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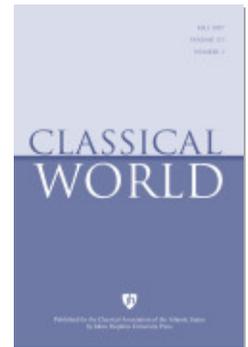
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Virgil, by contrast, offers no relief from Aeneas' final, and finalizing, act of fury. The poet's language would presumably evoke for Augustus, as it does for us, a vision of the damage individual passion can wreak, especially in the hands of someone omnipotent. The theme takes us from the brilliant beginnings of Greek literature to a masterpiece of Latin letters. It remains a constant in much transcendent writing to follow.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Solvuntur Frigore

JAY REED

Twice shaken to my intellectual core, I have lost any confidence about what the “optimism–pessimism” debate means or where I stand within it. In 2007 I published a book-length interpretive study of the construction of Roman identity in the *Aeneid*. A reviewer for *The Claremont Review of Books*, understanding my argument as “deny[ing] all meaning to Roman identity,” turned halfway through to a corrective illustration (“But consider, for example, the poem’s terrible climax . . .”) and took me to task for not addressing the complexities of what amounts to a Put-namesque reading of Aeneas’ slaying of Turnus (Esolen 2007). Several years later, the author of the article on “Critical Theory” for the *Virgil Encyclopedia*, allowing that the “traditional imperialist (pro-Augustan, optimist, code-affirming, etc.) reading [of the *Aeneid*] remains prominent,” cited my book, together with Cairns 1989 and Galinsky 1996, as a specimen of that approach, which she contrasts with the one holding that “two (or more) ‘voices’ (authorially controlled or not) can be detected within Virgil’s texts,” noting that the latter view “seems a fact of his poetics” (Perkell 2014: 317).

It would seem that not only can my reading of the *Aeneid* be understood both as “code-affirming” and as radically anti-determinist (“a deconstructing critic, learned and cold to the end”—so *The Claremont Review*), but, even more surprisingly, that the “Harvard,” “pessimist,” “two-voices” interpretation can actually serve as orthodoxy for scholars coming from quite different critical directions, both of whom can find

my ideas opposed to it: the conservative, basically Christian-humanist reading toward which the *Claremont* review points coalesces—at least through their common foil—with the liberal pluralism advanced by the *Encyclopedia* article. I feel both unable simply to discount either assessment and challenged to sort out and build on the complications of the Harvard School model that their oddly variant, yet oddly consonant, responses raise.

Now, I have never considered that my reading of the poem was inconsistent with the readings of the death of Turnus by, for example, Putnam (1965) and Thomas (1998). I have never imagined that Vergil's poem had a single governing voice. Phrases that first come to my mind, when I try to formulate my response to these questions to students, colleagues, or myself, are those of Johnson decrying black-and-white moral interpretations of the poem's end, mere "ethical melodrama," which "we would find banal in any ephemeral movie" (1976: 115–16); or of S. J. Harrison, reviewing a study of Turnus and Aeneas: "Vergil's iridescent moral canvas does not admit of monochrome reproduction" (1986: 43). My college term paper on the *Aeneid* (for Ralph Hexter in May 1986) read the Gate of False Dreams as a sign that the mission conveyed to Aeneas in the underworld could only dubiously lead to felicity; when I came back to the Gates of Sleep as a professional scholar I maintained a like double awareness (Reed 2001). I think I have always regarded as facts the poem's humane sympathy for victims on both sides and its resistance to any one definitive interpretation.

Perhaps my publications are less Harvard School than I am; but to surmise that my heart is of the Harvard School but my mind is not would be too shallow a response. Rather, something in Vergil's poetics is projecting that division back onto me. The irreducible plurality of voices in the *Aeneid* can be read either in rhythm with or against the grain of its age's authorized messages about power and identity. The Roman identity outlined by Vergil's poetry is not meaningless or void, but contingent and adaptive, capable of easing appropriations of other identities in ways peculiarly congenial to Roman imperialism in its syncretistic, assimilative mode. Where variant Roman voices are concerned, I have often been drawn to the suspicion of Empson (which he attributes to Pope) that "the *Aeneid* was 'political puff'; its dreamy, impersonal, universal melancholy was a calculated support for Augustus" (1935: 1). The ascent through the Gate of False Dreams, following upon Anchises' grief over the death of Marcellus and the mixed story conveyed by the

pageant of heroes, is complicit in a similar quietism or compromise, by reconciling Roman hopes to the Augustan outcome. From a standpoint of “pessimism” this view may look inhumane, as denying a final—certainly an authorial—interpretive value to the losses entailed by Aeneas’ mission, and so also be taken as “optimist” or pro-Augustan.

The various opposites to the “other” voice in Vergil—Roman, imperial, or Augustan ideology—are themselves moving targets. In deciding between our two positions—or in even deciding to read this polarity into Augustan poetry—we are reading one highly contingent trope against another. Augustus, in particular, is always there ahead of us, as rhetorically wily and elusive as his Vergilian proponent, the ghost of Anchises (but I remain skeptical of the oddly definitive *ambiguitas* insisted upon by some “optimists,” for whom Augustus owns that quality, and undecidability tends to decide in his favor). An anti-imperialist or anti-triumphalist reading cannot be generally “anti-Roman,” given the contestations of the Roman program by Romans themselves and the strong, dialogic strain of self-critique visible from at least Cato the Elder on: Vergil’s colonialist discourse meets its own irreducible critique in such passages as the episode of the souls at Lethe, waiting to be Roman (Reed 2007: 171). Moreover, exploiting the relativizing, non-affirmational nature of poetic—and of other—language, Vergil characteristically puts statements about Rome and Roman leaders in the mouths of characters—sometimes in quotations of quotations—or, when (rarely) in his own voice, in *recusationes* and deferrals (Reed 2010). Any moral evaluation of the end of the poem depends on perspective, and the poem frames many; the context needs to be part of the question and of any answer.

We need an analytical, rhetorical reading of the poetry—a narratology, which to me amounts to a metaphoric of perspective. In this, I think I’m in agreement with trends toward discursive reading and toward contextualizing the “optimist–pessimist” debate itself as a function of the response to Vergil’s poetry (from its very beginning), amply represented in this volume. I think of Hexter (1990) on the *Aeneid*’s ambiguities as highly polished surfaces in which readers see only their own desire for a solution, or Selden’s (2006) historicization of the discussion within European and American experience since early modern times. Doubtless such analysis requires that a critic be learned and cold, but that doesn’t preclude ardent engagement with these fraught political and personal questions within given frames of contingencies (some, to be sure, so ineluctable as to be virtually deterministic). It

does require us to include in the investigation ourselves—I mean our selves, those diverse, mutable entities—as subjects in the inexhaustible narratological exchange.

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The *Aeneid* as Space of Poetic Negotiation

SARAH SPENCE

The *Aeneid*, written to establish a link between Augustus and the gods and justify the enormous imperial expansion Augustus was undertaking, is indeed a story of empire. Yet the epic tells that story in a complex way, laying the groundwork for current events, pointing out the pitfalls encountered along the way, and perhaps most importantly, using the medium of poetry to articulate what the potential for empire might be.

The Harvard School has been epitomized as foregrounding the dark side of the *Aeneid*: the so-called pessimistic versus optimistic approaches to the poem. Characterizing the critical approach this way, though, is to reduce it to a foil made inevitable, in a sense, by a reading that emphasizes the glory that was Rome: the founding of the empire came with a large price tag. To approach the epic as a poem, by contrast, is to allow it to play out—and with—unresolved possibilities, to emphasize the *poetry* of the *Aeneid*, as Michael Putnam urged through the title of his first book. Putnam's methodology was unabashedly New Critical as it highlighted echoes, self-citations, and figures of speech within the epic and across Vergil's oeuvre. In so doing, Putnam opened the door to reading the *Aeneid* as poetry, as he foregrounded the ways in which Vergil's lines disturbed the message and were both epic and elegiac in nature. Three contemporary lyric poets with whom I have discussed the *Aeneid* at length, Rosanna Warren, Mark Strand, and David Ferry, respond to the *Aeneid* precisely because of its elegiac nature. Warren's poem "Turnus," dedicated to Putnam, speaks of the gaping hole Aeneas and Vergil rip in the end of the poem with Turnus' death:

Here's where you tear a hole in the poem,
a hole in the mind, here's where the russet glare