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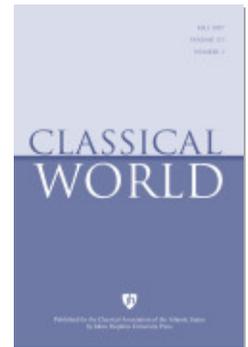
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Classical World, Volume 111, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 1-5 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2017.0061>



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Introduction: Reading Civil War

JULIA D. HEJDUK

When in *Darkness Visible* (1976) W. R. Johnson characterized one strain of *Aeneid* interpretation as “the somewhat pessimistic Harvard School”,¹ he could hardly have dreamt that the phrase would achieve canonical status so quickly. In fact, half of the seminal pieces he names—and the only two whose authors, Clausen and Parry, were friends who conversed regularly—were conceived and written at Amherst College, years before the Vietnam War and the “dissent and anguish of the sixties” (Clausen 1995: 313). “The somewhat pessimistic Amherst school” would probably have engendered fleeting thoughts of Emily Dickinson and been promptly forgotten. But America’s wealthiest and most powerful university has an aura (some might say, a *discolor aura*) entirely its own. The Harvard School may be a fiction, yet as every student of the ancient world knows, fictions survive long after the facts have disappeared.

My decision to entitle a Vergilian Society panel “Happy Golden Anniversary, Harvard School!” was intentionally provocative, if not perverse.² Every word is incorrect or ironic. “Happy”? The Harvard School stresses the *unhappiness* in Vergil’s works. “Golden”? Yes, in that most of the works named in Johnson’s infamous footnote were published about fifty years ago; but no, in that for Vergil the Iron Age of Jupiter has displaced the Golden Age of Saturn. “Harvard”? Yes, in that all of these scholars were associated with Harvard in some way at some point in their lives; but no, in that half of them were not at Harvard when the ideas were conceived—which negates “Anniversary” too. But the worst offender is “School,” a term that encourages people to dismiss any idea as conditioned and derivative, regardless of its actual provenance or its truth.

Nevertheless, my call for papers reeled in a wonderful assortment, all, as it happened, by women who, other than as the recipients of Loeb fellowships, had no association with Harvard. Two of the papers have

¹ Johnson 1976: 11, 156n10. The works in question were Brooks 1953; Parry 1963; Clausen 1964; Putnam 1965.

² Society for Classical Studies Annual Meeting, San Francisco, January 8, 2016.

found homes elsewhere.³ The two in this volume, however, approach the topic from very different perspectives. Nandini Pandey shows how “interpretive contestation” is written into the very fabric of Vergil’s works and characterizes their reception even during the poet’s lifetime. Zara Torlone demonstrates the key role Vergil played in Russian authors’ struggles, with mixed success, to develop a literature reflecting their own shifting national identity. James O’Hara, the respondent to the panel, provides a richer perspective on these papers than I can in this limited space, as well as some insightful reflections of his own.

Enlightening and enjoyable as it was, I still did not feel that the panel had gotten to the bottom of what the Harvard School actually is. It seemed that the best way to figure this out was to ask the people most likely to know, and Lee Percy’s gracious invitation to edit a special issue of *Classical World* based on the panel provided the perfect excuse to do so. I accordingly wrote to numerous senior (that is, senior to me, b. 1966) Vergil scholars with a very general prompt: “What does the Harvard School mean, or mean to me? How has it affected my reading of Vergil, or my scholarship, or my life? Were there teachers of subjects other than Latin who influenced my reading of Vergil?” To my pleasant surprise, the majority rose to the bait.

For full disclosure, I should start by giving at least some idea of my own answers to these questions. That I myself am a product of the Harvard School would appear to be an open-and-shut case. I read the *Aeneid* with Charles Segal (as an undergraduate at Princeton, but he was a Harvard product); I got my Ph.D. from Harvard, studying with Richard Thomas and Wendell Clausen; and my work reflects the techniques of New Criticism, with its emphasis on attending to the actual words of a poem. But in fact the methodology of New Criticism appealed to me before I had really read any. Verbal echoes in Latin poetry leap out at me and strike me as demanding interpretation: that is simply how my mind works. The seed for my dissertation (and book) was planted when the end of Aeneas’ penultimate line, *Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas* (“Pallas, Pallas with this wound [sacrifices] you,” 12.948), mischievously completed itself in my head as one from Juno’s opening speech, *Pallasne exurere classem* (“Pallas [was able] to burn the fleet,” 1.39);

³ E. Giusti, “Kennedy’s Dialectic Twist—Could This Really Be the End?” (Giusti 2016); B. Weinlich, “Vergil’s Pessimism: A Reappraisal of the Harvard School and Augustan Poetry” (Weinlich 2015).

when I noticed the striking clause *solvuntur frigore membra* (“his limbs are loosed in cold”) used exclusively of Aeneas persecuted by Juno at the beginning and Turnus persecuted by Aeneas at the end (1.92, 12.951), I was hooked. It is true that I was deeply influenced by Putnam’s *Poetry*, but only after recovering from the disappointment of finding that he had already discussed much of what I (thought I) had discovered.

Reading the canonical texts of the Harvard School, one notices that these authors are responding primarily to what Tennyson called Vergil’s “sadness at the doubtful doom of human kind.” Most people would (unless I am greatly mistaken) consider me a fairly cheerful person; I believe I hear these sorrowful strains in Vergil, not in spite of my own optimism, but because of it. It can therefore be somewhat frustrating to be caught up indirectly in ideological disputes alien to my actual concerns. Consider the end of the Introduction to my *Aeneid* book (Dyson 2001: 24–25):⁴

Mine is a dark reading of the poem. I do not believe, however, that the *Aeneid*’s darkness lies primarily in criticism of Augustus, or in vilification of Aeneas (representing the Roman conqueror) and idealization of Turnus (representing the conquered). If anything, my interpretation emphasizes that both men—all men, perhaps—are victims of the inscrutable and inexorable anger of the gods.

Or of my longest article: “Readers engaging the perennial question of how far the *Aeneid* is anti-Augustan may find it fruitful to consider how far it is anti-Jovian—whether the true terror of the *Aeneid* is not the triumph of Juno, but the triumph of Jupiter” (Hejduk 2009: 323). Or of my essay on (inter alia) Dante’s reading of the *Aeneid*, describing the heartbreaking moment when Dante-pilgrim, gazing at last upon Paradise, looks back to find that Vergil—his Eurydice—has vanished (*Purg.* 30.49–54): “His loss of the beatific vision is not a judgment on Virgil’s soul; it is a comment on Virgil’s poem” (Hejduk 2013: 78). If the “bias” behind sentences like these is as evident to others as it is to me, it should be clear that politics, whether American or Roman, has little to do with it.

The Reflections in this volume provide unique insights, from some of Vergil’s best modern readers, into why they read him the way they do.⁵

⁴ In 2006, after 17 years of marriage, Julia Taussig Dyson took her husband’s last name and became Julia Dyson Hejduk (with apologies for any bibliographic consternation this may have caused).

⁵ Aside from cosmetic trivia like regularizing citations and providing translations, I have done my best to allow the authors of the Reflections to speak in their own words,

To attempt to summarize these poignant personal testimonies would be hubristic, so I offer only the tiniest teasers here. There are affectionate tributes to great teachers and scholars: Brooks Otis, “the last Titan before the Olympian takeover of Virgilian studies” (Briggs); Jackson Knight (“JK”), with his white gloves, bow tie, and monocle (Clark); Wendell Clausen, who talked about Vergil “as if he knew him personally” (Clauss); Agnes Michels (“Nan”), with her “implicit advice, that we read and remember everything and cherish every moment spent with our most beloved authors and teachers” (Farrell). We hear the British Embassy peacocks scream as croquet mallet connects with ball on the lawn of the nascent Center for Hellenic Studies (Stahl). We glimpse the landscape everywhere from Cambridge, Massachusetts (Weber, Zetzel), Berkeley (Johnson), and Oxford (Martindale) in the 1960s to Ann Arbor (Thomas) and Dublin (Kennedy) in the 1970s to Pisa (Casali) in the 1980s. There are discussions of “Harvard School” readings of Vergil throughout his reception history (Harrison, Kallendorf). Some see the Harvard School as “the best thing that has happened to Vergil reception since Dante” (Perkell), others as “subjective wishfulness” (Powell) and a source of “disbelief, mirth, and muffled pity” (Galinsky). And these Reflections abound in incisive observations: “Virgil is as ruthless toward his reader’s peace of mind as is his victorious champion” (Putnam); “The irreducible plurality of voices in the *Aeneid* can be read either in rhythm with or against the grain of its age’s authorized messages about power and identity” (Reed); “These are complex characters in real-life scenarios, not allegories in barren landscapes, and their decisions and choices are enriched by indecision and doubt” (Spence); “In poetry as in politics, adherence to a single belief system or school is always tempting and always wrong” (Wiltshire); “By a mild paradox the essays were old-fashioned in form because in content they were timeless, and it is because they are timeless that they remain essential still” (Jenkyns).

As the preceding paragraph or a glance at the titles may suggest, some of the Reflections have a bit of an edge to them. Yet the very

including their spelling of the poet’s name. Since the ancient spelling was *Vergilius*, “Virgil” has an unimpeachable claim. On the other hand, “Virgil” derives ultimately from ancient puns and etymologies, some involving his “virginal” personality, others a *virga*, “rod” or “branch”: his mother dreamed about a laurel branch during pregnancy, and a poplar *virga* planted at his birthplace was said to have grown into a huge tree. On the many factors involved in this sometimes heated controversy, see Ziolkowski 2014.

sharpness of the disagreements, ironically, reveals a deeper unity. The contributors to this volume have all spent a considerable portion of their lives reading a long poem written in Latin over two thousand years ago, in the belief that it has something vital to offer. Aeneas and Dido, Turnus and Mezentius and Camilla, have become for us real people, friends and enemies who inhabit our imaginations and stir our emotions no less—often more—than the ones with whom we exchange daily pleasantries. The arguments over what Vergil stands for sometimes seem less like the defense of an intellectual proposition than the defense of a homeland. Though I could hardly expect that the present volume would hasten an end to academic civil war, I can at least hope that it may contribute, for our poet's sake, to a better understanding of both sides.

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