



PROJECT MUSE®

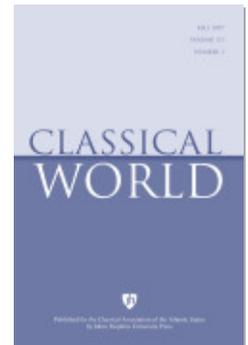
Response to Pandey and Torlone, with Brief Remarks on the
Harvard School

James J. O'Hara

Classical World, Volume 111, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 47-52 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2017.0064>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/676932>

Response to Pandey and Torlone, with Brief Remarks on the Harvard School

JAMES J. O'HARA

My contribution is a hybrid; I was the respondent to the four good papers in our January 2016 panel and will begin by including some of those remarks here, on the two printed in this volume, but then end with brief, largely autobiographical reflections of my own on the Harvard School.

Nandini Pandey's fine paper shows how Vergilian texts, from *Eclogue* 1 through the *Aeneid*, lend themselves to a dialectical interpretation compatible either with the Harvard-School approach or with balancing the Harvard approach with other approaches.¹ Almost half of her paper is on the *Eclogues*, and I'll comment almost exclusively on those sections. Of *Eclogue* 1, Pandey notes that "[t]he music of this poem arises from the counterpoint between the pessimistic Meliboeus, displaced from his land, and the optimistic Tityrus, saved by Octavian. In other words, Vergil's earliest work was already characterized by 'dual voices.'" Her paper nicely shows how *Eclogue* 1 can teach us how to read Vergil, and that what it teaches us is to expect conflicting attitudes and positions, as here we see two characters with a bright future and with a grim future. The pattern of winners and losers set up by the depiction of Tityrus and Meliboeus in *Eclogue* 1 continues with Aristaeus and Orpheus in the *Georgics*, and in the *Aeneid* Aeneas and Dido, and then finally Aeneas and Turnus. My small book on inconsistencies (2007) is one of several works that have argued that many Latin poems offer oppositions like these, because Greek and Latin poets knew that texts tend to fly apart, tend to contain multiple voices, and that they therefore worked with, rather than struggled against, the interesting problems that this produced. More formidably, Conte (2007) has more firmly established these claims for the *Aeneid*. He argues well that "Virgil, the epic poet of

¹ I wrote the entry on "Harvard School" for *The Virgil Encyclopedia* (O'Hara 2014), where I note that "Many works in the 'school' positioned themselves to address an imbalance in scholarship, and most good critics today work with an amalgam of approaches that takes into account the darker and brighter aspects of Virgil."

pathos, learned from them [i.e., from ‘the great dramatic poets’] how to grant space to those individual voices, making himself their witness and their champion” (34) and that “for Virgil . . . destabilizing the meaning of his text by fuelling it with internal contradictions is a genuine strategy of composition, a strategy by which the ‘ambiguous’ manner of Greek tragedy infects the language of epic” (161).

Pandey nicely analyzes *Eclogue* 9.44–50, where Lycidas quotes an earlier song by Moeris about Daphnis and Caesar, which recalls and recontextualizes *Eclogue* 5’s lamentation for Daphnis, which “becomes highly ironic in the context of Moeris’ current plight as a refugee.” She notes that “Moeris’ grandsons, unlike Daphnis’ (50), will emphatically *not* be able to harvest the pears he planted.” I offer the reminder that *Eclogue* 9.50, *insere, Daphni, piros: carpent tua poma nepotes* (“graft pears, Daphnis, your grandsons will pluck your fruit”), echoes Meliboeus’ words in *Eclogue* 1.73, who on his way out of town sarcastically and bitterly says *insere nunc, Meliboe, piros, pone ordine vitis* (“graft pears now, Meliboeus, place vines in order”). Meliboeus knows he will get no benefit from his careful grafting and viticulture. *Eclogue* 9 reprises not only some concerns of *Eclogue* 5, but also some of the issues of *Eclogue* 1. *Eclogue* 1 tells us that somebody has had their farm or their ability to farm saved. *Eclogue* 9 almost cancels that out: we might paraphrase, “Didn’t the poet save the day?” “No, that’s what we thought, but that’s not true.”

In Pandey’s approach to *Eclogue* 9 I also see possible insight into the *Fourth Eclogue*. That poem offers a gloriously optimistic prophecy, with a dramatic date of 40 BCE, about the birth of a wonder child and the wonderful age to follow. But what happens if we recontextualize this poem in exactly the same way that *Eclogue* 9 recontextualizes earlier songs, and put it in a collection of poems in 38 or 37 or 35, when everyone knows both that neither Antony nor Octavian had a son, and that the Peace of Brundisium did not work out?²

My one micro-comment on the *Aeneid*: given discussion of Aeneas’ reading of the temple of Juno by Pandey and many others, I suggest that when we see Aeneas interpreting the Fall of Troy in book 2 we should remember what it was like when he interpreted the temple of Juno.³

² I’ve suggested this briefly in print a couple of times (1990: 179 and 1996: 332–35). A similar argument about Horace, *Satire* 1.5 is made by Reckford 1999.

³ On Aeneas’ narrative, see Seider 2013: 101–11, 121–25, and my review, O’Hara 2014a. Later in the spring of 2016 I had the pleasure of taking part in a first-book seminar

Zara Torlone's fine paper on "the *Aeneid* in Russian Letters" supplements her book (2015), which admirably explains for both specialists and non-specialists how Russian authors of various periods used Vergil and the Roman Empire. Like her book, Torlone's paper, which does not overlap with her book much, is also clear and informative as well as being analytical; I offer comments as a nonspecialist. My first observation is that Russian readers of Vergil differ from contemporary Augustan readers because they know that Augustus is the first of many emperors who would rule for hundreds of years—many hundreds of years in the East. So the Russians are responding not just to Vergil, but to Vergil and the whole history of empire: the *Aeneid* recontextualized by later history. The pattern is like that suggested above for the recontextualization of *Eclogue* 4 and the songs quoted in *Eclogue* 9, except over a much longer period of time, and for a period of time that in this case involves success (for the most part) rather than failure.

Two things that I enjoyed about this paper are that I got to read poems I did not know, some of which are hard to find in English, and Torlone's discussion of the reception of Dido. Torlone talks about how Pushkin's "diminutive epic *Bronze Horseman*" (a poem the size of a book of the *Georgics*, which I had not read until now, and of course have only read in English) "has the unusual quality of simultaneously lauding the vision and the will of Peter while treating his victim compassionately." This victim, the "hero" of the poem who becomes homeless and dies, gets much of the attention. Here I can't help but think not just of the *Aeneid* but of *Eclogue* 1, as discussed by Pandey and others, both because the *Bronze Horseman* is "diminutive," and because of how that *Eclogue* praises the *iuvenis* who has saved Tityrus' way of life, even as it portrays in detail the suffering of Meliboeus, and implicitly that of other victims of the land confiscations. I think too of Dido and Aeneas, and of *Aeneid* 8, which both looks towards the glory and gold of Augustan Rome, and expresses admiration for the simplicity of Evander's Rome. But I can't suggest that Pushkin was influenced by any of these.

There is much in Torlone's paper and in her book that Vergilians could use when teaching or writing about either the reception of Dido, or just *Aeneid* 4 itself. It's fascinating to read about how in the

in Madison in which two external and several internal scholars discussed a book manuscript related to Pandey's paper.

eighteenth century two different Russian authors, one playwright and one translator, show “their shared interest in the figure of Dido as the *dux femina facti*, a female monarch with a strong grip on her power, an image of herself that Catherine [the Great] was trying to perpetuate at the time.” That Dido could serve as a model for Catherine the Great, despite how she ends up in the *Aeneid*, tells us something about the different ways in which the Dido story can be read and used. And more recently, Brodsky’s use of Aeneas and Dido provides fascinating takes on *Aeneid* 4. Brodsky’s *Dido and Aeneas* and *Ischia in October* would both be great texts to put in front of students reading the *Aeneid* either in English or in Latin.

Brief comments now on the Harvard School. I began my response to the panel by observing that the so-called Harvard School is a varied, unruly group, whose unofficial members have staked out a variety of nuanced positions, and sometimes have even changed their positions over the years. I also noted that our four speakers and panel organizer were women, which would not have required comment except that it is so different from the first decade or two of the Harvard School, which featured few women, in fact mainly (but not exclusively) two independent-thinking quasi-members, Sara Mack, my Chapel Hill emerita colleague, and Christine Perkell, my colleague in the Vergilian Society that sponsored this panel and in the ongoing Focus/Hackett *Aeneid* commentary project.⁴

I then said the following: “I’d like to mention here my own first contact with Harvard. I spent the summer after my first year of graduate school not in Ann Arbor but at my parents’ house in a Boston suburb, and one thing I did that summer was to work for ten days at minimum wage doing inventory at Harvard’s bookstore, the Coop. Naturally as I worked there I could feel my worldview darken, overcome by pessimism, ambivalence, and a kind of gloom which I could not quite put into words. The Coop is of course not actually on the campus, but in Harvard Square, but no doubt these dark feelings came from my being so close to the Harvard classics department. . . .”

This story is mostly true, although right after that summer I took my first course with my future dissertation advisor, Harvard Ph.D.

⁴ Consider also S. Scheinberg, Harvard Ph.D. (1981), who published her dissertation as Kristol 1990.

(1966) David O. Ross, Jr. After meeting David, I realized he had taught my Vergil teacher at Boston College High School, Thomas Tighe, S.J. In my undergraduate years at Holy Cross I read Horace with Rev. Greg Carlson, S.J. (who had done a Vergil dissertation with Victor Pöschl at Heidelberg) and the *Aeneid* with religion scholar and Greek epigrapher Rev. Robert Healey, S.J., Harvard Ph.D. (1961). These three Jesuit Vergilians, two teaching me Vergil, one Horace, promoted a varied and open-minded approach that involved the rigorous critical thinking and logical argumentation characteristic of the Jesuits. Fr. Healey concentrated on religion, love of Italy, and Vergil's Latin. Fr. Carlson encouraged original thought and careful text-based arguments about the relationship between Horace and Augustus, and he gave precise comments on many short papers. Mr. Tighe (he was ordained as a priest later) taught me something about the darker approach to Vergil, but more about taking an Alexandrian approach to Vergil, influenced as much by Clausen's "Callimachus and Latin Poetry" (1964a) as by his "Interpretation." One aspect of the complexity of my training is that one day in high school I was struck deeply by Tighe's claim that the *Aeneid* teaches that sometimes you just cannot avoid war. Before that day, although the Vietnam War had ended and made it a moot point, I was full of Thoreau and the Gospels and various antiwar poems and might have qualified as pacifist, a person with the belief that war is always wrong. I was still pacifist-ish, but studying Vergil with a student of David Ross made me not a real pacifist.

I have not yet seen the Reflections by various members and non-members of the Harvard School. I hope that they give an idea of the range of views on various issues taken by scholars associated with the School, including seeing in various Vergilian passages optimism, pessimism, ambivalence; hope for Augustus, and worry that he would not succeed; support for Augustus, but worry about the changes that he was bringing; opposition either to Augustus or to some of his ideas and policies; or a pessimism about human life that extends far beyond thoughts of Augustus. The belief that "two voices" were present in the poems in a stable hierarchy, or that the poems would yield one correct view on any issue, has I hope largely yielded to a view that sees both multiple voices and considerable burden on the reader to make sense of how they interact. The move could be described as one from "which is the correct view of this poem?" to "which readings do details of this poem encourage?" This change came about, I think, in part because of scholars within and

outside of classics teaching us how to read texts better, but also because of the close reading, attention to intertextuality, and appreciation of Hellenistic models encouraged by the Harvard School.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAPEL HILL
jimohara@unc.edu