

The cultural and historical legacy of classical antiquity in Rudolf Borchardt's essay on Virgil's *Aeneid**

Liliana Giacomoni

Università degli Studi di Firenze (<liliana.giacomoni@unifi.it>)

Abstract

In Germany Virgil's work had long been considered a fake re-interpretation of Greek models, lacking originality and life: Virgil himself was seen as a mere servant of power. This essay explores how Borchardt sought to undermine the accepted interpretation of the author of the *Aeneid*. It will show that while reinterpreting Virgil's legacy, Borchardt set out a completely new vision of his work and how this vision differs from the fascist exaltation of Virgil. It will focus on Borchardt's inference that the *Aeneid* is at the same time a message from the past and a message of hope for the future. It discusses to what extent examining the present through Virgil's work, he endeavours to escape the disruptive power of the crisis of the 1930s. Finally, it will expose how the author finds an emblematic alter-ego in the character of the exiled Aeneas.

Keywords: *Aeneid*, *Borchardt*, *crisis*, *rebirth*, *Virgil*

I sing of arms and of the man, fated to
be an exile. (Virgil 2004, *Aeneid*, I, 1)

In 1930, Rudolf Borchardt was invited by Werner Jaeger to give a speech at the University of Kiel to celebrate Virgil's bimillennium. At that time, Kiel University was an outstanding institution for Classical Philology. The University had intended to award the speaker with an honorary title. However Borchardt was refused the honorary degree *Doctor Honoris Causa* due to the opposition of some professors at Kiel University¹.

*The following article is a revised version of a contribution presented at the "Classical Antiquity & Memory (19th-21st century)" Conference at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn on the 29th September 2017.

¹The speech was for Borchardt an occasion to defy the "influential Masters of philology" and to oppose his lively vision to their pedantic school methods in an academic context (Borchardt 1995, 530-531). At the University of Kiel in that year were teaching two relevant professors, both

Nonetheless, it was for this event that Borchardt wrote his Virgil essay². Seen as a mere servant of power, Virgil's work was mainly considered by German scholars a fake re-interpretation of Greek models, lacking originality and life, as we will examine. On the other hand, the Virgilian bimillennial occasioned celebrations all over Europe, and especially in Germany and in Italy, it was enthusiastically eulogized. The connection between ancient Rome and contemporary Europe was the aspect that mainly emerged during the Virgilian celebrations as we will clarify later. Some excellent authors contributed with valuable essays to the celebration of Virgil. One of those was Borchardt as we can read in Ernst Robert Curtius' work *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur* (1954a [1950])³ where he dedicates a chapter to Borchardt's speech on Virgil. Curtius explains that,

in demselben Jahr, in dem ich Virgil entdeckte, war in Leipzig ein kleines Buch erschienen [...] Es hieß *Das Gespräch über Formen*, und sein Verfasser war Rudolf Borchardt. Borchardt lebte von 1877 bis 1945. Als er das *Gespräch über Formen* veröffentlichte, 1905, war er noch ganz unbekannt. Und wenn Sie heute einen jungen Deutschen nach Borchardt fragen, werden Sie wahrscheinlich feststellen, daß er wieder unbekannt geworden ist. (Curtius 1954a, 24)

in the same year in which I discovered Virgil, a little book was published in Leipzig [...] It was called *Das Gespräch über die Formen* [*sic*] [*The Discussion of Forms*] and its author was Rudolf Borchardt. Borchardt lived from 1877 to 1945. When he published the *Gespräch über die Formen* [*sic*] in 1905, he was still quite unknown. And if you were to ask a young German about Borchardt today, you would probably conclude that he has become unknown again. (Engl. trans. by Kowal in Curtius 1973, 19)

Curtius connects his discovery of Virgil to the encounter with the works of Rudolf Borchardt, an author whom at that time was no more read and had become almost unknown in Germany. Then, in 1954, a book was published with the title *Verschollene und Vergessene* (Hennecke 1954). In that book among the "Missing

connected with Borchardt. Richard Harder, a young philologist and a disciple of Borchardt, as the author states in his letter to Bodmer, where he asserts Harder was "schon mit an meinen Schriften gebildet" (*ibidem*; formed on my writings); moreover he was a specialist opposing the flourishing Wilamowitz-school. Friedrich Wolters, a Professor and German historian, was a former friend of Borchardt and a central figure in the "George-Kreis". In his youth Borchardt was in the group of friends and followers of George but he distanced himself after a very short period. It seems that the denial to Borchardt's *Honoris Causa* came from the Professors and the Academics close to the "George-Kreis" (Spengel 2015, 344). Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the author.

² In the same year and on the same occasion, the celebration of the 2000th birthday of Virgil, Borchardt had written an article for the magazine *Corona*, owned by his friend and publisher Martin Bodmer. The main issues exposed in the article will be treated in the speech at the University of Kiel too. The speech is now published in the complete works of Borchardt in the volume *Reden* (1955, 254-271), while the article written for the magazine *Corona* is in the volume *Prosa II* (2004 [1959], 295-309).

³ In 1954, in the preface to the second edition of the *Essays on European Literature*, Curtius notes that "the new edition has been heavily augmented", including missing parts and products of the later years, as in the case of the study on Rudolf Borchardt written in 1951.

and *Forgotten*” there was a place for a brief anthology of Rudolf Borchardt’s works, and only nine years had passed since his death in northern Italy.

Borchardt in his *Das Gespräch über Formen und Platons Lysis deutsch* (1905) investigates a similar aspect: Virgil in Germany is not ignored as his works are studied in schools, but no one reads his poems with passion. By the same token Virgil being an aspect of school curricula, implies that he is read in order to learn Latin. Borchardt mentions an (unidentified) German scholar presumed to insult the sacred shade of Virgil. And he asserts: “aber wen kümmert es? Welcher Deutsche liest Virgil?” (2002 [1957], 10; Engl. trans.: but who cares? Who reads Virgil in Germany?). Here we can draw, recalling Curtius, a first parallel between the Roman poet and Borchardt, both forgotten by German scholars and critics in the middle of the 20th century.

But where does Borchardt’s analysis come from? And to what extent was his speech a breaking point in 1930? Borchardt had acquired a comprehensive knowledge of philology at the universities of Berlin, Göttingen, and Bonn. He was a scholar of the great Dioscuri Usener and Bücheler in Bonn. Both philologists left their mark in the study of the ancient world and attracted the best pupils to Bonn. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf was perhaps the best scholar at Bonn University, but the philosopher Paul Natorp, the church historian Hans Lietzmann, and Aby Warburg, the founder of the Warburg Institute, professed their lifelong deep gratitude to the great masters. In the “Bonner Schule” Borchardt had been trained as a classical philologist. In Göttingen he attended the lessons of his beloved Maestro Friedrich Leo drawing from his guidance the vital teachings he won’t forget all his life long. He will dedicate to Leo many of his own works. In his essay *Deutsche Denkrede* (1996 [1960]) Borchardt, expressing his admiration for his much esteemed Professor, describes Friedrich Leo’s pioneering role in Germany reformulating the most important issues concerning Latin literature (Poiss 1997, 56). But Borchardt fled the Academy, even though Leo held him in high regard. His prophetic and visionary attitude needed to be understood by poets and critics more than by professors and scholars. He was in fact restoring the past preparing a new language for a new literature and he called it “Creative Restoration”. Borchardt had a peculiar way of expressing his opinions: first frightening the reader, then talking as if he possessed some higher knowledge from which the masses were excluded. But that does not detract in any way from the importance of his works.

His ideals were those of a conservative, but his name and works were banned during the Hitler regime. He had imagined the reclamation of German language and literature. He drew his criteria from antiquity and from German classics, but he incorporated in the tradition the Provençal Troubadours and the Tuscan poets of the Trecento as part of the great tradition of European poetry and humanism, and Curtius admonished that Borchardt’s *oeuvre* and legacy would be an important gift for German criticism (1954a, 24).

Borchardt left Germany and the academic world and found his freedom in Italy: he lived in Tuscany, in ancient villas full of history, in the countryside between Pisa and Lucca. Describing Italy, the country he had chosen as a second “Heimat”, a new Fatherland, his description broadens out into a characterization of Italianness as such and even more, of Latinity. Actually, Borchardt’s rediscovery of Latin poetry and literature was not only the result of scholarly research but the outcome of a living contact with the country he cherished and its people. Curtius declares that if the contact with Oxford enabled Borchardt to write *Das Gespräch über Formen*, the contact with Tuscany led him to produce his essay on Virgil. Curtius considers it a landmark in modern German intellectual history: “Ich halte ihn für einen Markstein der neueren deutschen Geistesgeschichte” (1954b, 25; Engl. trans. by Kowal in Curtius 1973, 19: “To integrate Borchardt’s oeuvre and to explore his legacy will be an important task for German criticism”). Indeed the philological training Borchardt underwent led by Leo and his other professors, gave him a deeper knowledge of Latin literature, allowing him to detect the enduring appeal of the Virgilian poems. In addition thanks to his refined poetical skills, he had a special understanding for the subtly musical verse and the style of the Latin poet. Borchardt examining Virgil’s work in front of scholars and academics in a German university, strove to rewrite the history of its reception.

Virgil, when writing the *Aeneid* had to confront his work with epic models, but for Borchardt this was the price his masterpiece had to pay to come to term with the Homeric tradition (1955, 260-261). When Virgil first conceived the idea of writing an epic poem, he was aware of the need to go beyond a set of linked texts such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Apollonius’ *Argonautica*. He needed to invent a new kind of epic without relinquishing close contact with his predecessors. But if the *Aeneid* had to refer to the Homeric poems, and this was the price to be paid to literary tradition, according to Borchardt this epic tradition is only a disguise, as Virgil had to borrow the clothes of the Homeric epic to dress his poem, for the sake of obtaining the right to let it cross the spiritual threshold of the world with its real personality (*ibidem*). Borchardt in his speech unveiled the true personality of the *Aeneid* in front of his audience.

The epic intends to change the idea of things and facts and gives the past the framework of a model. Therefore the epic is the preliminary level of an elaboration that strives to the organization of collective cultural values, and this is essentially a function of the epic code (Conte 1986⁴). In giving voice to the history and culture of his community, Virgil implements a norm

⁴The essays in this volume include the larger part of Conte’s two volumes published in (1974), *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario: Catullo, Virgilio, Ovidio, Lucano* and (1984), *Il genere e i suoi confini: Cinque studi sulla poesia di Virgilio*.

formed by the existing epic code and therefore we can assume the poet is not an original creator. But at the same time expressing the hopes and sorrows of his people the poem embodies the attitudes and ideals of a whole community.

Therefore the new epic poem had to be made within invisible signs of the frame of the past that would give his work authenticity while enriching it by recalling multiple figures that would state its epic quality. Virgil had at hand a complete system of rules but each of those rules already contained a clear mark. He had to rediscover the heart of epic composition. While writing a text for the Roman community, going back to the earliest stages of Roman history, Virgil was rewriting history and all that, suggests Borchardt, would account not only for his age but for the present time too.

Virgil was able to give voice to his time and to his community: he inserted into his poem, along with particular significant aspects of the epic code, other themes, literary expressions and registers, achieving

un contrappunto di sensi grazie al quale si intende demistificare l'unione fittizia tra un uso retorico storicamente cristallizzato e una parte [...] di quel sistema aperto che abbiamo detto essere il codice. Questa contaminazione fra modi diversi del linguaggio [...] dischiude alla parola poetica nuove possibilità. La dialettica della contaminazione, proprio perché attiva una funzione critica del linguaggio, reintroduce in esso la Storia, rimette in moto il processo evolutivo del linguaggio epico sottraendolo alla fissità in cui era caduto. (Conte 1984, 64)

a semantic counterpoint whose aim was to unmask the fictitious union between a historically crystallized use of rhetoric and part [...] of the open system we have called a code. By making the epic norm [...] relative rather than absolute, this contamination between modes of languages opened up a new poetic horizon. The dialectic of contamination reactivated the critical function of epic language, brought history back into it, and set it evolving again after a period of fossilization. (Engl. trans. by Segal in Conte 1986, 150-151)

The forms in which Virgil enunciates those ideals, asserts Borchardt, have a new spirit but an old body. This constitutes a limit for poetry as it has to deal with a set of established rules in which to create something new. But exactly in that observation we see that Borchardt points out a valuable issue: the limited possibilities, the tragically poor means (1955, 261) and the political turmoil are not downsizing the work of the poet: all those constraints provide freedom, an immense and sacred freedom. Thus Borchardt is asserting that poetic creation does not relate on the possibilities offered to the poet, that can be able, as Virgil was, to create a completely new poetic world with little means living in dramatic periods. And here, Borchardt while describing Virgil's situation is penetrating his time.

All the historical events that led to the fall of the Roman Empire did not save the Western World, writes Borchardt, but they offered the precious opportunity to create a new one. Therefore he affirms that the perspective of

the Virgilian lyrical verse is not limited to the recalling of a tale and shows its passionate point of view that aims to remind and recover every detail of what happened. And exactly this attitude eliminates the epic character of the poem, which is consumed and drawn down. Borchardt imagines Virgil in front of his characters in a second distance, the distance of history. Thus he is not creating them, he is just interpreting them. With his brilliant analysis Borchardt affirms Virgil accompanies his characters in all the fatal events with the music of the soul, knowing that no human hand can help avoiding their tragic destiny “als er [...] nichts [...] zu bringen hätte, nur die Seelenmusik einer kontemplativen Begleitung” (Borchardt 1955, 264; Engl. trans.: as if [...] he had nothing to bring, just the music of the soul for a contemplative company).

Borchardt upholds the understanding that if Plato could be considered the Old Testament of the Greek Orient, the *Aeneid* is the Old Testament of western world: “Wenn Platon das Alte Testament des griechischen Ostens genannt werden kann, [...] das Alte Testament des gesamten abendländischen Westens ist die Aeneis” (Borchardt 1955, 271; Engl. trans.: If Plato could be considered the Old Testament of the Greek Orient, the Old Testament of the western world is the *Aeneid*). In the same manner he emancipates Virgil’s work proving that it was not an unsuccessful Roman copy of a Greek original and had little epic features. He finds a parallel to Virgil’s poetry in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Written under the guide of Virgil, Dante’s poem doesn’t retain however any Virgilian aspect and moreover it was not a comedy at all despite its title. By the same token the *Aeneid* is not really a pale copy of a Greek epic:

Die Aeneis ist genau das nicht, was sie am meisten zu sein scheint, ein homerisches Gedicht. [...] Nein, die Aeneis ist so wenig ein Homeridengedicht oder überhaupt ein Epos, wie die in Vergilischem Geleite unternommene Comedia Dantes eine Komödie oder wie sie vergilisch ist. (Borchardt 1955, 260-261)

The *Aeneid* is not a Homeric poem as it mainly seems to be. [...] No, the *Aeneid* is as little Homeric or is epic as much as the *Comedy of Dante*, began under the leadership of Virgil, is a comedy or has Virgilian aspects.

Therefore to consider the *Aeneid* as an obvious imitation of Homer, whose aim was the glorification of the emperor, is a disparaging thought. If we view the form of the content in the *Aeneid* as the ideal locus of a clash between values that individually claim for inclusiveness but as a whole are mostly irreconcilable, and furthermore, if we would consider that the triumph of a people is due not to a triumphant prevalence over others but rather to a more noteworthy ability, which is foreshadowed by the will of the gods and by Fate, at that point, the reflection in Virgil’s epic turns out to be not a glorification of the Augustan age but rather a reflection on the reasons why one individual or one people has risen triumphant in its agonizing battle against another.

That “other” was not dishonourable; it was necessary and important, yet its meaning can be discovered at a different degree where those who have been excluded can claim their prerogative in helping to build a new structure on which they appear to have acted as a synergist. The victor, the conqueror, doesn't live off virtue alone, he must come to terms with the shock of victory. Victory means destroying the rights of the conquered, and the victor has to look through its enemies' eyes. Epic is the place where a whole age is mirrored: Virgil's age was a torn apart age and the language of the *Aeneid* reflects its anguishes. It is a divided language, furthermore the narrative is rich in contradictory registers. Representing his age, for Virgil, involves much more than just glorifying the deeds of the victor:

<p>ma insieme il suo doloroso affermarsi. Le ragioni degli altri, esposte in tutta la loro forza, non danno solo un incremento artistico al poema, ma sono un memento contro la stabilità di ogni vittoria. Anche i morti possono ritornare se chi vince non ha saputo essere anche il loro rappresentante, la loro voce più alta. (Conte 1984, 96)</p>	<p>it must include the painfulness of their emergence. The conviction of the losers, put forward in all their eloquence, not only adds artistic richness to the poem, but also stands as a reminder against the permanence of every victory. Even the dead can come back if their conqueror has been unable to become their representative, their noblest interpreter. ((Engl. trans. by Segal in Conte 1986, 184)</p>
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Borchardt was a well-trained philologist, he possessed a deep knowledge of Greek and Latin literature and even though he did not remain inside the profession, he would remain a philologist all his life long. He examined the past, classical antiquity, Latin literature, with the eyes of a scholar, questioning the masterpieces, the landscapes and the stones, as if they were not only part of the literature but of real books. He shares with Nietzsche the idea of a literary text whose creative strength forces the individual to creativity and, as he suggests, the form of this new creativity must be suitable to the incommensurability of the masterpiece (Borchardt 2002 [1957]).

The young Wilamowitz, in his work *Zukunftphilologie! Eine Erwiderung auf Friedrich Nietzsches "Geburt der Tragödie"* (1872) had rejected Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872) demolishing the book and its author's classical credentials as Nietzsche was not only evading scholarship but scholarly methods too, relying on unstated evidence. And there was no evidence, according to Wilamowitz, to support the plausibility of his arguments.

Borchardt attacks Wilamowitz with an assumption that recalls Nietzsche's attitude, accusing him of having given the illusion that everything could be explained, that there exists a way, an infallible method to cope with the complexity of a Greek tragedy thus offering to the contemporary reader a clearer idea of it, clearer than the one hidden in the original text. Borchardt

is referring to the introductions Wilamowitz used to write for his translations, where, Wilamowitz declared, he was turning his attention to the people who believed they had learnt some Greek and not to the decadents saturated with culture. Borchardt's irony draws attention to the German conformist, "Der Philister", that reads – half absent mindedly – the easy translations offered by Wilamowitz, thinking "Ja, die Griechen! Merkwürdig, wie modern sie doch eigentlich waren!" (2002 [1957], 343-344; Engl. trans.: Yes the Greeks! Incredible how modern they were!) Wilamowitz was pursuing the aim to eliminate the unbridgeable distance existing between us and our past while Borchardt, in harmony with Nietzsche, was fiercely attacking a philology that had no influence on culture and society, a profession that lived in a house with no doors nor windows.

In Kiel, Borchardt underlined the fact that scholars had called a poet to celebrate Virgil, intending that, on the occasion of the Virgilian celebration, philology had opened the windows of its impenetrable home. Undeniably with his speech he is re-establishing and re-thinking the role of the poet. Indeed the poet is far more an interpreter of history expressing his world view in his works. The role of the poet is clearly central for Borchardt in that it reveals an urgency to understand the meaning of the development and decline of European culture and the role of the intellectual in that period of decadence. He infers that Virgil, in his poems, was able to sing for his country, his people, and his time (Borchardt 2004 [1959]). In stating that the role of the poet is as the voice of a community and of an age, Borchardt is speaking for his time and for his role.

And it is noteworthy that Borchardt recalls the role of poetry at the opening of his speech: the University of Kiel asking him to celebrate Virgil, has accepted "der Poesie das Wort über Vergil zu lassen" (1955, 254; Engl. trans.: to leave the word to celebrate Virgil to Poetry). So only Poetry deserves the last word, escaping all the leading patriotic and state-oriented interpretations of Virgil (Schmidt 2001b, 150), and this accounts for the most telling analysis Borchardt offered to his audience, reflecting his own experience of these turbulent years.

While in Europe, Virgil enjoyed great esteem, in Germany his position was quite different. Following his ideal of humanity, Herder had expressed a negative evaluation of the Romans. He saw in them only the soldier or the oppressor or both of them. The spirit of national independence and the love of humanity was not their talent. Admiring the majestic architecture of the Romans, their love for circus play and gladiatorial fight, the luxuriante of their baths, one would almost believe that some demon, unfriendly to humankind, had founded Rome. Roman poetry was only an "imported flower" not *Urpoesie* or *Naturpoesie*. Moreover, Herder assumed it didn't rely on the fresh inspiration coming from the soul, spontaneous as only genuine poetry does. When Herder wrote those lines, he had just discovered the poetry of Homer and Shakespeare. By comparison with them, Virgil seemed pale.

Herder contributed to establishing an utterly negative criticism which was pervasive amongst nineteenth-century German classical scholarship. Even Friedrich August Wolf, who revived classical studies in Germany, was averse to Virgil. And so was Niebhur, the historian of Rome. In 1810, Niebhur wrote that Roman literature was born already dead, and that was the idea that governed the bias on Latin literature considered a derivative (*abgeleitete*) or conditioned (*bedingte*) culture (Niebhur 1851 [1846]). And so were Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Romantics. If Lessing disdained the art of Virgil, Goethe had little interest in the author of the *Aeneid*, while Friedrich and Wilhelm Schlegel also shared a negative approach to Virgil's poems. In his history of Roman literature, Wilamowitz asserts his allegiance to this tradition, expressing all his distaste for Virgil's works.

That was how matters stood throughout the whole nineteenth century and beyond. In 1903 Heinze published in Berlin his *Virgils epische Technik*: a book that determined a new course in Virgilian studies. Analysing the literary sources of Virgil he goes on to broaden the understanding of his masterpiece beyond the level of originality versus imitation.

But a change did not take place, Curtius declares, until about 1925 (1954a [1950]). At that time German philologists began to discover and appreciate the Roman world⁵. Scholars like Eduard Fraenkel and Friedrich Klingner brought about this change. Klingner contributed to the new appreciation of Virgil with his eminent work *Virgils erste Ekloge* written in 1927 and reprinted in his *Römische Geisteswelt* in 1943.

The rediscovery of Virgil in Germany was a starting point for the research into Virgil's poems in the period between the two World Wars. Those studies were undertaken in a time of political and social crises that greatly affected German society. The renewal in Virgil's researches was nourished by a sense of moral loss and defeat: Germany had lost the war and experienced the humiliating conditions imposed by the treaty of Versailles; the monarchy had come to an end, inflation devastated the country and the new born Weimar Republic proved to be weak and lacking efficiency. The repeated elections were if anything a most alarming sign of the instability of the Republic. Schmidt asserts that the political interpretation of the *Aeneid* was a mental product of the 20th century, of the turbulent era of crises in Germany in the aftermath of World War I (Schmidt 2006).

Notably Borchardt, reaffirming the poetical value of the *Aeneid*, wanted to open Germany to European literature and the Latin tradition, a tradition that belonged to world humanism, not simply to scholars or to a nation. This is a noteworthy line of thought that offers an alternative perspective on Borchardt's

⁵ On the reception of Virgil in Germany in the 20th century see Schmidt 2008 and Atherton 2006.

analysis of Virgil. Recalling the role humanism plays in society, and how the *Aeneid* belongs to this broadened community, Borchardt presents landmark moments in the difficult reception of Virgil in Germany. In addition, although Borchardt was writing before Hitler's dictatorship, his claim to a worldwide humanism and a Latin rooted humanism, "lateinisch determinierte europäische Humanismus und humanistische Erdkreis" (Borchardt, 1955, 255; Engl. trans.: a humanism worldwide in scope but european and rooted in Latin humanistic ideas) is remarkably prophetic and demonstrates that violence and oppression were already impending at the back of the destabilized Weimar Republic.

If Heinze pointed out the prejudice towards Virgil's *Aeneid*, stating that the times had overcome the negative evaluation of Virgil expressed by Herder and Lessing, the point does not seem to have been made as deeply as in Rudolf Borchardt's analysis. Virgil was not to be understood according to an historical vision. As Borchardt explains, Virgil wanted much more: while creating and re-creating Homer, he was establishing a new poetical world, and a lyrical one. Here lies the originality of Virgil that Borchardt deeply understands. His insight was the one derived from a visionary ability, more than from a philological method. But he was able to watch the poet with the eyes of a poet. Once again promoting a revolution in poetical taste, he was restoring the past to help restore his disarrayed present. And Borchardt's lecture was one of the most important documents of a new picture of the *Aeneid* in those years.

In assuming Virgil's poetic and lyrical aspect instead of the impersonal epic character, Borchardt proved to be anti-classical (*Antiklassizist*). Moreover he considered the *Aeneid* as the deepest expression of the death of antiquity. Transposing the possibility of a new start when a whole world had collapsed, he projected humankind in a future of hope and promise. While looking back at the devastated Troy, asserts Borchardt, Virgil describes the new town, mixing the sorrow for the desolated past with the hope for a new future.

Borchardt goes far beyond his time, thanks to his visionary attitude and his outstanding philological skills. He reads Virgil's masterpieces with the eyes of a poet, bearing a new vision of literature and history. He considered himself a victim of the epochal degradation that shadowed the cultural and spiritual life of his age, drawing parallels with the anxiety and confusion dominating Virgil's life before the Augustan peace. His essay on Virgil is an answer to the political and social crisis of his time: Borchardt feels therefore the urgency of examining the whole situation from a distance, escaping the disruptive power of an age torn apart, the troubled age of the Weimar Republic.

History is composed of many threads that cannot be interwoven in a single tapestry; some issues come from the past, some announce the future. For Borchardt, the life-blood of romanticism was now exhausted and was only able to express the decadence of his time. That led Borchardt's search to

retrieve in the past with his philological and poetic attitude which enabled him to comprehend deeply the strength and the vitality of Virgil's work.

Addressing the University of Kiel, Borchardt doesn't eclipse

mit welchen Blicken kalten Abwartens das humanistische Europa der Vergilfeierstunde über die geistigen Grenzen hinweg in das Land Herders und der Romantik hinüberblickt. (Borchardt 1955, 256)

the glances of frigid anticipation with which European humanists were peering, at the hour of the Virgil festival, across intellectual frontiers into the land of Herder and the Romantics. (Engl. trans. by Kowal in Curtius 1973, 23)

asserting that Germany needed to deal with the differentiating components in the legacy of Antiquity. And his country had, too, to determine the antitheses between the western European and the German reception of Classical literature into a solitary all-encompassing vision in which the German Greek convention could incorporate Virgil without deserting Hellas. Borchardt calls attention to the Greek epic asserting it was an interesting but finished occasion, which had officially finished up its life cycle by the 6th century and conceded no resumption. Here Borchardt shows that the question at the basis of the cultural reception of Virgil and Latin literature in Germany reflects the clash between Romanity and Germanism, considered one of the principle features in the intellectual history of Europe (Canfora 2011).

But Borchardt goes on questioning: what to say when a voice again sings: "Musa mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso, / quive dolens regina deum... / impulerit?" (1955, 258). He insists in asking whether we have to forget the Homeric epic to accept the *Aeneid*. And he states that we shall very clearly remember Homer in order to be able to understand and admire Virgil's *Aeneid*. But the admiration he paid to Virgil, was far different from the one acclaimed in fascist Italy.

The myth of ancient Rome constituted one of the cultural foundation myths of European history. From Charlemagne to Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, emperors turned to the Roman tradition to legitimize their power. However, it is during the 20th century that the myth of ancient Rome became extensively diffused and misused: Fascism looked back at the Roman imperial past in a biased way in order to create its own tradition and support its ideology with symbols taken from this past. Consequently Virgil's bimillennial could not escape the aim of fascist propaganda (Canfora 1985, 469). By exalting Virgil's value, Fascism showed the world the worthiness of Fascism and Virgil became the *vate* of fascist Italy. Intellectuals linked glorious aspects of Roman history to the present time, assuming Virgil as the poet whose *Aeneid* was written to praise Augustus and his imperial government, a paradigm for all intellectuals. The fascist propaganda linked Roman history to fascist Italy, driving parallels between the heroic past of the Rome of Caesars and the present era which was going to bring back the memorable achievements of the Roman empire.

In Borchardt's analyses, Virgil in the *Aeneid* transforms a message coming from the past into a message for the future. Contrastingly to fascist ideals, this message derives his strength from the dark winter days ("die lichtlosen Wintertage", 1955, 261) of the barren imperial time, where Borchardt doesn't discover any valuable triumph. Thus changing perspective, style, and accent he is giving us a sense of *mise en abîme*. The hero we are confronted with is a fugitive facing an uncertain destiny. In front of us, the epic fiction breaks into pieces revealing the abyss of its deep contradictions. When Virgil wrote his major poem, suggests Borchardt, he was living in a desperate time, civil war ravaging the country, misery and cruelty ruled, death was the main feature of his time. Virgil has consequently transposed in his poem the tensions, the contradictions and the complexity acting in history.

The *Aeneid* reflects the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the desolating imperial period, but it is exactly that end and that new beginning, which is inherent and included in the end itself. And that beginning includes the past while announcing the future, says Borchardt as

in einem magischen Momente die ganze Vergangenheit noch einmal nachlebt, indes ihm die Tore der Zukunft schon aufspringen, voll Gold der Ewigkeit. (Borchardt 1955, 262)

in a magical moment, relieves the entire past even as the portals of the future burst open to it, full of the gold of eternity. (Engl. trans. by Kowal in Curtius 1973, 24)

Nonetheless, if Heinze was not accepted by the academic world, Borchardt was not considered much by German scholars and he was then forgotten. It was nonetheless a failure as well from a personal point of view: his ideology was one of a fugitive. Born in Germany, he spent most of his life in Italy. The rejection of his celebrated essay and the planned *Honoris Causa* in 1930, symbolize the marginalization he was confronted with by the academic world. And this was one of many sources for his impetus to go into self-imposed exile. In 1945, imprisoned by German soldiers, because of his Jewish origins, he was captured and brought back to Germany. He died during the deportation.

Schmidt analysing the commitment of T.S. Eliot to Virgil, pointed out the definition Eliot gave of Aeneas during a lecture broadcast in 1951, presenting him as a "Displaced person" and asserting "Aeneas' end is only a new beginning, the ultimate goal of his pilgrimage being reached only by future generations" (Schmidt 2006, 141). This is the very same assertion Borchardt offers in his lecture at Kiel University. Eliot gave his lecture the title "Virgil and the Christian World" (1957), linking his speech to Borchardt's essay, that in the last passages define Virgil as "anima naturaliter christiana" (1955, 270).

The parallel between the exiled Virgil and Borchardt who lived his exile in Italy, as we can read in his letters, continues in a way to be true even though it is a kind of an intellectual exile that we can imagine, as we could state,

echoing the words of Borchardt on Virgil: who reads Borchardt in Germany today? In his writing, Borchardt supposes Virgil had been expelled from his home during the Roman civil wars in order to give him the quality of an exile, thus incorporating the Latin poet in his personal paradigm:

Nirgend als im eigenen Erlebnis des eigenen gebrochenen Individuallebens, im unheilbaren Erlebnis des vertriebenen und heimatlos gewordenen Landkindes, hat Vergil die Kraft zu den grandiosen Metapher seines Gedichtes gefunden, des Gedichtes vom Flüchtlinge mit dem Rauche der brennenden Heimat im Hintergrunde, mit dem Schattenlinien einer noch undeterminierten geschichtslosen Küste neuer Mission in der Fernsicht [...] eine neue Welt nur mit den Kräften der alten Welt [...] wieder geschaffen werden könne. (Borchardt 1955, 267-268)

From no other experience if not from his own, whose life was so hardly affected by the irreparable events, a man born in the country and banned from his fatherland, there has Virgil found the strength of the magnificent metaphors of his poem, the poem of a fugitive who sees the fatherland burning at his back, and far in front of him distinguishes an uncertain and undetermined coastline, with no history just waiting for his mission [...] A new world [...] to be established with the energy deriving from the ancient world.

And Conte while reading Borchardt's essays on Virgil had a clear impression: only an exile could have that way of thinking (Conte, Vivarelli in Borchardt 2016, 7). In describing Virgil as an exile, Borchardt was describing himself. "Distanz ertragen", enduring the distance, that was for Botho Strauß the stylistic cypher of Borchardt (Strauß 1987). Strauß' opinions were very questionable and utterly problematic. At the same time they pointed out an important aspect of Borchardt's work: he wanted to establish a bridge between the present and a past, a past that seemed lost forever. His attempt proved fruitless, exhausted in the realm of the Conservative Restoration. Aeneas fled his country, and Borchardt was able to see the poetic quality of this character because he himself was a fugitive, an exiled. In the letter he wrote to Reinhard Piper in June 1927, he describes his condition:

Meinen Aufenthalt in Italien müssen Sie, wenn Sie mir gerecht werden wollen, als das ansehen was er ist, ein politisches Exil. (Borchardt 1995, 208)

You have to consider my staying in Italy, if you want to be honest to me, for what it is: a political exile.

At the same time, "enduring the distance" he could give his personal interpretation of Virgil's poem which proves

die Tragik des Menschenlebens an sich, die furchtbare Gesetzmäßigkeit der historischen Kausalität, ihn berührt und im Anrühren um die Freude am Sterblichen gebracht hat. (Borchardt 1955, 264)

that the tragic nature of human life as such, the terrible law of historical causality, has touched him and destroyed with its touch his pleasure in mortal things. (Engl. trans. by Kowal in Curtius 1973, 24)

Borchardt, invoking a different evaluation of the *Aeneid*, claims for an all-encompassing understanding where the tragic aspects of history and human life are worth the song of the poet. That song can lead us to build a new future escaping the disruptive power of social and political brutality. The poet is defeated by fate and time, as Borchardt was, nonetheless he is fighting with his lines the eternal fight for humanity. Borchardt loves in Aeneas the fugitive who sees the fatherland burning at his back, and far in front of him distinguishes an uncertain coastline (Borchardt 1955, 268); his hero is a man carrying on his shoulder the burden of loss, facing an undetermined future, human in all his features: “ein Geschöpf, das Geschöpf des Abendlandes, ein Gedicht” (1955, 271; Engl. trans.: a creation which is a creature, the child of the Western World, a poem). And this could be the symbolic cypher of Borchardt’s legacy, reaching out beyond its age.

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