

Gerardus Joannes Vossius. *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres: Institutes of Poetics in Three Books*.

2 vols. Ed. Jan Bloemendal. Leiden: Brill, 2010. xiii + 2092 pp. index. append. illus. bibl. \$636. ISBN: 978-90-04-18369-8.

Jan Bloemendal's monumental edition with translation and commentary of Gerardus Joannes Vossius's *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres* is a remarkable achievement: "the last of the Renaissance monsters," as P. R. Sellin famously dubbed Vossius, has found an intrepid tamer who deserves an ovation from the world of learning.

Vossius showed an early interest in poetics, for in one of his master's theses of 1598, he already maintained that "poetica non est ars, sed facultatum quasi cinnus" ("poetics is not an art, but a hodge-podge, as it were, of disciplines"), thus stating a conviction that would remain with him for the rest of his life, but he went against the grain of the widely accepted idea that poetry was mainly based on irrational *furor*. However, it was only half a century later, in 1647, that Vossius published the sum of his thoughts on the issue in a triptych consisting of the *De artis poeticae natura ac constitutione liber* (*Book on the Nature and System of Poetics*), defining the notions *poeta*, *poesis*, and *poetica*, and assessing the place of poetics among the arts; of the *De imitatione cum oratoria, tum praecipue poetica, deque recitatione veterum liber* (*Book on Imitation, both in Oratory and especially in Poetry, and on Recitation in Antiquity*), in which he discussed the best classical authors to follow, and the ways in which texts were read in antiquity; and of the *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres* (*Institutes of Poetics in Three Books*), dealing with the subject matters, styles, and meters of poetry, with the different ways of classification, and with all major and minor Latin (as well as Greek) genres known to exist in Vossius's days. It is the edition of this latter text, preceded by an excellent "Introductory essay" (1–48), accompanied by an English translation on facing pages and by notes identifying the sources of the quotations and allusions (82–1219), and followed by a commentary (1221–637) that forms the main course of the two stately volumes under review. The two shorter tracts are printed as "Appendices" with translation and notes (1716–2122). The edition is concluded by an "Index locorum" (2123–56) and an "Index nominum" (2157–89) that refer to all three of the works.

The largest part of the introduction is devoted to a succinct presentation of Vossius's main sources: Aristotle, Horace, Diomedes, Donatus/Euanthius, and Athenaeus among the ancients; A. Lullus Balaeris, J. C. Scaliger, J. A. Viperano (himself mainly relying on Scaliger), and, most surprisingly, C. Saumaise's *Animadversiones*

on the *Historia Augusta* among the moderns. Given the heterogeneity of these sources, the treatment of the subject is bound to be somewhat eclectic and inconsistent, but Bloemendal maintains that, according to Vossius, “two general principles govern all other ideas” (36), viz. that the end of poetry (with the exception of the Greek satyr play) is moral correction, and that the means to this end is imitation, defined as “a sketch of morally good or bad actions” (37). In order to make this work, and to integrate unavoidable contradictions, Bloemendal claims that Vossius made a generous use of divisions and subdivisions, which do, however, “often seem forced and the result of excessive systematisation”: “In short, Vossius tried to obtain coherence in his *Poeticae institutiones* by a systematic approach, but he is not dogmatic and violates his own system in some instances” (38). A few pages only deal with Vossius’s “reception” in the Netherlands, in France, and in England, but they suffice to show the influence of some of his tenets in poetic, especially dramatic practice (e.g., in the works of Vondel, Corneille, and Dryden).

The Latin text is generally very reliable, though I have noticed a few minor inaccuracies: on p. 596,11 add *v* (Greek for “50”) after ἐπεδείξατο; on p. 794,7 write *Ac* for *At*; on p. 2109,3 write *siphra* for *sphra*; on p. 2110a,22 write 27 for *T*. Abbreviations of the original edition are for the most part correctly expanded, but there are a handful of inexplicable lapses that give rise to ungrammatical sentences, e.g., 792,17 and 800,1, where *Chil.* ought to be expanded as *Chiliadis* (or *Chiliados*, but not *Chiliade*); 794,9, where *lib.* ought to read *liber* (not *libro*); 800,4, where *epig.* stands for *epigrammate* (not *epigramma*); or 800,8, where *Apol.* is an abbreviation for *Apologiae* (not *Apologia*). As in almost all scholarly publications nowadays, accents in the Greek tend to appear in the wrong place, shape, or not at all: see, e.g., p. 128n5 Συμμίκτα for Σύμμικτα; p. 142,12 πως for πῶς; p. 146,20 θεοίτι for θεοί τι; 1280,22 πάρελκει for παρέλκει; p. 1285,20 συλλογίσμου for συλλογισμοῦ, etc. In view of this irritating endemic problem, it would be good if academic publishers in general, and Brill in particular, would once again start hiring people trained in the classical languages.

The enormous conceptual difficulties posed by the Latin text have been superlatively well dealt with in the translation. Bloemendal — partly relying for this on preliminary work done by Edwin Rabbie, whose collaboration is acknowledged on the title-page — always makes unambiguously clear what he takes the meaning of the text to be. Thus, even if one disagrees with some of his choices (as I do with his occasional rendering of *poetica* by “poetry” [9, 103]), it is always possible to understand why they were made in preference to others, and hence to have a meaningful argument about them. There are, predictably in a work of this size and scope, a few typos left, but in most cases these can easily be corrected (e.g., p. 113,25 *a* for *an*; p. 191,6 *it* for *if*; p. 203,3 *universal* for *universally*, etc.). Serious mistakes are few and far between, the strangest case being found on p. 121, where Synesius’s *Calvitii encomium* is translated as “Encomium of Calvitiu[s],” with the correct paraphrase given in the commentary (“the paradoxical eulogy of baldness” [1238]).

Praise is finally due for the extraordinarily learned commentary, in which Bloemendal very successfully treads the delicate tightrope between explaining too much or too little: it is useful for the newcomer and for the specialist alike.

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