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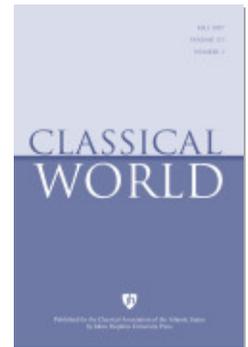
## Reflections of an Infidel

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years before mine, has done the best job of capturing the poem's delicate equilibrium between these opposite perspectives, and that several years later Monica Gale (2000) made an excellent contribution by considering the topic in terms pretty closely aligned with my own, but more explicitly attuned to the optimist versus pessimist debate. I did not go in that direction, but instead tried to apply intertextual analysis to a certain number of literary-historical problems that seemed to me to converge on the *Georgics* more powerfully than on any other Latin poem. What I knew at that time about intertextual poetics I had learned, not exclusively but in large part, from the writings of Clausen and, especially, of those he influenced, Ross above all, as I tried to spell out in the introduction to that book (1991: 3–25).<sup>1</sup> I did not use the phrase Harvard School to identify these scholars. Whether I have used it since, I do not know—frankly, it did not seem worth the time to check—and in light of the recollections that the very welcome invitation to reflect upon the Harvard School and its influence has provoked, I suspect that I will use it in the future, if indeed I ever do, in the same rather ambivalent way that I have used it here.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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## Reflections of an Infidel

KARL GALINSKY

Here is my basic take: The Harvard School was an overdue reaction against the long-standing view that the *Aeneid* was a paean on the Augustan “Golden Age” (as in Robert Graves’s entertaining polemic on “The Virgil Cult” [1962]), a perspective that was exacerbated by Syme (1939), who portrayed the Augustan poets as craven mouthpieces of a

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, as I note in the preface to that book (ix), Richard Thomas generously read the book in manuscript form and offered a number of very helpful comments, for which I remain grateful. I am also happy to acknowledge how much that book owed to the work of G. N. Knauer (1964), who remains at age 90 as much an optimist as it is possible to be, though (I believe) his method can be applied in a variety of ways. In view of these very different sources of inspiration (and I have made no effort to make a complete list), I suppose I would have to admit that my youthful eclecticism has never left me.

proto-Fascist regime. Surely, Vergil deserved a closer look and had to be rescued especially from the latter charge. With missionary zeal, therefore, the Harvard School turned things around by 180 degrees. Converting received notions into their opposites, however, does not ipso facto result in a widening of horizons—the box is simply turned upside down. The problem with the Harvard School, then, was that it got stuck in that groove (sorry for mixing metaphors) and constructed a dualistic world (and facile dichotomies are a staple not just of political discourse): if you were critical of any of the Harvard School's tenets—the phenomenon definitely took on the shape of doctrine—you perforce were a defender of the old order. Both Vergilian and interpretive realities, of course, could not be so easily harnessed, and what we have seen in recent years is a much wider spectrum of inquiry and exploration, especially of the *Aeneid*, from many different aspects: history, poetic nuance, intertextuality, contemporary Roman values and ethical philosophies, the construction of cultural memory, and more. Would this have happened without the Harvard School's role in breaking away from the previous schema? Probably, but it would have taken a somewhat different path.

For one of the curious things about the Harvard School was that it kept clinging fiercely to much of the previous baggage. So far from being jettisoned, mantras like Aeneas being on a self-improvement journey from *furor* to *pietas* (I'm being lighthearted: the postulate again was laden with serious Christianizing) and the *Aeneid*'s presumed Stoicism became cornerstones in the heavy moralizing (always dear to academe) about the failure of Aeneas, reflecting Vergil's dim view of Augustus and Rome. Dearth Aeneas won—Julus, I am your father.

The message was as heavy as the underlying methodology was light, a dynamic that is not unusual. Rooted in the Old South's parting gift to literary criticism, the New Criticism (which, again not untypically, already was showing its age when it was discovered by Latinists) was swiftly routinized especially by recourse to verbal repetitions: *furor* was simply the same thing no matter where it occurred. Contextual differences and the kind of intratextual nuances that are a staple of Vergil's poetic technique were flattened out in the process. Matching this streamlined approach to complex poetry, the corollary armature of choice became as simplistic as it was binary, hence the unceasing prayer wheel of "optimism" versus "pessimism" and "pro-" and "anti-Augustan." These were easy schemas to buy into and copy and therefore found eager practitioners who were unconcerned about the insularity of the phenomenon. Take optimism versus pessimism: for what other major classical

and later authors did banalities of this sort become a dominant *modus interpretandi*? Homer? Sophocles? Dante? Their works certainly could be interpreted in these terms, but for good reason they are not. It's not just that critical ambition should be made of sterner stuff; in due course, the reaction outside the cocoon of Harvard School exceptionalism, especially in other lands than the U.S., was a mix of disbelief, mirth, and muffled pity: "Are they *still* peddling that line?," I would get asked at European conferences and the like.

As for pro- and anti-Augustan, the picture is the same: you don't find this sort of reductionism in other areas of Augustan scholarship, be it social history, art, architecture, religion, or whatever. The well-recognized reason is that we are dealing with multi-layered phenomena of which Augustan poetry, and Vergil most of all, is certainly a part. Semantic reasons may have played a role as "ambiguity" became the favorite shortcut to the poetic meaning that was sought. Rooted as it is in *ambo*, it connoted dualism, while non-English practitioners would use terms like *vielschichtig* and *vieldeutig* or speak of *sfumature*—more shades of meaning were involved than two: compare Servius' (certainly not the greatest interpretive highflyer) characterization of the *Aeneid*'s first verb, *cano*, as *polysemus sermo* and the topical use of "polysemous" in connection with Augustan art and architecture. The Harvard School, however, and its acolytes went a different route: just as it was enough to say "ambiguity" and be satisfied with the resplendent aura of a new discovery, so certain auratic keywords effloresced, "disquieting" and "disturbing" being among the favorites. The overuse of these and similar tropes at times verged on (involuntary) self-parody.

But, as I said at the beginning, maybe we should give the Harvard School credit for initiating this phase, imperfect as it seems in retrospect (and some renegades opted out of conversion to the new faith from the start), for in due course it led to the next evolutionary step: first the monism of the triumphalist tradition, then the dualism of the Harvard School, and now a world of multiple perspectives. To believers in *zeitgeist*, the parallels with the changing configuration of global power may look striking: first American post-World War II hegemony, then a world of two superpowers, and now a multipolar one. More importantly, the defects of the Harvard School were all too obvious and have been in the process of being addressed in various ways. Even without deconstructionism, great texts ask for multiple responses that can be influenced by the experience with our times without imposing anachronistic notions. It is a truism that the *Aeneid*, even at the time it was composed, was much

richer than being one- or two-dimensional; this applies to its relation to Homer (too many Vergilian scholars still traffic in outdated Homeric stereotypes), its examination of values (unsurprisingly, the most knowledgeable discussions of *pietas* or *ultio*, for instance, are currently found in scholarship not on Vergil but on the Augustan Forum), its historical setting (the twenties were only the beginning of the Augustan reign, with uncertainties galore), the variety of philosophical orientations (good progress has been made on the connection of Vergil and Epicureanism), and the taking shape of a Mediterranean *oikoumenē*.

The fact that much of American Vergilian scholarship stayed mired too long in a pro- or con- Harvard School environment probably contributed to channeling more worthwhile attention to post-Augustan epic, with good results. The exciting prospect is that Vergilian studies now are more open than ever—*nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri*<sup>2</sup>—and many aspects of Vergil’s poetry remain to be explored in a fresh way, whether textual, intertextual, intratextual, or contextual. A helpful perspective, which I have used in teaching both undergraduates and graduates, is this: Vergil is one of the most deliberate composers ever (average some three lines a day). For every word, every phrase, every line, every episode, as well as for larger units, including the overall design, there were alternatives. If you don’t like one of above—maybe because you find it “disquieting” or “disturbing” (although more precise criteria are called for)—what would you have done? But mainly, WDVD (What Did Vergil Do) and, more importantly, why?

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## A Voyage Around the Harvard School

STEPHEN J. HARRISON

When I arrived at Oxford as an undergraduate to study classics in 1978, it was only a few years after the Harvard School had been so baptized by Ralph Johnson in *Darkness Visible* (1976). I had the great fortune to

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<sup>2</sup> “Bound to swear allegiance to no master” (Hor. *Ep.* 1.1.14).