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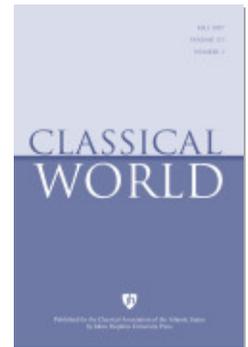
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Classical World, Volume 111, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 53-55 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2017.0065>



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What the Harvard School Has Taught Me

WARD W. BRIGGS

My chief contact with the Harvard School came during two periods of my career: the preparation of my dissertation and my editorship of *Vergilius*.

My *Doktorvater* was Brooks Otis, the last Titan before the Olympian takeover of Virgilian studies. His gifts as a close and sensitive reader of texts demonstrated (starting from Richard Heinze) Virgil's unique "subjective style," and showed the consistent development of thought and style throughout the poet's oeuvre as no one else has since; yet he is forever tainted by chronologically mischaracterizing, in his last published work on Virgil, Michael Putnam's Aeneas as "a product not of the Augustan poet but of the Vietnam war and the New Left" (Otis 1976: 27). Gordon Williams was perhaps more accurate to associate those who imagine Virgil as anti-Augustan with the general anti-war sentiment that had grown up since the end of World War II (Williams 1982: 2).

The Otis I knew was a committed Christian and a devout New Dealer, and since he believed in a beneficent deity and that government could improve the lives of its citizens, even if it took necessary wars to do so, he saw Virgil in much the same light, as, in his phrase, "a convinced Augustan." Vietnam was very much on the minds of us in his classroom in 1970, but he and others of our teachers who stood in sympathy with the protesters on Franklin Street every Monday nevertheless reminded us that pacifism in our sense was simply unknown in the societies we were studying and war was the accepted norm, not the fleeting interludes of peace.

Though Otis was an encouraging teacher, he liked to remind us that no one under the age of forty ("fifty preferably") has anything new or meaningful to say about Virgil, a view eminently disproven by Joe Farrell, our Richard Heinze, as well as a host of other tringintarians of my generation. Having revered the first wave of the Harvard School, I came to know and admire their successors: Charlie Segal, David Ross, Tony Boyle, and the Keeper of the Flame, Richard Thomas. (Apologies to all those I leave out for reasons of space.) They were close readers and generally of the political left, in general opposed to the Vietnam War. It was clear to me that our shared reaction to Nixon and his subalterns

contributed to our reading of the *Aeneid*, just as Otis's experience of Roosevelt contributed to his. In the heated political climate of the time, even pristinely liberal scholars writing positively about Virgil's Augustanism in the 1970s and 1980s became suspect, not just academically but politically.

This was driven home to me during my ten-year editorship of *Vergilius*. I quickly regretted being reluctantly cast into the politicized world of Virgilian scholarship, for which the fervor of the second wave of the Harvard School was largely responsible. I had real difficulty getting positive reader's reports on contributions that diverted from the party line and in several cases I overruled the readers, to their fulminating fury. I must, however, say at once that despite some minor policy disagreements I have never encountered more loyal or ethical colleagues than Richard Thomas, John Miller, and Jim O'Hara, who all defended me in my final editorial crisis.

When I consider the Neoptolemi on the fringes of the newest generation of the Harvard School, I am reminded of a commonplace of my graduate days. Study of the Homeric formulae, so brilliantly and courageously undertaken by Milman Parry in the 1920s, had in the 1960s been reduced to the absurdity of "formula by analogy," in which any single word could be a "formula," a preposterous notion exploded by a real poet and a majestic Hellenist, Douglas Young, in *Arion* in 1967. It was commonly said then that the problem with American Homeric studies was that we had Milman Parry while the Germans had Wolfgang Schadewaldt.

No one would diminish Parry's contributions any more than one would deny that the first wave of the Harvard School, such as "Rab" Brooks, Adam Parry, Wendell Clausen, and Michael Putnam (apologies again to those I have left out), permanently enlarged our understanding of Virgil's art and thought. By the time Ralph Johnson came to give the school its moniker, in 1976, the flickering dark-and-bright torch of Virgilian ambiguity (I always preferred "ambivalence") was passed from one generation to another, then to another.

As time went by the articles I refereed, books I reviewed, and papers I endured seemed less and less about the Virgil I knew and more about a confused, uncertain, and finally utterly facetious author who could be relied on usually to mean the opposite of what he said. At this point, it seemed that a kind of Parryitis had arrived in this branch of Virgilian studies and deconstructed itself to nearly self-referential parody. While

interesting and creative work on Virgil and his reception will continue to be produced by those literally and associatively from the Harvard School, it finally occurred to me that interpreting Virgil would probably best be a private pursuit.

So what have I learned from the Harvard School?

- 1) A great deal about Virgil's language, control of imagery and episodic structure that was new and important;
- 2) That every movement over time seeks preeminence until it feeds on its own extremes, despite the ability and intentions of its founders, and can in a matter of decades devolve into a kind of tyranny and then ultimately to absurdity;
- 3) That every interpretation arises from two life experiences, the artist's and the reader's. We all suffer the fatal flaw of not being first-century BCE Romans and must finally take from Virgil what our own knowledge and life experience allows us.

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Elective Affinities: The Harvard School at Pisa at the End of the Eighties

SERGIO CASALI

The first book I read on Vergil was G. B. Conte's *Virgilio* (1984). In 1988 I was about to face the entrance examination to the Scuola Normale of Pisa, and Conte was one of the examiners; afterwards, he was my tutor both at the Normale and at the University of Pisa. What impressed me most and had a profound influence on my reading of the *Aeneid* were his pages on the "polycentrism that fractures the epic norm into a series of relative truths, all with their special values and points of view," to borrow words from Putnam's very positive review of Conte's book (Putnam 1987: 790). "The coexistence of the worlds of Aeneas, Dido, Turnus, Mezentius, and Juturna springs from the fact that Vergil allows each of them an autonomous, personal *raison d'être* which the historico-epic norm had always denied" (Conte 1986: 157 = 1984: 71).