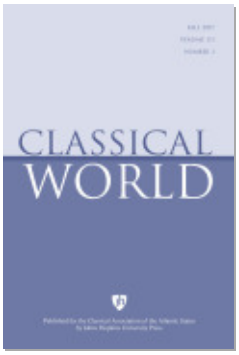
Elective Affinities: The Harvard School at Pisa at the End of the Eighties



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interesting and creative work on Virgil and his reception will continue to be produced by those literally and associatively from the Harvard School, it finally occurred to me that interpreting Virgil would probably best be a private pursuit.

So what have I learned from the Harvard School?

1) A great deal about Virgil's language, control of imagery and episodic structure that was new and important;
2) That every movement over time seeks preeminence until it feeds on its own extremes, despite the ability and intentions of its founders, and can in a matter of decades devolve into a kind of tyranny and then ultimately to absurdity;
3) That every interpretation arises from two life experiences, the artist's and the reader's. We all suffer the fatal flaw of not being first-century BCE Romans and must finally take from Virgil what our own knowledge and life experience allows us.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Elective Affinities: The Harvard School at Pisa at the End of the Eighties

SERGIO CASALI

The first book I read on Vergil was G. B. Conte's *Virgilio* (1984). In 1988 I was about to face the entrance examination to the Scuola Normale of Pisa, and Conte was one of the examiners; afterwards, he was my tutor both at the Normale and at the University of Pisa. What impressed me most and had a profound influence on my reading of the *Aeneid* were his pages on the "polycentrism that fractures the epic norm into a series of relative truths, all with their special values and points of view," to borrow words from Putnam's very positive review of Conte's book (Putnam 1987: 790). "The coexistence of the worlds of Aeneas, Dido, Turnus, Mezentius, and Juturna springs from the fact that Vergil allows each of them an autonomous, personal raison d'être which the historico-epic norm had always denied" (Conte 1986: 157 = 1984: 71).

Conte's pages on the polycentrism of the *Aeneid* were soon followed by those of Oliver Lyne on Vergil's *Further Voices* (1987), a book that encountered much skepticism in Italy (see especially Traina 1990), but that I found exciting and revelatory: "Further voices intrude other materials and opinions, and these may be disturbing, even shocking. Further voices add to, comment upon, question, and occasionally subvert the implications of the epic voice" (1987: 2). (I also had the opportunity of meeting Lyne during my stay at Oxford as an exchange student in 1992, and we stayed in touch until his untimely death.) The notion that through little details or through intertextuality Vergil may subvert the Augustanism of his text cohered for me with the lessons I was learning from another professor at the University of Pisa, Francesco Orlando. Orlando had developed a Freudian theory of literature where literature is seen as a form of the socially instituzionalized "return of the repressed" (see Orlando 1973 and 1982). Orlando's model of literature as a compromise-formation—that is, a semiotic manifestation that makes room, simultaneously, for two opposite meanings, which stand in an irreconcilable relationship to one another—seemed to me to adapt particularly well to what Don Fowler termed "two-voices Anglo-American Harvard and Balliol pessimism" (1989: 235). Conversations with my friend Alessandro Schiesaro, who knew Orlando's theory much better than I, helped me to verify the appropriateness of referring Orlando's ideas to the *Aeneid* (Schiesaro 2003: 42–43; 2008).

The professor of Latin philology at the Scuola Normale was Antonio La Penna (though he did not tutor the pupils of the school). He represents a typical Italian way of reading the *Aeneid* as "the poem of the vanquished." In this respect, his formulations about the "inexcusability of history" (1966: lxxxiv) may recall typical Harvard-School positions; but for La Penna Vergil never manifests any covert revolt against the Augustan order, in which he has absolute faith (2005: 320). To me this seemed, and seems, way too bland an approach.

When I moved more decidedly from the study of Ovid to that of Vergil (under the guidance of Alessandro Barchiesi), it was with this background that I finally encountered the Harvard-School tradition of R. A. Brooks, Adam Parry, Wendell Clausen, Michael Putnam, and Richard Thomas. Considering the early influences I have sketched above (and that of Ovid himself is to be added), it is no surprise that I found in them kindred spirits and models to imitate. Putnam and Thomas I had

the luck of knowing personally; both their published works and their conversation have had the greatest influence on me.

UNIVERSITY OF ROME "TOR VERGATA"

Optimism and the Pessimism of the Harvard School: Contrasting Perspectives

RAYMOND J. CLARK

My very first lecture as an undergraduate and my earliest introduction to Vergil came from the Vergilian scholar and very eccentric man W. F. Jackson Knight in 1960. He wore white gloves, a bow tie, and a monocle clenched in one eye from which a grand loop of a chain hung from his waistcoat pocket. He had already written his Penguin translation of the *Aeneid* and before that his *Roman Vergil*—he told me in six weeks in total—some of it in the summer of 1939 when he was expecting military appointment, the rest in the ensuing winter.[1] The range of his book on Vergil is immense and his chapters on "Tradition and Poetry," "Form and Reality," and "Language, Verse, and Style" are famous for his focus on how Vergil's mind worked, fusing and blending past poetry by a poetic process of integration. In the third of these chapters, Jackson Knight (known to his students as JK) focused upon the semantic penumbrae of individual Vergilian words and phrases and whole passages. He showed how Vergil worked to give new meaning to inherited poetry. Today it is called intertextual criticism. In lectures he compared Vergil's art to the sorcerer's refrain in the story of Aladdin's lamp, "new lamps for old, new lamps for old!" His point was that Vergil really could, by the mere hint of a word or a phrase, turn old poetry into new and imbue age-old traditions with new meaning.

Jackson Knight preceded this by demonstrating the same poetic process of integration and fusion in respect to traditions, detailing the layers of thought and emotion that went into, for instance, Vergil's creation of

[1] For the date and circumstance, see Jackson Knight 1966: 9.