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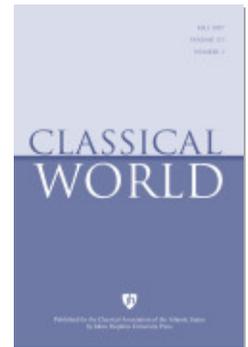
The Harvard School and the Problem of History

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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

a tradition of pessimistic interpretation not proof that these critics are simply reading their own modern cynicism back into Vergil's poetry?

This is a legitimate question that deserves a carefully researched and well-thought-out answer. Most of us would agree that it is at least possible that it might take centuries before someone is able to respond to an aspect of a work of literature that is in fact there: a good example is the Vergilian foundation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which was not recognized until around the same time as the Harvard School began to coalesce, but which is now generally accepted as an important aspect of the play (Hamilton 1990; James 1997; Tudeau-Clayton 1998). But if the pessimistic approach to the *Aeneid* in fact sprang fully formed from the head of some hermeneutic Zeus at the end of the twentieth century, then at the very least some significant skepticism would be justified.

To be sure, some cracks in the optimistic edifice clearly precede the rise of the Harvard School. Nicholas Horsfall, who is certainly no pessimist, has noted that key elements of its approach can be found in essays from the twenties, thirties, and forties by E. Adelaide Hahn, C. M. Bowra, and W. F. Jackson Knight (Horsfall 1995: 192n8; Hahn 1925; Bowra 1933; Knight 1944: 299–328), but that just pushes the objection back a couple of generations. An often-quoted passage from Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 5.10.9) that challenges Aeneas's piety strikes me as relevant (Wlosok 1983: 63–68), but there is a lot of ground between Lactantius and the twentieth century, and anyway one passage does not constitute a tradition.

In an important book that opened the door to a real answer to this problem, Richard Thomas (2001) argued that the pessimistic interpretation has its roots in antiquity, and that efforts to buttress an optimistic reading can be found in John Dryden's influential 1697 translation; in nineteenth-century philology's revision and excision of disquieting passages; and in the responses of advocates and opponents of twentieth-century fascism. This is beginning to look like a tradition, and since Thomas's book appeared, a number of other scholars have worked to identify similar responses in other eras. Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr., for example, has argued that the ending of Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which was a bestseller in its day, replays the ending of the *Aeneid* in all its ambiguity and complexity (Sitterson 1992). I have argued elsewhere that the long-obscured Vergilian foundation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* challenges an optimistic reading of the *Aeneid* by presenting a world in which lust and anger always lurk below the surface and threaten

to overwhelm reason, compassion, and forgiveness at any moment. In a similar way, I believe that a nuanced reading of *Paradise Lost* against the *Aeneid* reveals a poem in which the reader is initially deceived into identifying Satan with Aeneas, but should then settle on Adam as the new Aeneas who, like his model, allowed passion to invert his priorities temporarily and must then head out into the world knowing that success will, eventually, always be accompanied by failure (Kallendorf 2007: 102–26, 138–69).

All three of these examples are from vernacular literature, so the skeptic could argue that these interpretations may be correct but the Latin tradition is different from the vernacular one. To this objection I would offer two responses. The first centers on two efforts to complete the *Aeneid* in the fifteenth century, one by Maffeo Vegio and the other by Pier Candido Decembrio. Vegio's supplement, which was printed dozens of times up into the eighteenth century, at first seems to reinforce an optimistic reading of the poem by making explicit the plot developments that Vergil had suggested within a binary reading that drove home Aeneas' *pietas* and Turnus' *dementia* and *furor*. But if Vergil's moral world were really black and white, why would a supplement be necessary to eliminate the shades of gray? Decembrio's supplement is in some ways even more interesting. It is written from the perspective of Turnus, who is described as *magnanimus*, and the Rutulians, who are presented as praiseworthy patriots. This looks as if it could evolve into a full-blown pessimistic reading, but interestingly, Decembrio never got past verse 89 and the work survives in only one manuscript (Eckmann 2002). The second response centers around Marco Girolamo Vida's *Christiad*, an epic poem from the sixteenth century that went through more than three dozen editions in its day. Bartolomeo Botta, who wrote a commentary to the *Christiad*, explains that Vida wrote his poem to counter the seductive enticements of its Vergilian model, which drew its readers toward the impiety of idols and the perniciousness of lust. There is no cheery optimism behind this interpretation.

Our skeptic could complain next that all these examples come from the milieu of imaginative literature, and that as with all literary texts, other interpretations are possible, so we really have not established much of anything so far. Fair enough; so let us turn to some more straightforward Vergilian commentary. In his *De morali disciplina*, Francesco Filelfo dismisses Aristotle's doctrine of just anger and argues that anger should never be associated with bravery. Filelfo can only look in bewilderment

at the final scene of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas should have presented himself so that he could be praised for his piety but gives in completely to his anger. Giovanni Pontano takes the next step in his *De fortitudine* and focuses on Aeneas' opponents, especially Turnus. Turnus, Pontano writes, is a *vir fortis*, a virtuous man, one who shows how bravery can be preserved by controlling anger (Kallendorf 2007: 37–48). The ambiguity being set up here is developed at length in the commentary on the last scene of the *Aeneid* that was written by Juan Luis de la Cerda, whose three-million-word Vergilian commentary was considered authoritative during the seventeenth century and was known, and used, by John Milton. La Cerda develops a reading of the last scene that unfolds within the categories of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Epic, which is similar to tragedy in its key aspects, often rests on the actions of two heroes rather than one, both of whom are exemplary. Vergil, La Cerda writes, understood this and made both men heroes who were brave, noble, and magnanimous. Aeneas has other attributes as well, like *pietas* and *iustitia*, so that his killing Turnus does not offend our sense of justice (Kallendorf 2009), but there is a sense of tragedy and excessive loss in this interpretation that would satisfy anyone in the Harvard School.

The line of reasoning developed here was taken up in the next century by Thomas Cooke, who is certainly not one of the shining lights in the firmament of Vergilian commentators: in fact, his commentary was only printed twice, and both editions are extremely rare today, which tells us something about their impact. Nevertheless, in light of the present discussion, Cooke's comments on *Aeneid* 12.952 merit quotation in full:

We have been thro a poem that is one of the noblest monuments of the genius of the antients: it is a diamond, but not without flaws. . . . *Aeneas* asserted his claim to the *Italian* dominions as promised him by the gods, and fixed by fate: *Turnus* disputed his title very justly, for the other is a claim that any man may make. *Turnus* was guilty of no disobedience to the divine will. . . . [T]hey who read the *Aeneis* with taste and reason send their wishes along with *Turnus*, because he was right in his opposition, and because *Aeneas's* title from heaven was not half so good as *Turnus's* right of inheritance from his father *Daunus*.

(Cooke 1741: 454; Kallendorf 2015: 37–38)

Surely anyone who has been sensitized to the possibility of ambiguity, other voices, and similar hermeneutic phenomena will acknowledge that these phenomena are audible here.

One can still lodge objections, of course. As David Scott Wilson-Okamura has noted in his *Virgil in the Renaissance*, it is clear that not all the writers cited so far were aware of one another's works (2010: 210–12): Decembrio's supplement was never published; Shakespeare certainly did not read Filelfo; and Cooke's commentary was, and is, genuinely obscure. This makes it difficult on one level to speak of a tradition, at least in the sense that T. S. Eliot used the term (1919). And I would certainly not suggest that these early Harvard School readings were anything other than marginal during the centuries when the optimistic interpretation prevailed. I am also happy to acknowledge that some hesitation about Aeneas' actions is part of any responsible optimistic interpretation of the *Aeneid*, so that by themselves, some of the points discussed above do not prove decisive. But examples could be multiplied in Vergilian scholarship through the twenty-first century, so that in the end, I think it is no longer possible to state categorically that the Harvard School must be wrong because there is no evidence of pessimistic readings prior to the end of the twentieth century. There is, and they are becoming more audible each day as we train ourselves to listen for them. It may well be true that the Harvard School is more congenial to our times than to the past, but that is not to say that this approach to the *Aeneid* is ahistorical, or that the commentators and creative writers of the past never saw the things we think we see in the greatest of ancient Rome's epic poems.

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Voices in Conflict

DUNCAN F. KENNEDY

I first came across the Harvard School as an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin in the early 1970s. While studying the *Aeneid*, I'd come across in the college bookshop a copy of Steele Commager's *Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1966) in Prentice Hall's *Twentieth Century Views* series. I was beginning to develop an interest in mapping literary critical approaches, and Commager's book on Horace's *Odes* had fixed