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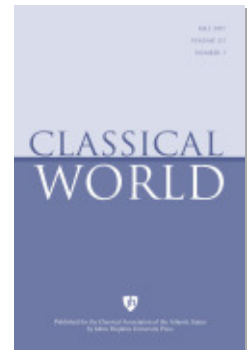
## On The Harvard School Forty Years After

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old-fashioned in form because in content they were timeless, and it is because they are timeless that they remain essential still.

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## On The Harvard School Forty Years After

W. R. JOHNSON

It was in the senior year of Latin that I first encountered Virgil's epic (books 1, 2, 4, 6), which was then regarded as an allegorical imitation of Homer, a poem in which a court poet of genius celebrated Augustus, savior of Rome and its empire. Since our main concerns were with syntax, scansion, and vocabulary, we spent little time considering what the poem might mean. Its hero, Aeneas, patriotic and brave, if somewhat dull, founded the city that his heir would save from destruction and, along with its empire, would preserve for the ages. What could be more transparent than that?

Almost a decade later, after a few years of service in the army, while doing graduate work in classics at Berkeley, I met with Virgil's epic again. This time I read the poem from cover to cover and taught it in translation in survey courses. Now, I quickly discovered that I and the poem and the times had changed. Its hero was now, though still loyal and courageous, ambiguous and conflicted, and the allegory he enacted was enigmatic and dim (an impression that the second half of the poem magnified). What had happened? I was reading the poem in the Berkeley of the Free Speech Movement, Civil Rights marches, Vietnam War protests, and Reagan's governance. This situation of discourse did nothing to help solve the problem I was having with the *Aeneid*.

What helped me was coming upon the writers I was a decade later to name the Harvard School, and what helped me in particular was the book by Michael Putnam (1965).

It was not until years after *Darkness Visible* that I began to see that members of my School (along with Robert Lowell and Robert Fitzgerald) had been reading the *Aeneid* during another, earlier period of disruption, the late 1940s and early 1950s: Hiroshima, the Cold War, the

Korean War, the McCarthy era, the threat of nuclear war, various intimations of the American Empire, and, in another key, the New Criticism.

(In my late teens and early twenties I had been experiencing, dimly, the same phenomena, but I was not then trying to wrestle with the meanings of Virgil's epic. For a modern instance of this situation of discourse, consider how different receptions of *Heart of Darkness*, throughout the last century, center on the dialectic of imperialism, its ambiguities, its triumphs and its failures.)

I learned later that over the centuries, usually in periods of unusual disruption, the transparencies of the courtly epic are replaced by ambiguity, irony, and paradox (see Thomas 2001). Different cultures and different people read their classics differently. How and why they find their places on the spectrum of reception—with transparencies at one end and ambivalences at the other—is a complicated, mysterious affair. Doubtless shifts in ideology play some role here (though perhaps not as much as I think); but what is certain is: the poem's transparencies are not as secure as Augustus hoped they would be or as his partisans believe them to be. As Lucan neatly put it: *sed par quod semper habemus / Libertas et Caesar erit* ("But Liberty and Caesar will be a gladiatorial pair that we always have" (*BC* 7. 695–696).

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## The Harvard School and the Problem of History

CRAIG KALLENBORG

To start, my title requires a word of explanation. One of the better arguments in favor of the validity of the Harvard School approach is the vigor with which its tenets have been attacked over the last couple of generations. I will leave most aspects of this dispute to others, but I want to confront head-on one of the strongest arguments against the Harvard School perspective: If some sort of deep-seated pessimism is a driving force in Vergilian poetry, why did it take nearly two millennia for critics to identify it and insist on its importance? In other words, is the lack of