entry “animals, domestic” to a catalogue of the beasties mentioned in

*E(clogues)*, *G(eorgics)*, and *A(eneid)*—and contain conspicuously less information about stimulating results achieved in modern analyses of those works. In that respect, the *VE* is wholly conventional and can rightly take its place among all the companions and encyclopedias with which British and American publishers have been flooding the market for some time now. But it is not going to encourage anyone to sit down and read the above-named three classics of world literature. It collects and files, but it does not inspire.

And yet encouraging or inspiring appears to be one of the principal goals which the *VE*'s two editors originally set themselves. Their target audience consists not merely of learned colleagues, but evidently also, indeed more so, of students and “generally interested” readers (lxv), two groups to which they hope to render Virgil as easily accessible as possible and (here I conjecture) enjoyable to boot. One way to achieve this, the editors believe, is to cast aside all expectations of their readers, including the scholarly type, being moderately proficient in any tongue other than English, not even in Latin. Virgil’s language, the particular elegance of which has, over centuries, often fired and enthused readers more than the actual contents of his poems, has been virtually ‘edited out’ (lxvi: “... removing almost all Latin words”). Apart from the odd isolated word, we find, where the original Latin has not been given a miss right from the start, only very short sentences (and those translated in parentheses, of course). This Anglicization of the Roman poet serves the express purpose of “shifting the geographic and cultural context of gravity from predominant Italian within a European context to Anglo-American in the first place, and then Anglophone within a global setting” (lxvi). No problem, fine and dandy for the rest of us around the globe—we all speak English anyway. But do both editors seriously believe that their strategy rises to the real and present needs of today, of an age in fact already pervaded and shaped by American culture? The entire Western World is experiencing a rapid decline of literary and intellectual interest and knowledge among its young, a lack of willingness to read books or to learn new languages, as well as an alarming inability to master even just adequately their own, orally as well as in writing—and all this to a degree and at a pace which, a mere twenty years ago, no one would have thought possible. Faced as we are with young people who prefer scanning social media to curling up with a good book, who seem to be eschewing even the bare bones of what can be classed as higher education, should we really respond by spoon-feeding them the sort of ‘Virgil lite’ offered in the *VE*? One especially typical ingredient there is the plot summary. Entries such as “Anchises” or “Turnus” offer minute paraphrases of the figure’s deeds and fate. Where is the sense in that? Students already reluctant to read will be lulled into believing, without having cast so much as a glance at the poems, that they know Virgil,

and not only him, but the whole host of later authors who followed in his wake. What profit can there be in that kind of knowledge? Gained merely by rote and not in the adventure that is reading, it might help when it comes to passing the next exam, but it will then very soon be forgotten. More to the point: if antiquity is no longer to be ingested as antiquity and in its own original form, then there can be no place for it in a day and age that has a lot more interesting, gripping knowledge to impart than lists of domestic animals or of works in which *E*, *G*, and *A* have lived on through the centuries.

The *Nachleben* entries just alluded to can perhaps further illustrate what I am trying to say. Many of those also smack of the duteous. Take “Fielding, Henry”, for example. Yes, *Amelia* does have a lot to offer in terms of Virgilian intertextuality, and that is duly declared here. But what about *Tom Jones*, today probably Fielding’s most famous work? Is there absolutely nothing in that? Can passing that over in complete silence really be justified? What about Partridge, who spouts his *infandum regina iubes renovare dolorem* at four different points in the novel? I can vividly remember reading *A* back in my grammar-school days: we had to learn verses such as this one by heart and, as some of us were also devouring *Tom Jones* at the time, we simply had to laugh out loud at this “ill applied ... Latin”, as Tom himself calls it (12.3). If only the one or the other of the *VE* entries on *Nachleben* were written in a way that might elicit a chuckle and tempt young readers to take a look at the texts! Yes, there are exceptions to this rule among the articles, and yes, the encyclopedic form naturally imposes certain restrictions. But Virgil has inspired so many others to write great poetry and prose, and that should at least have been outlined or touched on in such a manner as to challenge the pole position of social media.

Seen purely from a scholar’s-eye view, the three quite conveniently-sized volumes of the *VE* do offer a welcome epitome of the monumental five of the *Enciclopedia virgiliana*. However, the editors of the Italian reference work were at pains not to remain within ‘national’ confines of the kind chosen by Thomas and Ziolkowski, making instead every effort possible to recruit qualified specialists without regard to their country of origin. As one might expect, that was not always feasible, but the number of compromises which had to be made was not as strikingly high as it has been for the *VE* (I shall return to that presently), and, more importantly, the older encyclopedia cites from any language where at all useful and stimulating, and certainly does not anxiously avoid quoting the Latin texts in the original. Let me be quite clear: the *VE* can without a doubt boast a considerable number of extremely good entries which may not be over long, but are jam-packed with information—this applies e.g. to J.F. Miller’s “Palatine” and M. Fontaine’s “puns”, the latter in addition a very refreshing

article— and which scholars will therefore find invaluable or, at the very least, useful as an introduction. Moreover, many of the longer articles, those covering between two and seven pages, are nothing but outstanding, for instance S. Harrison’s “Augustan poetry”, M. Fantuzzi’s “epic cycle”, R. Gleis’s “Neo-Latin literature”, or—in my opinion far better than the articles on *E* (B.W. Breed), *G* (C. Nappa), and *A* (D.O. Ross)—R.F. Thomas’s “Virgil, life and works of”; to these few examples I could add numerous more. All the names just mentioned are, in addition, those of experienced Latinists. In fact, the preface to the *VE* raises hopes that the other contributors will be equally qualified, the editors having intentionally “refrained from the syndrome . . . of distributing to graduate students entries that were difficult to assign” (lxv). This appealing prospect, it has to be said, sadly proves to be something of an illusion: an awful lot of beginners have been drafted. Added to that, some of the more senior scholars selected have not made the effort to bring themselves up to speed as regards current research in what was once their respective specialized fields, and others, younger and older alike, have ventured into territory that was quite new for them without first or at any time burrowing their way through previous work.

D.F. Elmer, for example, the young author of a recently published book on the *Iliad*, can tell us a lot in his *VE* entries about Homer and the two epics, but rather less about those in their function as intertexts for *G* and *A*. He does note that, in terms of structure, *A* evokes the *Odyssey* throughout, but he makes no reference to F. Cairns’s book, which would be essential reading on that.—F. Clark, still working on his PhD, but with two articles on Dares Phrygius in the Middle Ages to his name, was considered by the editors sufficiently qualified to write about that author and about Dictys Cretensis. The finished entries, however, betray that he made no attempt to grapple with S. Merkle’s pioneering research (even although some of that was published in English) or with the work done by H. Brunner’s Würzburg project.—L. Kronenberg, like Elmer and Clark a young Harvardian, refers us for Empedocles, as do many others for their specific themes, to the wholly outdated *RE* article (churlish of me to single this out, I know, as it is in German, indeed in quite challenging German!) and fails to mention the Strasbourg papyrus discovered anew in 1992, a text which has changed not a little our picture of the philosopher and his influence.—B.W. Breed, out of Harvard for a while now, knows bucolics like the back of his hand, but his entry on the genre “elegy” makes nothing of its quite central importance for Virgil (the name Dido is not mentioned at all). He might at least have told us about the word’s derivation in antiquity from ἔλεγεῖν and that *G* 4.465f. *te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum, / te veniente die, te decedente canebat* is a

sophisticated and unmistakable allusion to that. Wait, no, what am I thinking? That's Latin (to say nothing about the Greek).

Among the more seasoned Latinists who appear not to have kept up with the latest developments in their former fields of expertise is D.O. Ross with his entry on Catullus. As far as I can see, he makes no references to any work that goes beyond his own findings back in the day, although there has in fact been a fair amount published.—R. Maltby's 2002 commentary on Tibullus is without question one of the best studies on the elegist, but should his entry "Tibullus" really be stating now, in 2014, that Book 1 was published around 27-26 BCE? P. Knox dated it in 2005, and for entirely convincing reasons, to 29-28, something Maltby ought at least to have mentioned.—Knox himself was probably venturing onto foreign ground with the entry "Trojan War", terrain involving research which goes back to Heinrich Schliemann. The result is an eminently readable article, but the most recent book he cites dates from 2001 (J.S. Burgess's) hardly represents the status quo in scholarship: that same year saw the publication of J. Latacz's comprehensive study, still crucial reading, and in 2008 R. Schrott's assertion, one founded on exhaustive research, that Homer's home was part of the Assyrian Empire and that his Troy was in Cilicia sparked off a heated debate in the German and Italian media, one serious enough for a W. Burkert to enter the lists. Curious, is it not, that no one further west in the "global setting" seems to have paid any heed to all that?—Of Troy sang Triphiodorus too, and M. Paschalis tells us in the entry on this poet that "[s]upport for Virgilian imitation is much diminished in current scholarship". But is Paschalis, who only cites the 1982 Budé (and even then dates it to 1959), at all familiar with current scholarship? Any notion that *A* could have been a pretext for Triphiodorus was refuted once and for all by U. Dubielzig in 1992, his powerful arguments developing further the earlier thoughts of Norden, Kroll, and Heinze. Dubielzig's book remains today the standard work, even if Paschalis, one must conclude, has never heard of it.—J. Henderson is renowned for his expert knowledge of ancient sexualities, but his entry on Virgil and Priapus is more than disappointing. He does refer to the important lines *E* 7.33-36, but omits to mention that Thyrsis is clearly addressing Priapus' phallus, promising it in v. 36 appearance-enhancing gold (Henderson makes no reference to *G* 4.111), and only points briefly (using the obsolete numbering *CP* 84-86) to *Priapea* 1-3 with their elegiac couplets and "harmless" content, but not to the rather more obscene *Priapeum* in iambics, *Quid hoc novi est*, which is found among the texts in the *Appendix Vergiliana*. The poem stands in the tradition that derives an association with Priapus from Virgil's very reputation as *virgineus*; we find this 'legend' in *Mart.* 9.33 (see below s.v. Martial and most recently A. Heil, "*Maronis mentula: Vergil als*

Priapeen-Dichter bei Martial (Mart. 9,33).” *Philologus* 157, 2012: 111-8), and it seems to have been the reason why for a long time (into the eighteenth century) the salacious *Corpus Priapeorum* was mostly printed together with *E*, *G*, and *A* as Virgil’s own work.

These few pointers ought to have demonstrated that readers consulting the *VE* would be well advised to take a good look at the respective contributors and at the literature cited by those. I have compiled supplements to various of the entries, listing relevant books and articles which really ought to have been used and included in each. To all that I have added a small number of headwords which I would have expected to find in the *VE*, but which are missing. Under “*puer* in Eclogue 4”, for example, one could have presented the most substantive among the attempts to identify the child. Instead, the *VE* tell us under “Antony”, “Augustan poetry”, “Hero”, and “Pollio” that he was “most likely” (p. 99) Marcus Antonius’ as yet unborn son, while Asinius Gallus’ claim to boyish fame is mentioned in the entry on him, and the metaphorical candidate (“a desire for cultural rebirth”) s.v. “pregnancy” with, finally, the Christian interpretation under “Messianism”. Another reading, which I personally consider the most plausible—it identifies the *puer* with Octavian—is withheld from us entirely. One proponent of that theory is G. Binder, whose 1983 article presents extremely persuasive arguments which should definitely not have been ignored, especially as Binder is one of today’s leading Virgilians (even if the only *VE* entry which actually mentions his crucial book does manage, on p. 958, to get him mixed up with V. Buchheit).

Anyone who has ever edited a handbook will know that the question of length for the individual articles is a particularly vexatious one. Thomas and Ziolkowski have, on the whole, reached good decisions. In a few cases, however, criticism seems justified. My example: the entry “Ovid”. There may well be Virgilians who do not like him very much, who are of the (erroneous) opinion that he constantly made irreverent fun of his older fellow poet. In reality, however, Ovid is quite assuredly the one author who ‘got’ Virgil and who was on a par with him in a way that none would later match, not even Shakespeare, the *VE* entry on whom is, however, twice as long as the one on poor snubbed Ovid. That almost seems a little ridiculous when one notes that the headwords following the latter—“owls” and “oxen, wild”—have together been granted roughly the same number of words as his. And, on top of that, what has B. Weiden Boyd done with the little space allotted her? She has wasted half of it on a tedious catalogue of bare dates and facts about the poet’s life and work—an amount of detail no one would actually seek to find in handbook on Virgil—and she has not even mentioned that Ovid was probably the first to imitate the “Virgilian career”. His is the earliest known allusion to *pascua rura duces* (in *Am.* 1.15.25), but we unfortunately do not find that noted in the entry

“Virgil, epitaph of” either (only in “career, Virgilian”). A short paragraph at the end of Boyd’s entry—immediately preceded by the unattested assertion that Ovid shows “a wry awareness of his own standing as epigone in the annals of Latin literary history” (p. 952)—very briefly outlines the younger poet’s reception of the older, then merely refers to literature which she is about to list anyway; unsurprisingly, she has also missed some important studies. Yet again one would have liked to see a few neat, catchy examples quoted of how the insightful and witty Ovid ‘cites’ Virgil, creating the while, in a unique combination of reverence and sparkling playfulness, brilliant art. *Met.* 3,210 *Arcades omnes* (on dogs) < *E* 7.4 *Arcades ambo* or *Met.* 2.572-3 (the speaker princessCornix) *cum ... ut soleo ... spatiarer harena* < *G* 1.389 (*cornix*) *sola ... spatiatur harena* or *Met.* 14.120-1 *inde ferens lassos aduerso tramite passus / cum duce Cumaea mollit sermone labore* < *A* 6.128-9 (the speaker the Sibyl) *sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras, / hoc opus hic labor est.*

Such intertextual gems as the above mentioned are in themselves a weighty argument against the *VE* policy of suppressing things Latin. Similar examples could be found in Virgil too, and yet this form of poetic *ars* plays scarcely any role at all in the encyclopedia, even although it is an *ars* which, as I know from personal experience, is the perfect bait for reeling in young students and persuading them to read Latin verse. Would the editors not perhaps have been better advised to allocate at least a bit of the generous space given to entries on *realia*, e.g. livestock, to thoughts on Virgil as fascinating Callimachean? I for one cannot imagine that young readers being coaxed gently towards Virgil would really expect, let’s say in the entry labeled “night” (which is as long as the one devoted to Ovid), to find a list of every single night that falls in *A*. That kind of thing reminds me worryingly of the days back in the early 1970s when the protests against bourgeois scholarship (very controversial at the time) found a satirical voice in an organization known as D.O.N.A.L.D. (the acronym translates roughly as the ‘German organization for non-commercial supporters of pure Donaldism’). I can recall going to conferences on “Donaldistic Studies” and listening to lectures devoted e.g. to the question as to whether angry ducks can really bare teeth, or on Duckburg’s healthcare system; we were shown slides (remember those?) of relevant panels from the comics, for instance Donald Duck visiting a GP. One of the stories about Donald describes how the drake, finding himself kept awake by the barely detectable sound of slipped footsteps from the apartment next to his, responds rather audibly and thus embroils himself and his neighbor in racket-making rivalry; both draw on all manner of objects to raise the roof. These fond memories came to mind when I was reading the *VE* entry “sounds”, which presents a catalogue of the noises that occur in Virgil, and I’m afraid I fail to see a vast

difference between that and the lecture I heard almost forty years ago, in which a “Professor of Donaldism” produced the very objects used by Donald and his neighbor to make a racket and ‘played’ them for us, one after the other, in order to “prove” that the story “Donald’s Raucous Role” could pass the test of scholarly verification.

A little in excess is offered not only in various of the *realia* entries, but also in those which introduce the readings of Virgil propagated by what is known as the “Harvard school”. In order, it seems, to call this form of interpretation, above all of *A* repeatedly to the fore, it has been served up either as the main or side dish in the following entries (and I have most likely missed a few): “Achilles”, “American scholarship”, “*clementia*”, “critical theory”, “Decembrio, Pier Candido”, “Harvard school”, “optimism and pessimism”, “‘two voices’ theory”, “Vietnam War”, “winners and losers”, “World War II”, even “Renaissance” and “Shakespeare” too; T. Burkhard’s convincing demonstration that the 16th and 17th centuries would not actually have had an ear for “two voices” is not cited. Readiness in Germany to second Harvard-school readings, on the other hand, has been similarly passed over in the *VE*. According to the entry “Harvard school”, the only scholars outside the US who followed its thinking were the three Balliol professors A. Boyle, J. Griffin, and R.O.A.M. Lyne (p. 588); the many published studies in which W. Suerbaum champions the “two voices” theory with considerable verve do not exist for the *VE*, nor does his very readable 1999 book on *A* either. I may seem to be harping on a little about the *VE*’s persistence in avoiding modern Virgilian scholarship produced in Germany, but it is not as though the editors have otherwise wholly excised Europe as “context of gravity”. In his entry “World War II”, R.F. Thomas names a number of older German Latinists who perceived Virgil as unequivocally loyal to Augustus, detailing in some cases their NSDAP membership and Nazi past; he then stresses that, although after 1945 a few German and Austrian scholars did go on to produce “Virgilian studies of lasting merit”, “the postwar German Virgil remained focused on Virgil as the poet of Augustus.” This I find both frustrating and curious: the first because the *VE*’s “generally interested reader” will now probably assume that post-postwar studies written by German scholars have not changed much in their focus either, and the second because one postwar German publication, V. Pöschl’s 1950 book with its symbolic interpretation of *A*—it can be numbered, I take it, among the works from those decades which Thomas considers to be “of lasting merit”—in fact exerted (via the 1962 English translation) not inconsiderable influence on the first proponents of the “two voices” theory, something which Thomas should at least have mentioned.

It should be clear by now that there are aspects of the plan drawn up by the two editors with which I personally would have been uncomfortable. One final example: the abbreviation *VSD*, used throughout for the *Vita Suetoniana vulgo Donatiana*. The letters alone must surely leave general or student readers, those that know some Latin anyway (even if the assumption was that they would not ...) wondering puzzled who actually wrote the thing, Suetonius or Donatus. Unfortunately, looking at the various entries which talk about the *VSD* will not provide them a clear answer: in “Jerome” and “medicine” Suetonius is the sole author, in “Donatus” the *Vita* is “probably based on that of Suetonius”, in “Suetonius” his *Vita* “forms the core” for Donatus’s, while in “Lives” it is “somewhat difficult to distinguish” who wrote what; and “*Aeneid*”, “*Appendix Vergiliana*”, “half lines”, “Virgil, tomb of” and “Warren, Rosanna” ascribe the entire *Vita* to Donatus. Two comments. 1) That “generally interested reader” is going to be very confused by this plurality of opinions, especially as no reasons are actually given for any of them; the editors ought, then, to have established some form of cross-referencing which would allow for individual opinions, but avoid bewildering discrepancies. 2) There exists a 300-page analysis of language and style in the *VSD*: the work of K. Bayer, it was published in 2002 and its findings show that the *Vita* is “at core Suetonian”, an assessment which the *VE* only presents in the entry “Suetonius”. Bayer’s invaluable book is ignored in the *VE*, as is the fact that its author also produced the first modern bilingual text of all the Virgil *vitae*. It was printed in 1958 in Götte’s Tusculum edition of *A*, and was consecutively revised in a further three editions, Bayer having in the meantime discovered new texts—including the *Vitae Monacenses* II-IV, which he found among the manuscripts now preserved by the Bavarian State Library in Munich—and written a comprehensive scholarly appendix on text transmission, etc. Bayer, who died in 2009 after a life spent as teacher, headmaster, undersecretary, co-editor of the Tusculum series, and tireless campaigner for the improvement of Latin teaching in grammar schools—it is ultimately thanks to him that the Federal State of Bavaria can still boast a large and unparalleled number of pupils learning Latin and Greek—is, it seems to me, no less worthy than the English scholar T.E. Page (the author, as was Bayer too, of a school commentary on Virgil) of an entry in the *VE*.

To sum up: the three volumes of this reference work present, as far as a literary scholar such as myself can judge—I lack the expertise needed to be able to comment on the entries on Virgil in the arts—all important aspects of Virgil and of his reception. They offer a large number of excellent articles, those accompanied, it has to be said, by some which are less reliable, but which scholars whose own research encompasses more than just the literature

published in English will at least be able to identify. Perhaps, should there one day be a second edition of the *VE*, my *monenda* will, all crankiness forgiven, persuade the editors to make a more global and meticulous job of it.

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