



PROJECT MUSE®

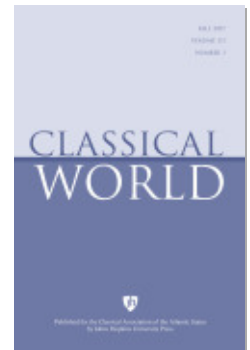
Present at the Founding

Clifford Weber

Classical World, Volume 111, Number 1, Fall 2017, pp. 120-123 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2017.0084>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/676952>

as Mezentius, but as readers we can point to the text of Virgil, who has him share the final line of Camilla—to very different effect. Mussolini could make bimillennial claims about the shared spirit of the *Aeneid* and his own fascism, but like Italy the poem survives that gambit. Servius, situated deep into the empire of the Caesars, like Pharr knew that the aim of the *Aeneid* was to imitate Homer and to praise Augustus from his forebears (*Aen.* 1.1), but it is now an established reality that the poem’s “complexity of worlds” takes us far and away from that simplicity.

You can have your *Aeneid* lighter or darker. Mine’s darker, and that is one of the fruits of the Harvard School. Apart from some encyclopedia entries, these words are the first I’ve written much on the poem’s ideology in fifteen years, and I don’t see myself writing on it again.² Nor do I expect the question will flourish in others’ hands, if partisans of a lighter poem keep trying to recover the *Aeneid* of Clyde Pharr’s introduction and imperial bimillenary celebrations. Those interested in this game can keep playing it, but they should expect to do so before an ever smaller and ever less interested audience—some of whom may even experience “recovery.” There aren’t many around at this point who can be persuaded to see the poem simply through the lens of ruler-cult. And besides, there are newer and more interesting things to talk about in the work of this ever-surprising poet.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Present at the Founding

CLIFFORD WEBER

It must be that, as an undergraduate at Harvard College in the early 1960s, I was present at the founding of the Harvard School. At the time, though, I was quite unaware of any such thing coming into being. Indeed, the label itself I first encountered only many years later. If the putative founders of the Harvard School had in common anything beyond, in most cases, their connection with Harvard University, the bond that

² Unless new wars reactivate the issues; see Thomas 2015.

united them may have been above all a shared sympathy with the New Criticism. If the Harvard School broke new ground, privileging the text as the New Criticism enjoined, that is likely to have been the critical point of view that led to a more positive assessment of Virgil as a poet, and to a different evaluation of the *Aeneid* in particular.

Fifty years on, it is easy to forget how wrongheaded opinions of Virgil's poetry could be in the 1950s and early 1960s. Ronald Syme's big book (1939), widely read and influential, made of Virgil a cheerleader for Augustus. Writing in 1970, Allen Mandelbaum lamented that some years had to pass before he could break free from the "tenacious resonance" of Mark Van Doren's "tag line," as Mandelbaum called it, that "Homer is a world; Virgil, a style" (1981: v). In 1952, concerning the final episode in the *Aeneid*, a colleague of Van Doren's at Columbia could write, "all bitterness and all passion was [sic] now laid at rest, and all could now join hands as comrades and together walk to meet the shining future" (Hadas 1952: 159). If such declarations are no longer taken seriously, the Harvard School deserves much of the credit. As Willem de Kooning said of Jackson Pollock, the Harvard School "broke the ice," though Pöschl's book, appearing in America in 1962, surely played its part as well.

Arriving in Cambridge in 1961, I had already read the first half of the *Aeneid* under a notorious martinet at Phillips Exeter Academy. Years later, astonished, Wendell Clausen would exclaim, "You studied with *him*?" Terror though that teacher was, he taught us a lot. My senior paper on intratextual repetitions in the *Aeneid* now seems, fifty-five years on, simply too sophisticated to be the work of a senior in high school. That is entirely to the credit of Exeter, where many of today's luminaries, classical and entrepreneurial, also read Virgil for the first time.

Nevertheless, well trained though I was, nothing could have adequately prepared me for reading Horace with Steele Commager and, later, the *Aeneid* with Wendell Clausen. Clausen's lectures on the *Aeneid* were nothing less than revelatory, even for someone so naïvely self-confident as I was then. Their philological rigor combined with consummate aesthetic tact has remained a potent influence ever since. I have been asked, though, to write about Virgil, not about Clausen, whose extraordinary qualities as scholar and pedagogue others have documented with insight and eloquence. At the same time, it can be said that Professor Clausen would have had little patience with an analysis of the *Aeneid* as narrowly pro- or anti-Augustan, or with the equation that this entails between Aeneas and Augustus. "It is this perception of Roman history," he wrote, "as a long Pyrrhic victory of the human spirit that makes Virgil

his country's truest historian" (1964:146). This well-known formulation has little to do with the Rome of Augustus in particular. In the same paper, Clausen writes that "Aeneas is always aware of the fate that draws him irresistibly on towards Italy, but rarely happy about it" (141), and he details what he calls "the sorrows of Aeneas" that pervade the poem (143). In such assessments of the hero of the *Aeneid*, it is hard to find anything that could be deemed pro- or anti-Augustan.

Hoping to provoke a reaction (though rarely with success), I used to tell my students that what a poet says interests me less than how he says it. In retrospect, this could be only a more tendentious version of Clausen's insisting to us that the *Aeneid* be read as if it were lyric verse. It is not especially remarkable if a poet portrays Dido and Aeneas, as Virgil does, as if they were twins (Weber 2002: 338–40). Virgil's genius rather consists in the subtlety and complexity of the manifold ways in which this idea is expressed. Thus, his poetry will have the greatest appeal for readers who prefer nuance to extrovert skill and virtuosity.

If my own views concerning the *Aeneid* should happen to agree with those attributed to the Harvard School, I would prefer to think that the text itself has been my guide, and not that I was somehow indoctrinated during my years as an impressionable undergraduate. Despite the pessimism that is often associated with the Harvard School's view of the *Aeneid*, Michael Putnam long ago decried what he termed "the artificial polarity . . . in recent Virgilian scholarship between positive and negative, optimistic and pessimistic readings of the poem" (1995: 5). In this connection, the concluding episode inevitably arises.

It is commonly recognized that the end of the *Aeneid* recalls the beginning thematically, in that the poem begins and ends with vengeful and deadly rage being provoked by the memory of past injury. Reflecting this thematic correspondence are similarities of diction that lead to "rehear[ing] Juno in Aeneas," as Putnam has written (1995a: 438). In addition to the verbal echoes of the beginning that have been shown, or are alleged, to exist, in the final few lines, one small metrical detail may be worth noting.

In 12.945, *doloris* of Aeneas, eight lines from the end, has a counterpart in *dolens* of Juno (1.9), nine lines from the beginning. Similarly, *exuviasque hausit furiis accensus et ira* ("he drank in the spoils, enflamed by furies and wrath," 12.946) recalls *vi superum saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram* ("by the power of the gods, on account of the mindful wrath of savage Juno," 1.4), the key term *ira* capping both lines. In this echo, there is also a metrical component. In both lines, the distribution of dactylic

and spondaic feet is identical, and all the words from the trithemimeral line position to the end have the same metrical shape (*hausit furiis accensus et ira = saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*). Only one other line in book 1 (1.297) bears so close a resemblance metrically to 12.946. Both diction and meter, therefore, conspire to link the seventh line from the end with the fourth line from the beginning, and thus Aeneas with Juno.

I find it hard to resist the conclusion that, in the final episode, clear recalls of the beginning of the poem transfer to Aeneas Juno's persona as the avatar of deadly anger. Together with a final line that has previously related the killing of an Italian maiden, the intimation that Aeneas' rage has replaced Juno's necessarily leaves the impression that the poet's point of view is at least ambivalent, and quite possibly even pessimistic. To quote Clausen, "there is only the grim reality, which the poet . . . will not mitigate, will not explain away" (1987: 100). If this also happens to be what I think, I have not learned it from the Harvard School. Rather, the text itself leads me there, as it did those pioneers at Harvard.

Apparently forgetting for a moment the works of J. S. Bach, Franz Schubert is said to have asked, "Kennen Sie eine fröhliche Musik?" as if to imply that no such thing as joyful music exists. To the extent that Schubert's perception of music comes close to the truth, lovers of music, and of Schubert's music in particular, will instinctively be drawn to the melancholy that readers past and present have found pervading the *Aeneid*. Yes, we specialists are privileged to enjoy the special delight of entrée into the endless complexities of Virgil's epic. Even we privileged few, however, are likely to treasure most Adam Parry's second voice, subdued yet omnipresent, and clearly audible beneath the panegyric that was all that some could hear before the Harvard School began to write.

KENYON COLLEGE, EMERITUS

Leaving School

SUSAN FORD WILTSHIRE

I did not notice it when I first read the *Aeneid* at age seventeen or even during an intensive yearlong reading in graduate school. But eventually I started noticing that in every book of the *Aeneid*, whether in simile,