The papers are based on a conference that was held at the University of Texas at Austin in the spring of 1990. They were substantially revised especially in the light of the ensuing discussions of which only one, that after the presentations of Professors Segal and Ahl, is included in this volume. The speaker/respondent format is the time-honored one of the *controversia* and improved on its model by producing substantive rather than rhetorical results. It is my pleasure to thank the Department of Classics and the College of Liberal Arts for their sponsorship, and to acknowledge gratefully the financial support of the Mobil Foundation, the Floyd A. Cailloux Centennial Professorship in Classics, Mr. and Mrs. Dixie Smith of Fulbright&Jaworski in Houston, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Keller of Plano, Mr. and Mrs. Mark Finley of Austin, and Mr. and Mrs. George Nalle, Jr. of Austin. I am indebted to several of my colleagues, especially David Armstrong, Peter Green, and Thomas Hubbard for their encouragement and helpful suggestions; to Christopher Francese, Ruth Rothaus, and Shawn O'Bryhim for technical and research assistance; and to Cate Fowler for her invaluable help with my Roman desire for order and with the production of the manuscript. Finally, I am grateful to Michael von Albrecht for accepting this volume for expeditious publication in the series *Studien zur Klassischen Philologie*.

Austin, November 1991

INTRODUCTION: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMAN POETRY AND THE CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL SCENE

In the very first decade of this century, Richard Heinze, one of the great Latinists of our time, wrote an eloquent article on "The present tasks of the history of Roman literature." In it, he laid stress on two basic perspectives whose interplay, whenever it is pursued vigorously, is essential to the dynamics of the interpretation of literature in general and of Roman poetry in particular. First, he urged, as he had in other fundamental articles, the need for attentiveness to the historical and social setting of a literary work, but he now reformulated such aspects in strikingly modern terms, such as the "aesthetic demands of the public" and the relationship between "producers" and "recipients." Secondly, instead of holding classical philology up as a model for literary research and interpretation—and this was only twenty years after the appearance of the revised edition of Boeckh's monumental *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der Philologischen Wissenschaften*—Heinze faulted classical philology for having let itself be overtaken by the kind of work that was being done on modern literatures. Instead of contentment with mere historical positivism, he emphasized the importance of the later reception of Roman literature because that literature "did not die with its creators; its works have continued to live on and to have an effect." He then went on to ask for cooperation between scholars of classical, medieval, and modern literature (Heinze 161ff., esp. 174f.).

Now, any savvy reader of a book written by a classicist is conditioned, as part of his or her horizon of expectations, to await the moment when the old shoe of *déjà vu* is being dropped. Part of my reason for beginning with a reference to Heinze, therefore, is not to transgress such generic codes and, in fact, to get them over with as quickly as possible. More important, of course, is the essence of Heinze's exhortation. Had it been followed, the course of the interpretation of Roman literature in this century might well have been different. From being active participants in hermeneutic discussions Latinists have turned into mere bystanders, a situation that does not apply to Graecists whose work increasingly is fruitfully incorporating modern anthropological and literary approaches, all in combination with traditional attention to

philological nuance and careful historical scholarship.[1] The interpretation of Roman poetry in particular, and especially in the U.S., has been characterized by a virtually complete absence of reflection on method and, most fundamentally, by a lack of explaining its presuppositions. This is not to dismiss it as stale or even bad in qualitative terms, as some good and interesting work is being done and the process of interpretation is anything but standing still. Yet there is an elementary lack in most new interpretations, for instance, of attention to such basic issues as differentiation between authorial meaning (and whether or not it exists), personal reading, and significance in terms of modern sensibilities that may be shaping the interpretation; most of these "horizons of expectation" are merrily commingled and any newly discovered meaning is implicitly identified with that of the poet.

The result is unhealthy and one if its effects has been expressed concisely by a recent European reviewer, Professor Ernst A. Schmidt, of Michael Putnam's study of Horace's fourth book of Odes. Schmidt, who is by no means addicted to any particular literary theory, has these comments (p. 503):

> What concerns me and disturbs me is this: that a sensible, cultivated, and erudite man of approximately my age and with a cultural background (U.S., east coast) not radically different from mine, who teaches the same subject and has similar interests, is able to come up with individual interpretations which I consider as pointless (*abwegig*) and embarrassing and in which I see elementary mistakes of method, while he evidently considers them as having a hermeneutic basis and as plausible. I infer from this that he is coming to similar conclusions about my methods. And I generalize (as this is not my first experience of this sort): are we (philologues, intellectual and cultural historians) still able to be intelligible to one another given the pluralism of opinions and methods, of interests and literary cultures, and given the absence of conditions for a basic consensus, and are we still interesting to

1 Gentili's book is a sterling example. Its Appendix on "The Art of Philology" is the kind of methodological statement one would like to see more often. The issue of the orality especially of early Greek literature has provided a major impulse for the greater awareness of method among Graecists.

> one another? Obviously not; my resignation has grown after I read this book.[2]

It is timely, therefore, to address some of the perspectives pertaining to these issues. Hermeneutic is not absent from the current interpretation of Roman poetry; it is simply that often it is not stated. Nor should it be inferred from the title of this book that theory and empiricism be viewed as irreconcilable opposites. They clearly are not, as Tzvetan Todorov, among others, reminds us (p. 173), but it was useful to choose a theme for our discussion that would generate more exact definitions of method instead of the prevailing looseness, which should not be confused with flexibility. Moreover, as is clear from the contributions to this volume, Latinists are quite aware of the ongoing discussion about theory and hermeneutics in the modern literatures, and while any specific debt to them is acknowledged infrequently, absorption of the practices they produce has taken place on an osmotic basis; this applies, for instance, to Stanley Fish's brand of "affective criticism" because it relieves the critic "of the obligation to be right (a standard that simply drops out) and demands only that I be interesting (a standard that can be met without any reference at all to an illusory objectivity)."[3] Or, to give another example, the notion of an infinite plurality of meanings *de facto* is enthusiastically subscribed to by many Anglo-American interpreters of Latin poetry, especially those who make a living by discovering such new meanings, a.k.a. "voices" in Vergilian criticism. One byproduct has been that American scholarship on Roman prose authors, with the occasional exception of cataloguing rhetorical tropes and the like, has declined to less than a subsistence level because the subject requires a relatively higher standard of methodological validation.[4]

In a more positive though similarly unstated fashion, there is, in fact, considerable convergence between the concerns of interpreters of Roman poetry and those of modern theorists who have simply gone to greater, and sometimes excessive, lengths to explain them. Issues such as the multiplicity of possible interpretations and their relation to the text and author, the historicity

2 It is typical of Professor Putnam's class that Schmidt was subsequently invited to be a visiting professor in his department at Brown University. Schmidt in the meantime has been motivated to further hermeneutic reflection in R. Kannicht, ed., *1838-1988. 150 Jahre Philologisches Seminar der Universtät Tübingen* (Tübingen 1990) 55-67.

3 "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" in Fish, 1970, 383ff.; cf. the comments by Abrams, 1979, 580, and Graff, 1977, 473f.

4 Winkler's study of Apuleius (1985) is a rare and delightful exception.

of both the original setting of a work and of subsequent interpretations, the "burden of the past" borne by poets working in a given tradition, the validity of formalist interpretation like the New Criticism (still much in vogue among American Latinists), and the very resistance to "theory" in favor of a more direct enjoyment of a work of art or literature—these are principal, shared concerns. They provide another illustration, in Frank Lentricchia's words (p. 280), "that the much-touted shift from traditional to contemporary critical theory conceals significant common investments." It is important to discuss them, and some others, and to relate them briefly to the various essays in this volume.

1. *What to do about multiple interpretations?*

Even the traditional philology never entertained the myth of one fixed, immutable meaning of a work of literature. More than a century ago, Boeckh raised, with a succinctness that has found regrettably few imitators, the same epistemological questions (p. 86) on which contemporary theorists like to expatiate at length. Even Boeckh's terminology is strikingly modern. He speaks about "the infinite number of conditions for each individual utterance" and the "impossibility to bring it to discursive clarity." He quotes Gorgias on the impossibility of expressive reality (cf. Belsey 7ff.) and its incommunicability. He concludes by emphasizing, to use Robert Scholes' words (p. 154), that "different, even conflicting assumptions may preside over any reading of a single text by a single person" and that interpretation, therefore, can only be an ongoing process of approximation which is never completed. Or, as John Dryden put it, "no text is ever fully explicated."

Another good intention behind the road to what has been overelaborated into a theoretical inferno is the obvious recognition that great literary works—the much harped-on "classics," for that matter—are classics precisely because they are susceptible to new interpretations by subsequent generations which, due to a changing world, may have cultural sensibilities different from those of the original audience. As teachers of classics, we don't want to treat works like the Homeric epics or Vergil's *Aeneid* as museum pieces that leave us cool and detached. We are also part of a modern audience that wants to react to them directly and find individual meaning in them. Such meanings, of course, can be very subjective and downright anachronistic.

These issues lie at the center of the current theoretical debate, and it is instructive to survey briefly the principal solutions that have been proposed and to assess their utility for the interpretation of Roman poetry. One commendable trend has simply been to differentiate between the original meaning and those developed in the course of interpretative history. E.D. Hirsch, for instance, distinguishes between the "meaning," i.e. the orginal meaning of the text imparted to it in large measure by the author, and the various kinds of "significance" or "relevance" that are products of later values and cultural contexts. The theory takes into account the notions of historicity and historical relativism developed by Gadamer and, from a linguistic orientation, by de Saussure. The recognition of this conditionality is, at root, a common-sensical insight and leads to the further recognition, on the part of a non-charismocratic literary hermeneuticist like the late Peter Szondi, that even our own hermeneutical systems are a product of historical conditions and therefore will be superseded in due historical course (p. 25).

The difference between that liberal attitude and the more autocratic behavior of some of his French and American counterparts could not be more marked (cf. Felperin 203). In line with the paradigm shift from author to text to reader, they celebrate the death of the author in ways rather different from more literal-minded Latinists who find the current decades congenial for congregating on the bimillenaries of the deaths of major Roman poets. The separate existence of author and text was ushered in by the New Criticism; Wimsatt's remarks are fairly typical: "The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to control it). The poem belongs to the public" (p. 75). Poststructuralism, with several variants and transitional constructs, has further developed that premise into two principal answers to the question, "What does this text mean?" (cf. Todorov 183). Deconstructionists by and large will answer with "nothing at all" and, in recognition of the historical and linguistic relativism of interpretation, proceed to equate all interpretation with misinterpretation. While this is an insurance policy against hostile critics and relieves the interpreter of the anxiety of possibly being wrong about a text (Graff, 1977, 473), it amounts to a hermeneutic of inconsequentiality. Professor Conte in his paper joins the chorus of those who argue that literary criticism does not need such remedies.

The new literary "pragmatism" reduces the same question to irrelevance by answering it with "anything whatsoever." The paradigm shift is further extended as the authority of literature, which was still acknowledged into the 1970's, was superseded, in a wilful confusion of means and ends, by the authority of criticism. It is only the reader and, especially, the critic who matter: they, and not the *poietes* ("maker"), are the makers of meanings. This

puts them in the enjoyable position of making up the rules as they go along; "a track-laying vehicle steered by its own tracks," as Peter Green has characterized the process (p. 8). Validity becomes a moot question or, in Richard Rorty's words, the interpreter "simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purposes."[5]

There is, of course, plenty of judicious latitude this side of such extremes. Lest classicist readers get complacent at this point, it is useful to remind them that this seemingly modern *modus interpretandi* has had a long career in the interpretation of Greek and Roman letters. Subjective interpretations are nothing new, no matter what their trappings. Once again, the modern theorists at least explain their presuppositions. Moreover, they do so with unconcealed honesty. We could do worse than learn from that, even if the "method" itself is an incitement to irresponsibility. It is really no method, but, to give only one example, that orientation is hardly different from Wilamowitz' pronouncement on the same subject: "Why, this prized 'philological method'? There simply isn't any—any more than a method to catch fish. The whale is harpooned; the herring caught in a net; minnows are trapped; the salmon speared; trout caught on a fly. Where do you find *the* method to catch fish?"[6] Conversely, critics like R.S. Crane, whom Professor Zetzel prominently cites in his essay, might praise Wilamowitz for his ostensible aversion to the endemic reductionism which has been the curse of theoretical and hermeneutic systems (Graff, 1987, 234-36). The "pragmatic" solution, therefore, is an interesting logical paradox.

It does not, however, obviate the concomitant question of a qualitative hierarchy or validity of multifarious interpretations. One answer, proposed by the advocates of reception theory, is that the meaning of a literary work is concretized over time by various generations of readers. In other words, different, though immanent aspects of a work can be uncovered in the course of time and their sum total, which does not necessarily amount to a synthesis, comprises the meaning of the work. All interpretations, therefore, contribute to the unfolding or development of the *Sinnpotential* of a poem or novel. Careful inspection of such receptions, alas, reveals what one would suspect: it is "the remarkable pliability with which the text follows virtually all predispositions of its interpreters" (Lobsien 28), whether we are dealing with

5 "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textuality," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (New York 1982) 151.

6 Cited by William M. Calder III in *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 16 (1975) 452.

Joyce's *Ulysses* (Lobsien) or the poems of Martial (Sullivan). Texts, after all, "offer no resistance to acts of interpretation."[7]

How, then, should one interpretation be privileged vis-à-vis another? How can myopic interpretations be put in their place by more insightful ones? Here is one solution:

> These blind first readers—they could be replaced for the sake of exposition, by the fiction of a naive reader, though the tradition is likely to provide ample material—then need, in turn, a critical reader who reverses the tradition and momentarily takes us closer to the original insight. The existence of a particularly rich aberrant tradition in the case of writers who can legitimately be called the most enlightened, is therefore no accident, but a constitutive part of all literature, the basis, in fact, of literary history.

One can only marvel how applicable these comments are to Vergil, for instance. Great writers beget "particularly rich aberrant traditions." How refreshing it is to see the confirmation of the value of the critical reader who "takes us closer to the original insight!" No doubt a traditional classicist is speaking, nay, "shouting"[8] here. But no, it is actually Paul de Man himself (p. 141): "For all of its rich poststructuralist texture, de Man's characterization of the best criticism is familiarly traditional" (Lentricchia 306). Similarly, even the Nietzschean Stanley Fish refers to "interpretive communities, rather than the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features" (Fish, 1980, 14). Despite the usual vagueness of the notion (cf. Scholes 152-54), we are back to the concept of the Guild to which Professor Habinek adverted several times during our conference.

Given this sort of traditionalism on the part of even the most avant-garde exponents of literary theory, there is no reason for us as interpreters of Roman poetry to turn our backs on the refined hermeneutic traditionalism of critics such as Hirsch, Graff, and Scholes in judging the quality and validity of various interpretations. There is plenty of latitude between the extremes of "objective" positivism and the egalitarianism of "undecidables." It is in this space that most

7 Scholes 158, paraphrasing Fish.

8 Such terminology is not unusual in attempts, such as Don Fowler's in *Greece and Rome* 37 (1990) 106, to dismiss any requests for explanations of method in the current interpretation of Roman poetry. As Fowler himself illustrates by citing E. Lefèvre (in G. Binder, ed., *Saeculum Augustum* 2 [Darmstadt 1988] 178), if American interpreters of the *Aeneid* do not state their procedures, others will do it for them.

of our activities, such as refereeing for journals and supervising dissertations, in fact takes place. The principles these critics invoke largely coincide with those classicists follow in actual practice, but again, it is helpful to see them spelled out[9] and provide an occasion for both critical and self-critical reflection.

The notion that theory alone does not produce good criticism is already found in Boeckh;[10] being a good German, he goes on to mention the importance of such factors as *Gefühl* (perhaps best translated as "intuitive sensibility") and even tact, qualities that are similarly prized by modern non-theoretical critics such as Frederick Crews (p. 1041) and Susan Sontag. More generally, it is common sense (cited, for instance, by Michael von Albrecht) that plays a crucial role in good criticism besides the more specific criteria cited by the traditionalist trio I mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and it is anything but beyond definition. Catherine Belsey spends a whole chapter on defining (and rejecting) it, singling out the reception aesthetics of Iser and Jauss as the culminating example: "Iser's *Act of Reading* is in many ways an excellent theoretical account of what, in all their variety, most liberal humanist readers in the second half of the twentieth century probably *do* when they read" (p. 35). For Belsey, who is a good representative of the advocacy of new theory for the sake of new theory, this is not good enough. She finds Iser's specific readings "very conventional"—a notion that may mildly shock Latinists such as Antonie Wlosok[11]—and proceeds to postulate "a new theoretical framework which makes a fundamental break with the proposition of common sense."

Belsey's characterization, albeit polemical, is another illustration of the "common investments" which are shared by traditional and modern critics and to which I already have referred on several occasions. Jauss in particular exemplifies once more that some modern theorists differ from classicists only in the much greater degree to which they define and articulate hermeneutic issues. I confine myself to one example, his concise distinction between three "horizons of expectation" that critics should use for their interpretations (Jauss, 1981, 473). Jauss usefully differentiates between the following, successive

9 See esp. Hirsch, 1967, 127ff. on such issues as critical freedom and interpretive constraint, problems and principles of validation, and objective interpretation; Scholes 149ff. for some basic definitions of interpretation; and Graff, 1987, 247ff. on problems of theory.

10 Cited in full by James Zetzel (p. 42.below).

11 Who blames Iser for much of the relativism and subjectivism of *interpretationes modernae*; see *Würzburger Jahrbücher* 8 (1982) 16ff. *Contra*, see especially P.L. Schmidt and Barner.

kinds of readings that comprise the total interpretation: (1) a first and aesthetic reading, a stage that other theorists identify with "understanding"; (2) a second, "retrospectively explicating" reading; and (3), a third, historical reading "so that we may catch sight of the text in the horizon of its alterity and in its difference from our experience." This historical reading, he continues, "can begin with the reconstruction of the horizon of expectation of the text's original readers; it does full justice, however, to the requisite unity of the hermeneutic triad only when the historical distance between the text and the present is elaborated and when the tradition of readings is clarified that prepared the way for the most recent interpretation."

One concrete example may suffice to illustrate how beneficial this common-sensical three-stage process would be for the interpretation of some of the most debated topics in Roman poetry, such as the ending of the *Aeneid*. A quarter century ago, Michael Putnam reinterpreted the scene in which Aeneas, after hesitating, kills Turnus *furiis accensus et ira terribilis*, as the victory of the dark forces in the *Aeneid*. With a zeal that surpassed even that of the curiously unacknowledged Christian predecessors of this view, Lactantius and Augustine, repetitive assertion of this peculiar interpretation, with a few embroidering accretions, has come to compensate for its intrinsic debility; one indication of the latter is the rather unsophisticated way in which the label "Augustan" or "historicist" is affixed (though not by Putnam) to anyone who doesn't want to buy into it. To move the discussion to higher ground, it is useful to cite Putnam's conclusion in full and then inspect it briefly in the light of Jauss' methodology.

Here is the end of Putnam's chapter on "Tragic Victory" (pp. 200-201):

> When the epic opened, it was Aeneas' turn to shudder with cold as the winds, the first pawns of Juno's anger, threatened imminent death (*solvuntur frigore membra*: I, 92). Now, as the poem reaches its climax, it is one of Virgil's most bitter and cogent ironies that he uses this very phrase at the exact moment Aeneas becomes the personification of avenging wrath and brings death to Turnus. The wheel has come full circle. It should cause little wonder when Juno seems to surrender so readily to Jupiter's plea that she give over her anger in contemplation of future Roman magnificence. For, according to the poet's wishes, it is she, not Aeneas, nor the grandeur for which Augustus seems to stand, who wins the greatest

victory as the soul of Turnus passes with a resentful moan to the shades below.

This is a textbook example of the confusion or melding (*Verschmelzung*) of the three interpretive horizons with a resulting lack of precision. When, on the other hand, we keep them separate at first, the following considerations emerge:

(1) *Aesthetic reading or "understanding."* What is the methodological justification for the lexically associative approach by which the repetition of words or phrases is implicitly considered the key to the "poetry?"[12] This is, of course, a variant inherited from the New Criticism (to which I shall turn shortly; see Section 2); hence also the search for "ironies," especially bitter ones. But is this kind of reading really appropriate for texts that were largely recited and could not be marked up with verbal grids stretching hither and yon? How can one say, then, it's "the poet's wishes?" Why not say, "this is my reading of it" instead of blithely equating one's own aesthetic reading with the poet's intentions?

(2) *Retrospective explication.* What about the full context? How many epic heroes even hesitate to kill their opponents? If sparing Turnus is *pietas*, so is the obligation that Aeneas avenge the killing of Pallas. What of the Homeric background? What of the preparation of this unsurprising final scene throughout the second half of the epic? What of the contrast between Aeneas' listening to Turnus' plea and Turnus' refusal to listen to Latinus' at the beginning of Book 12?

(3) *Historical horizon.* (a) Contemporary. What were Roman attitudes to anger? How did they deal with treaty breakers? By contrast, what is our reaction to anger today and how did we feel, especially in the 60's, about war and its necessities? If our attitudes are part of the interpretation, we should at least profess this subjectivism as some of the "New Historians" have done of late. (b) Previous interpretations, i.e. *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, the reaction to which, whether positive or negative, influences the new interpretation. To mention just a few: the church fathers' criticism of the end of the *Aeneid*; conversely, the excessive tendency to make Aeneas into a proto-Christian and a Stoic—now that he turns out not to conform to this image produced by earlier receptions, is it not better to admit that this was simply the wrong mold to cast

12 Cf. W. Moskalew, *Formular Language and Poetic Design in the 'Aeneid'* (Leiden 1982).

him in rather than treat his display of human emotions as a fall from grace? Similarly, the Augustan dimension needs far greater precision. How legitimate is it to make inferences from Vergil's handling of his characters about "the grandeur for which Augustus seems to stand?" More generally, is it enough to convert previous interpretive theses (e.g., "the *Aeneid* is a glorification of Augustus") simply into antitheses instead of taking a fresh look at the text itself and proceeding from there?

As can be seen, this kind of hermeneutic does not impose unnecessary theoretical ballast nor does it predispose the reader. It takes into account the historicity of the ancient text and that of subsequent interpretations, including ours. It does not inhibit multiple interpretations and even allows for one final cause of these to which I would like to advert, i.e. multiple reader responses as part of the author's intent.[13]

It is, of course, the very characteristic of great works of literature that they generate varied and even conflicting responses. The phenomenon deserves to be defined in terms other than the convenient relic inherited from the New Criticism which Latinists have routinized, i. e. "ambiguity." It needs to be viewed in conjunction with one of the essential characteristics of Roman poetry, i.e. its constant referentiality and systemic allusion to both Greek and Roman predecessors, a subject for which Professor Conte offers some astute redefinitions. In practical terms, this factor, among others, accounts for the many layers and the sophisticated complexity especially of late Republican and Augustan poetry. Take the main characters of the *Aeneid* (cf. Griffin 193/94): Aeneas is Achilles, Hector, Hercules, Menelaus, Jason, Odysseus, and Paris, and Augustus; Dido is Nausicaa, Calypso, Medea, Cleopatra, Ariadne, and Naevius' unromantic Dido. Our responses shift and may vary from reader to reader, but the guiding intention of the poet is anything but absent. In Jasper Griffin's excellent formulation: "All this might of course be a mere chaos of contradictory directives and muddled purposes on Virgil's part. It is in reality more than that, because this complexity of response is a vital part of the poet's intention and of the greatness of his poem" (p. 195). In other words, two concepts that modern theorists have tended to wall off from one another, if not outright deny, naturally come together here: there is a strong authorial, and even moral, center *and* a constant invitation to the reader not just to respond,

13 For instance, anger, as we know from Cicero and others, was one of the most debated subjects in popular ethical philosophy at Vergil's time (cf. *AJP* 109 [1988] 321ff.); in addition, it is typical of Vergil that he ends the *Aeneid* on the note of yet another dilemma. The answers to either are not easy, but neither are they shrouded in "moral ambiguity."

but to participate in assessing the ever shifting identity of these characters (and the same could be said about the variation of recurrent themes and scenes, a process which Griffin in this volume aptly characterizes as *tema con variazioni*). It is not a deconstructionist theater, but the dynamics of the process are similar to what Paul Zanker has called "Andachtsbilder" in Augustan art, i.e. mythological figures such as Venus/Tellus/Pax on the Altar of Augustan Peace, which have a multi-referential, complex iconography whose many strands the viewer is invited to discover and reflect on. In short, we are dealing with an intentional and authorially defined polysemy.[14]

This aspect of Roman poetry also leads to the legitimate hermeneutic, exemplified by Charles Segal's essay, of expanding on an inherent characteristic of an ancient work with concepts and constructs—such as "boundary anxiety"—whose development and formulation postdate the work we are interpreting. This is a major source of "new" interpretations, but so far from being extraneously imposed on a text, they genuinely add to elucidating one of its given dimensions. The procedure accords both with progressing sensibilities and with the "original intent" of the author; I choose the phrase deliberately because similar hermeneutic questions are central to the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution and, in fact, have been put in the context of literary hermeneutics.[15] In contrast to grinding a text through the mill of a theory, it is, as Segal reminds us, "the text itself which should direct us to the method rather than the other way around." That, happily, is the kind of work we see increasingly done in the area of Roman poetry, though there could be more of it.[16] It does not satisfy Belsey's autoteleological concept of "a radical new departure," but it is governed by good sense and is essential to fulfilling the true mission of modern classicists: to interpret the ancient authors, without any lapse into anachronisms, with the sophisticated methods and resources which are available to us today. It also mediates two practices that current theory has tended to develop into a schema of irreconcilable bipolarity, i. e.

14 The term is more than appropriate: as Annabel Patterson (*Pastoral and Ideology. Virgil to Valéry* [Berkeley 1987] 30) points out, it was Servius "who introduced into European critical discourse the crucial word polysemous, as a comment on Virgil's *cano* in the opening lines of the *Aeneid*." Patterson also credits Servius, whom Latinists tend to fault for his pedantry, with "a theoretical grasp of the problem of referentiality in a 'literary' text, as well as of the critical methodology such a problem requires." Barner 506f. suggests the use of 'multifunctionality' instead of 'polysemy' because of its supposedly more objective connotations.

15 See the special issue, edited by Sanford Levinson, of the *Texas Law Review* (vol. 60.3, 1982) on "Law and Literature" with contributions by Gerald Graff and Stanley Fish.

16 Cf. the applicability of anthropologist David Gilmore's definition of manhood in terms of selfless caring (*Manhood in the Making. Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* [New Haven 1990]) to Vergil's much misunderstood Aeneas; Galinsky, Ch. 3.

past-centered historical recovery and present-centered reinterpretation (Graff, 1987, 204; cf. Section 3). This is just one of the several instances where Latinists can make a genuine contribution to the contemporary hermeneutic debate (cf. Section 6).

2. *The Legacy of the New Criticism*

"The literary criticism of Roman poetry," as Charles Segal put it politely in his introduction to Gian Biagio Conte's book (p. 8), "still remains heavily under the influence of the now aging New Criticism." As for the New Criticism, this comes close to being an understatement: six years earlier, Frank Lentricchia could justifiably say that it had been "out of fashion for the past two decades or more" (p. 320). Not so in the interpretation of Roman poetry where, as Segal notes, it still predominates. I beg the momentary indulgence, therefore, of readers other than classicists for providing an *aggiornamento* mostly for the benefit of the latter, especially as this is another example of an interpretive practice in the field of Roman poetry that is carried out without much awareness of its presuppositions, let alone reflection on them. Latinists simply adopted the major modes of New Criticism and keep on continuing them without acknowledging them as being New Critical, occasional brave souls like James Zetzel excepted.

Two principal explanations can be given for the continuing prevalence of the New Critical *modus interpretandi* of Roman poetry. One, there has been understandable reluctance to hop on the bandwagon of subsequent and especially poststructuralist theory; Ralph Johnson's essay is an articulate statement of that refusal and I will return to it later (Section 4). The retention of New Critical methods, therefore, is largely a matter of *faute de mieux* which, however, also highlights the Latinists' inertia to come up with something on their own that would be *mieux*; that is why, besides its intrinsic merit, the exception provided by Conte's hermeneutic of genre and allusiveness is so valuable and why we need similar such initiatives. Secondly, the New Criticism, in the 1940's and 50's, presented the welcome opportunity to supplement arid philological criticism with an overdue aesthetic appreciation. This coincided with the increasing need for classics departments to offer courses in civilization and literature in translation and, as time went on, with the requirement of more publication for promotion, tenure, and merit increases. The new interpretive mode was yet another gift of the American South to classics not in the least because it was and is so eminently *doable*.

The results are all around us, though few Latinists go so far as to reminisce nostalgically about the good old days with Allen Tate (and, far from being holier than thou, I speak only as active member of this particular interpretive community): from the time of a graduate student's first seminar on Roman poetry, an eager and never-ending search is on for images, motifs and motif clusters, themes, verbal links, structure in the form of Chinese boxes (although preoccupation with those schemes at last has begun to ebb away), "tensions," ironies, ambivalences and paradoxes. It is, of course, a matter of seek and ye shall find: "Given the convenient elasticity of terms such as paradox and irony, not many poems could fail to reveal these qualities somehow, under the right kind of close inspection" (Graff, 1987, 206). As for attributing significance to repetitions of words and phrases, interpreters of Roman poetry went a great deal further than their unacknowledged New Critical mentors. The frequent result has been a sort of lemon-squeezing approach to the poems that flattens poetic design into a sequence of presumably related verbal echoes.

The absorption of the New Criticism into the study of Roman poetry certainly was not all to the bad. In contrast to English departments and others, it provided for the easy integration of critic and scholar in the same person. A breath of aesthetic air was sorely overdue and some good work was done on imagery, such as the fundamental article by Bernard Knox on Book 2 of the *Aeneid*.[17] With this, however, came the drawbacks inherent in the method. Poems increasingly were treated as aesthetic monads with no frame of reference besides the poem itself (or, at most, some verbal repetitions in its adjacent sisters in a poetry book). The resulting immanentism—shared by contemporaneous art-historical criticism—detached it from the author (hence the "intentional fallacy") and any historical and social context. The final stage of this process—and I am not asserting that it was reached in each and very instance—is that characterized by Terry Eagleton: "The poem itself was as opaque to rational inquiry as the Almighty himself: it existed as a self-enclosed object, mysteriously intact in its own unique being" (p. 47). This explains that as late as 1990, there is still a great deal of resistance to rational inquiries, for instance, into the exact nature of the "voices" that govern the interpretation of the *Aeneid* in mysterious ways. We cannot blame post-New Critical theorists for making "demystification" a part of their agenda.

17 *AJP* 71 (1950) 379-400; reprinted in S. Commager, ed., *Virgil. A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs 1966) 124-42. Knox is not primarily a Latinist.

For while literary critics of Roman poetry may be averse to the perceived trendiness of theoretical fashions, many of them share with these theorists the concern for a wider framework of reference than the poem itself. The commonality of transcending an isolationist formalism should not be overlooked even while the roads we travel may be different. Classical scholars, and Latinists in particular, tend to be eclectic in their methods and that was, after all, a good Roman virtue. While staying clear of the routinization of New Critical formalism and of its entropic tendencies, interpreters of Roman poetry may still find it a valuable tool for analysis in combination with others. Conversely, while modern theory has declared the New Criticism *passé* it actually has extended it in the worst direction: witness the "death of the author"; the transference or displacement of "power" from real life and politics to the realm of critical authority (cf. Eagleton 142ff. and Felperin 213ff.); and the resulting solipsism and anti-humanism (cf. Graff, 1987, 250ff.; Said 2ff.; Todorov 182ff.). The achievement of the posited wider framework of reference, therefore, often is defeated by such tendencies.

In contrast, it is impossible for the good scholar of Roman poetry to look even at an individual poem in total isolation given the intensity of its interaction with the previous tradition. Again, this is admirably taken into account by Professor Conte who correctly recognizes that such 'allusion' is more than an *ad hoc* relationship between a poet and his predecessor and who integrates concepts from semiotic and structural theory—such as the "competence" of the "Model Reader"—into his analysis (*The Rhetoric of Imitation*). Besides, there is, as always, the historical referent which is by no means absent from contemporary theory and to which I will turn next. In accordance with Boeckh's insight (cited by Zetzel, p. 42 below), however, that the value of theory is simply to make us conscious of what we otherwise are doing unawares, it is important especially for American-trained interpreters of Roman poetry to familiarize themselves with the genesis and stated principles of the New Criticism. We observed earlier that, like everything else, literary theories and systems of hermeneutics are the product of historical conditions, and the New Criticism is no exception. What Latinists, who are uniquely equipped to do so, will have to decide for themselves is to what extent the fact of their historicity makes New Critical methods dated and to what extent they can continue to be practicable.

3. *The role of historicism*

In his 1980 address as President of the MLA, Hillis Miller bemoaned "the turn away from theory to history." In so doing, he expressed a perceived dichotomy which is peculiar to some of the developments in current literary criticism and which, by the usual osmosis, has also rubbed off on some interpreters of ancient literature. The model of historicism that was posited as the straw man is largely the static one of 19th century *Historismus*, centered on von Ranke. Aside from, curiously enough, the current writing of new ethnic histories, this "static notion of eternal groups"[18] has been the exception rather than the rule in historiography. Goethe's observation "that world history has to be rewritten from time to time is no longer doubted by anyone" typefies it and this relativism found its most popular expression in American historiography in Carl Becker's *Everyman his own historian* (1935). Historical hermeneutic, in fact, is very similar to its literary companion: there is the constant recognition, on the part of any good historian, that there is no definitive account or interpretation. We can only approximate such a goal; to paraphrase Dryden again, no historical event is ever fully explicated just as no text ever is. Even casual acquaintance with historiography will make us aware of the fact that revisionism is endemic to the discipline. When, therefore, "textuality has become the exact antithesis and displacement of what might be called history" (Said, pp. 3f.), this is only another effect of the compartmentalization of humanistic disciplines and the solipsism of much of contemporary criticism, a solipsism that is made all the more poignant and ironic in view of the grandiose, overarching epistemological rhetoric which pretends to provide unifying concepts for experiential diversity.

A further result, as Said notes, has been that "in American literary studies there has not in the past quarter century been enough work of major historical scholarship that can be called 'revisionist'" (p. 167). Instead of providing authentic reinterpretations, the effort of modern theorists has been concentrated on redefining and repackaging an unchanged product. Often, such forms of criticism "amount to nothing more than the mere exchange of opinion," as a prescient and cantankerous Joshua Whatmough said in the preface to his Sather lectures in 1956 when he pleaded, like Ralph Johnson today, for the "enjoyment of literature as such, stripped of all unnecessary externals" (p. vii). While that includes, as Marilyn Skinner points out in her

18 Werner Sollors in S. Bercovitch, ed., *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge, MA 1986) 19.

response, intellectual enjoyment, the salient point is, in Said's words, that "for there to be effective interpretation in what is, after all is said and done, a historical discipline, there must also be effective history, effective archival work, effective involvement in the actual material of history" (p. 167). It is, without a doubt, a view that would be shared by most classicists and certainly by students of Roman poetry. The value of any literary work or, specifically, a Roman poem is not exhausted by its historical dimension. It is silly, however, to polarize interpretation into history here and aesthetics there and then go off to wallow in aporiai; the hermeneutic of Jauss, which owes everything to *praxis*, shows, just as Hirsch and Boeckh do, that these aspects need to be combined as they in fact are in many studies of Roman poetry.

That endeavor, to continue our survey of the modern scene for a moment, was also the central thesis of Wesley Morris' *Toward a New Historicism* (1972) which gave its name, though not much more, to the contemporary New Historicism whose incipient stirrings so worried Hillis Miller. Morris openly cited the parallel with literary interpretation: "There is no convincing reason given for why historical perspective and aesthetic response should be mutually exclusive. The new historicist sets as his task the resolution of literature's dual mode of existence by introducing aesthetics into history. . ."(p. 30). As an antidote to the monolithic definitions of historicism that inhabit the writings of literary theorists, Morris also usefully differentiated between several types and, by the sort of coincidence which defies hermeneutic, found as many major kinds of historicism as Empson had of ambiguity.

To jaded observers of cyclical critical fashions the "New Historicism" of the past decade may be nothing more than "history without footnotes," but its own distinctive orientation is a fitting illustration in itself of the historicity of such interpretive trends. Besides "dissolving literature back into the historical complex" without recourse to "the outmoded vocabulary of allusion, symbolism, allegory, and mimesis" and renouncing empty formalism in favor of "putting historical considerations to the center stage of literary analysis,"[19] it is a reaction against the professional compartmentalization that was exacerbated by the literary theoreticians. The New Historicism is interdisciplinary and aims at the illumination of culture (Stephen Greenblatt now prefers the term "cultural poetics") from the perspective of various

19 Veeser xii with reference to T. Hawkes, "Uses and Abuses of the Bard," *TLS* (April 10, 1987) 391-93.

relevant academic fields: literature, history, anthropology, art history, religion, etc. To a student of *Altertumswissenschaft* all this sounds strikingly familiar. Accordingly, New Historians recognize heterogeneity and the label is an umbrella rather than implying a new orthodoxy.[20]

What is new in the New Historicism and makes it a true child of its age is its congeniality to postmodern attitudes. Just as classicizing postmodern architects do not simply return to neoclassicism so New Historians eschew going back to the old school of historical determinism, to "overarching hypothetical constructs" and "causal equations." Instead, they prefer "surprising coincidences." The result is a *bricolage* not unlike that found in postmodern buildings, reflecting what Lyotard has defined as the lack of a shared spiritual center and of absolute authority in favor of the relativization of the "grand narratives" of history such as science and religion.[21] Both the architects and the New Historians had to buck an existing orthodoxy (the "Protestant Inquisition," in Jencks' apt phrase) and avoid the stigma of a full-scale return to traditionalism. Neither, therefore, dared to overthrow their immediate predecessor: hence the juxtaposition of Modernist and historizing elements in postmodern architecture[22] whereas New Historians share with the poststructuralists a preoccupation with "power" and "have substituted relationships of power for 'ideas' as fundamental units of historical analysis" (Thomas 225). Latinists will again recognize something familiar in this perspective and the New Historians' open admission that their personal attitudes (to current events, for instance) shape their writings: both, after all, were the guiding inspiration for Sir Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution*, still the most influential work on Augustus since it was published at the time of the autocracies of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. The difference lies in the New Historians' reluctance to be systematic on a grand scale and thus commit the causality fallacy.

What can the literary critic of Roman poetry learn from all this? At least three points are worth making. One, attention to the historical aspects of literature is by no means old-fashioned but turns out to be a constituent part of the current critical scene. While there are various definitions, as there properly should be, historicism is well recognized and actively assertive.

20 For more detail, see the useful overview by Brook Thomas, "The New Historicism and Other Old-Fashioned Topics," in Veeser 182-203.
21 J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis 1984).
22 See Jencks and my chapter on "Classicism in Postmodern American Architecture" in *Classical and Modern Interactions*.

Especially in the discipline of classics, therefore, it should not be used simply as a reductionist label. Two, there is an endeavor to combine historical and aesthetic perspectives in the writing on both literature and history. The interpretation of Roman poetry has had a distinguished tradition in this regard, from Richard Heinze to Gordon Williams (modesty prevents me from mentioning contributors to this volume). It is a good tradition that should be maintained. Three, the study of Roman poetry indeed should be a "poetics of culture" which benefits from an interdisciplinary orientation. Again, there is a good tradition to build on. Unlike the New Historicism, it does not owe its genesis to reaction formation and therefore is spared the Angst of being systematic. Eleanor Leach's recent book on literary and artistic representations of landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome is a splendid example.

There is, of course, the temptation of creative alternatives. In a recent essay on Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* the late Jack Winkler addressed himself to the methodological issue with the kind of directness that classicists should use far more often (Winkler, 1989, 102):

> But the larger methodological issue is whether readers should simply be trying to reproduce the author's meaning (if he had one—that is, if he had *one*) as the goal. Should we concede that much authority to the writers we read? If our critical faculties are placed solely in the service of recovering and reanimating an author's meaning, then we have already committed ourselves to the premises and protocols of the past—past structures of cultural violence and their descendants in the bedrooms and mean streets of the present. This above all we must not do.

Several issues are lumped together here that need to be differentiated from one another. Recovering an author's meaning or, more broadly, the historical and social context or "horizon" is an essential task for the critic. Trying to read a work in the light of its time has nothing to do with subscribing to its values. The confusion is a common one among modern critics who "insist that interpretation is a value-making event, not a passive mimesis of values that are there" (Lentricchia 345). In fact, however, the attempt to reinterpret an Greek novel in a politically correct way, as Winkler proceeds to do in this instance, ultimately produces the ironic result of making it less objectionable to modern sensibilities. The creative ahistorical

interpreter simply winds up practicing a more sophisticated kind of bowdlerization. Historicism, in short, is essential for dealing with the alterity of literature from other cultures and other times.

A final issue that needs to be taken up under the rubric of historicism is one that has produced the closest thing to a stated methodological controversy we have recently had in the scholarly criticism of Roman poetry. It centers on the degree to which the Roman poets shaped their creations on the basis of either literary precepts, rules of genre, and the preceding poetic tradition or on the basis of experience and inspiration from the social, cultural, and material world in which they lived, or both. It is not a new question because it sums up much of the aesthetic and scholarly interpretation of Roman poetry since the beginning of classical scholarship, which coincided with the Romantic period (cf. James Zetzel's essay), but it was answered concretely—and, in the view of his critics, one-sidedly—by Francis Cairns in 1972 in his *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry*. "The theory which underlies this book," Cairns wrote, "is that the whole of classical poetry is written in accordance with sets of rules of the various genres, rules which can be discovered by a study of the surviving literature itself and of the ancient rhetorical handbooks dealing with this subject," primarily Menander Rhetor and Pseudo-Menander Rhetor of the third century A.D. whose star now began to shine more brightly than ever on the interpretive horizon. Accordingly, "the poems of classical antiquity are not internally complete, but they are members of classes of literature known in antiquity as *gene* or *eide*, which will be described in this book as genres."

One of the merits of Cairns' book was to push Latinists in the direction of methodological reflection. And it may be more than a striking coincidence that it was published at the very time when literary theorists outside of classics were debating the same issue in their own way. Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* appeared in the following year and its "unspoken assumption is that poetic identity is somehow a wholly intraliterary process in no contact with the larger extraliterary processes that shape human identity" (Lentricchia 326), a remarkably apt characterization for Cairns' study of poetic influence, too, despite the particular differences between his work and Bloom's. Cairns has, in the meantime, made it clear (cf. his essay in the present volume) that he is anything but blind to such extraliterary processes, but it is a matter of degree of emphasis. Responding directly to Cairns, Jasper Griffin, in several meticulously documented articles, stressed the importance of the Roman poets' contemporary milieu, to be accused, in turn, by Richard Thomas of "turning back the clock" to an uncritical romantic and biographic

mode of interpretation. There are some exaggerated aspects to this discussion, as in any academic debate, in order to sharpen the point, if not the dagger; most Latinists actually are fully aware of and appreciate the complexity of the relationship between these two aspects, which is perhaps the most unique feature of Roman poetry. It appears prominently, therefore, in several of the essays in this collection and includes the attempt by Conte and Cairns to go beyond mere formalism in the definition of genre by discussing "genres of content."

4. *Resistance to theory*

The resistance of classical philology to current theory follows the same pattern that we saw in its adherence, at least in the area of Roman poetry, to the interpretive strategies of the New Criticism: it is practiced rather than articulated. Instead of being a superficial phenomenon, however, it has historical roots that connect easily with the main objections which are made by non-classicist critics to modern theory today. The subject deserves a fuller treatment than I can provide here and, in order to keep the discussion as concise and focused as possible, I will summarize it under several headings.

1) *Anti-methodism*. While classical philology may have been synonymous with hermeneutics in the early 19th century, it developed a strong anti-methodist tendency in the following decades (cf. Peradotto). Wilamowitz' disparagement, cited above (p. 6), of the "philological method" is typical and has its counterpart in Housman's pronouncement that "knowledge is good, method is good, but one thing beyond all others is necessary; and that is to have a head, not a pumpkin, on your shoulders, and brains, not a pudding, in your head."[23] It is understood, of course, that it is always the other fellow who has got the pumpkin on his shoulders and the pudding in his head. Underlying such statements is the recognition, as we saw earlier, that there is an element of subjective judgment in any critical activity, whether it involves the editing of a text or a literary interpretation. The elevation of the principle of subjectivism *über alles* on the part of the deconstructionists and pragmatists can therefore be viewed either as the triumph of utter honesty in the face of aporiai and other "undecidables" or as a *reductio ad absurdum*. While many classicists may never read the various arguments and articles supporting Knapp's and Michaels' *Against Theory*, their *anima naturaliter antimethodica* would no

23 For full citation see Zetzel's essay (p. 42 below).

doubt be greatly in agreement with the sentiments expressed there. So would they with the following warning by Roland Barthes:[24]

> Some speak greedily and urgently about method. It never seems rigorous or formal enough to them. Method becomes Law, but as this Law is deprived of any effect that would be outside of itself. . . it always falls short. As a result, a work that unceasingly declares its will-to-methodology always becomes sterile in the end. Everything takes place inside the method, nothing is left to the "writing". . . the searcher repeats that his text will be methodological, but this text never arrives. There is nothing more sure to kill research and sweep it off into the leftovers of abandoned works, nothing more sure, than method. At some point, one has to turn against method, or at least to treat it without any founding privilege.

This warning against method for its own sake can easily become an excuse for evading any method altogether.

2) *The anti-humanism of modern theory*. This concern is by no means the residual defense of nostalgic, mulish classicists who are loath to be drawn into the intricacies of deep structure. Instead, it is a pervasive theme in critiques of modern theory, many of them coming from critics who are not traditionalists. Harold Bloom speaks of "the anti-humanistic plain dreariness of all these developments in European criticism" (pp. 12-13) and Tzvetan Todorov concludes his pithy travelogue through American criticism with the comment that it is "dominated by what we may as well call by its rightful name, antihumanism" (p. 190). The road that he thinks should be taken is "the one indicated by Scholes" which "might be called critical humanism" (*ibid.*).

At the center of this objection lie the scientific trappings and impenetrable lingo of much of contemporary theory.[25] If we set the clock back by a century, we find precisely those characteristics, with the concomitant professional overspecialization, applying to classical philology and, over the next few decades, vastly contributing to the reduction of the role it once held in

24 *Tel Quel* 47 (1971) 9f. in the translation of Harari 10.

25 Eagleton notes similar tendencies in the genesis of the New Criticism: "Its battery of critical instruments was a way of competing with the hard sciences on their own terms, in a society where such science was the dominant criterion of knowledge" (p. 50). We should be aware of this historical commonality of hard-core classical philology, the New Criticism, and modern theory.

education. As in modern theory, means became ends. The elaborate apparatuses that were designed for the study of texts became more important than the study of the texts themselves, all in an effort to be as scientific as the emerging sciences that began to claim their place in the curriculum. Roman comedy, for instance, was subjected to a rigorous scientific, line-by-line inspection in terms of "Greek" and "Roman" elements, criteria that were in themselves defined with a great deal of subjectivity. While comedy rarely becomes funnier through scholarly discussions anyway, scholars like Leo and Jachmann virtually destroyed its literary existence, something that could have been avoided if they had taken Richard Heinze's advice and looked, for instance, at its reception in the later literatures.

This self-induced narrowness, resulting from a confusion of means and ends, was one of the main contributors to a drastic diminution of the study of classics. Since then, the latter has led a tenuous existence. To risk it once more by repeating the same mistakes through modern theory that were made by autoteleological philology is obviously not a course of action many classicists would seriously contemplate. Quite on the contrary, most American classicists today see their *raison d'être*, and whatever assurance there is of the continued viability of the discipline, precisely in raising "questions of more general significance about literature" which their 19th century predecessors did not do (Graff, 1987, 35). The harmful experience with solipsistic philology has taught us not to retreat again, to use Said's words, from our "constituency, the citizens of modern society," which is what entropic modern criticism has done (Said 4). Humanistic outreach, and not theory, is the road to survival (see, however, Marilyn Skinner's remarks for a somewhat different perspective). The result is that most American classicists, just like postmodern classicizing architects, are idiosyncratic practitioners, a characteristic that reinforces the tendency toward empiricism and free-style eclecticism in preference to any theory.

This is related to the strongest sociological determinant of American classics departments. Most departments are small—three to eight faculty members—and therefore cannot afford a theorist, especially one who teaches only theory as their counterparts in English departments have become accustomed to doing. Critics like Graff and have correctly equated the growth of the theory industry with the triumph of excessive professionalization that is endemic to American academic bureaucracies. In contrast, the tendency of some of the larger classics programs in the U.S. has been to put Humpty Dumpty together again and make classics an integrated study of literature,

language, history, art, archaeology, philosophy, law, linguistics, and religion and to encourage their faculty to teach across these lines. The late Bartlett Giamatti held such classics programs up as a model for the humanities in general.[26] Whereas such models fill an intrinsic need and are the organic result of academic content, the establishment of autonomous theory programs is increasingly perceived as the result of artifical academic job creation, leading only to further fragmentation of a discipline. It is ironic, in view of the Marxist orientation of so many of these theoreticians, that they are conforming to Walter Benjamin's observation "that in capitalist culture, the desire for novelty becomes recurrent in both senses of the word: 'Fashion is the eternal return of the new'."[27] More fundamentally, the interdisciplinary orientation of modern American classicists stands in stark contrast with the hermeticism of many modern American theoreticians. Under these circumstances, calls to broaden the classical discipline and revitalize it by engaging in a dialogue with modern literary theory can take on all of the force of an oxymoron (I need to reemphasize that not all these views coincide with my own: I am simply trying to explain why the classical *résistance*, and especially that of Latinists, is not merely capricious).

3) *Respect for text and author*. Modern American theorists are products of the U.S. educational system: rarely do they master a foreign language. Perhaps that is why they have invented their own. By contrast, not in the least by virtue of having to be expert in two demanding foreign languages, classicists come from a tradition which is attentive to language and the way authors use it. Even the aberrations of this tradition, such as the "scientific" philology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are excesses of this concern rather than invalidations of it. While believing in interpretive freedom, classicists will be wary of the free-for-all of *langue* and *parole* and side with the truisms of Scholes that "this freedom . . . is most certainly constrained by language" (p. 154) and Eagleton that "it is an academicist delusion to see the literary work as an arena of infinite possibility which escapes it" (pp. 87f.). Or, to give another example, the following critique of *interpretationes modernae* might easily have been written by a classicist:

> Interpretation in our time, however, is even more complex. For the contemporary zeal for the project of interpretation is often prompted not by piety toward the troublesome text (which may conceal an aggression), but by an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances. The old style of interpretation was insistent, but respectful; it erected another meaning on top of the literal one. The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs "behind" the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one.

Instead, these observations are those of Susan Sontag (p. 6). In due course, there came the empowerment of the critic at the expense of the author—a displacement, as we noted earlier, into the realm of theory, of the power academics could not attain in the real world. Besides the more clamorous assertions of Stanley Fish to which I already have adverted, Harold Bloom's concept of a poet's relation to his precursor as "the anxiety of influence" provides an interesting illustration. Arguing that one way for the later poets —all of whom Bloom makes out to be fairly neurotic about this—to cope with this burden of the past is to engage in a deliberate misreading or even misprision of their predecessors' work, Bloom then demands at least equal status for the interpreter: "Your work as an event is no more or less privileged than the later poet's event of misprision in regard to the earlier poet. Therefore the relation of the earlier poet to the later poet is exactly analogous to the relation of the later poet to yourself" (Bloom, 1975, 58). It is anything but that, of course (see Lentricchia 338f.). The different perspective of scholars of Roman poetry on the issue of poetic influence and Roman attitudes (cf. Section 5) to it has by and large protected them from such misconceptions.

Then again, in some cases it may just be a matter of not thinking things through. With respect for language, its manipulation and its nuances comes respect for the author. It leads, confusedly enough, to an identification with authorial intent of even the most (*de facto*) deconstructionist readings of Roman poetry, especially Vergil's *oeuvre*. Literary critics, and not just classicists, are fortunate to deal mostly with the works of authors who are long deceased. Living specimens, alas, speak a highly unambiguous language: "It is in the nature of deconstruction" writes John Updike, "to rob literary works of

26 *The University and the Public Interest* (New York 1981) 58. For further context, cf. my remarks on "Rome, America, and the American Classics Profession Today" in *Classical and Modern Interactions*, ch. 6.

27 Brook Thomas (note 20, above) 187 with reference to W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1.2 (Frankfurt 1972) 677.

their intended content, substituting instead subliminal messages the author did not intend."[28] The process certainly has been observable in the interpretation of authors such as Catullus and Vergil, but, both naively and implicitly, it is still always equated with the poet's intent. The upside has been an absence of authoritarian tendencies such as those exhibited by Barthes (cf. Felperin 203)—with all its conservatism, classics actually has held to attitudes that are far more liberal and tolerant than those of its feuding siblings. The reason is a mix of inertia, laissez-faire, and the genuine flexibility and tolerance that Robert Stern has rightly singled out in his assessment of the classical tradition in architecture.[29] We have avoided, for instance, applying a double standard to our writings and the dead poets': while the recognition that poetry is a special kind of discourse is anything but a new insight (cf. Whatmough), a poem does not simply mean whatever anyone but its author wants it to mean—a standard to which deconstructionists in particular are not known to hold their own pronouncements (cf. Felperin 34f.). The inconsistency, nay, hypocrisy of such an attitude was all too well summed up by Derrida's reproach to John Searle of misconstruing what Derrida meant.

4) *Enjoy! Enjoy!* Much of what I have outlined in this section is the natural background to Ralph Johnson's "jeremiad" wherein he is asking for a return to the simple joy of reading for pleasure. Readers will determine for themselves, as Marilyn Skinner does, the degree of affinity between his arguments and Barthes' *jouissance*, the "*nouvelle cuisine* of the pleasure of the text," in the ironic definition of a recent critic (Huyssens 38). It is actually a time-honored repast, though Professor Johnson certainly is not lacking for fellow banqueters on the contemporary critical scene.

They include Susan Sontag who, more than ten years before Barthes formulated his idea of *jouissance* with its sensual connotations, postulated that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (p. 13). The mimicking of science on the part of modern theorists has met with frequent disapproval because it is inadequate to the task (cf. Crews 1040f.). Todorov expresses his hope "that this forgettable episode of contemporary criticism might be quickly forgotten" and asks for a return of the critic to his proper function, "that of a

28 *New York Times Book Review* (June 10, 1990) 40. Cf., with a great sense of humor, Levin, esp. 500f.

29 *Modern Classicism* (New York 1988) 283: "Classicism offers the architect a canon as a guide, but what a liberal and tolerant canon it is. It proposes models of excellence in composition and detail. It does not set out on a singular route but points out various ways . . . Classicism has flexibility and built-in tolerance." The debate about the classical "canon" in literature should be informed by similar perspectives.

participant in a double dialogue: as a reader, with his author; as author, with his own readers—who in the process might even become somewhat more numerous" (p. 191); Todorov, like Johnson, does not address himself to feminism, something for which Marilyn Skinner's response vigorously tries to make up. At the very least, there is the general realization that the "great classic texts, which continue to repay so richly each historical construction and deconstruction they attract" (Felperin 223) will remain at the center of the changing critical discourse and, for that matter, enjoyment without the paraphernalia and cant of an overprofessionalized, self-serving interpretation industry. The latter also became a focal point of the systematic attack on theory by Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels in *Critical Inquiry* and in the ensuing, lively discussion which went on for three years (1982-85). Much of this echoes the similar sentiments of classicists as diverse as Joshua Whatmough and the editors of *Arion* against the intrusion of excessive philological method into the enjoyment and understanding of classical literature. The point is not a return to innocence, but this kind of aesthetic reading, as emphasized by Jauss, is a necessary first reading. Sometimes, we may just want to stop there, and at other times, that may not be enough. The answer to this question, too, is a matter of reader response.

5. *Convergences*

The foregoing discussion illustrates, as could expected, that there are indeed "significant common investments" in the interpretation of Roman poetry and modern literary criticism and theory. The answers and methods may be different, but, unsurprisingly, many of the central questions and concerns are the same. They include the range of possible meanings, the search for a greater referentiality than the monadism of poems, the more than positivistic role of historicism, the balance between historical and aesthetic response, and the concern for a humanistic criticism that transcends excessive professionalization. In addition, we have observed some strikingly traditional notions underneath even the most modern garb, such as de Man's affirmation of the "critical reader who . . . takes us closer to the original insight." We can add to it, for instance, Jane Tompkins' statement that a literary text provides "men and women with a means of ordering the world they inhabit"[30] and compare it with C. M. Bowra's dictum that the *Aeneid* "has succeeded in doing something that no epic has done before and since, and helped many generations

30 *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (New York 1985) xiii.

of men to formulate their views on the chief problems of existence."[31] I hope to have made clear, at the same time, that such convergences should not foster complacency among Latinists that what goes around comes around and that we can practice our craft by the mere imbibing or osmosis of suitable exemplars without critical reflection.

Two final, specific examples may illustrate that classicists can usefully sharpen their reflection on even some of the most traditional topics of Roman poetry while, conversely, modern literary critics can gain a valuable perspective from a proper understanding of the special nature, such as it has been elucidated by Latinists, of these issues as they apply to Roman poets. The first, to use the well-known phrases of Bate and Bloom, is the burden of the past or the anxiety of influence.

"Why the Romans," as one modern scholar has remarked so aptly, "threw themselves into the difficult business of aborbing the culture of one foreign nation just when they were involved in exhausting wars with another foreign nation (i.e. Carthage in the 3rd cent. B.C.), remains one of those puzzles which characterize nations in their most inscrutable and decisive hours . . . The assimilation of Greek language, manners and beliefs is indistinguishable from the creation of a national literature which, with all the imitation of alien models, was immediately original, self-assured and aggressive."[32] From its beginnings, then, Roman literature, and poetry in particular, was characterized by the deliberate *imitatio* of Greek models. That relationship has been studied exhaustively by Latinists in a positivistic way. Beyond that, however, there is the clear recognition that the Roman poets did not consider the past literary tradition as a burden but rather as a challenge to their creativity. The convenient label of *aemulatio* includes some, though by no means all aspects of this creative concept, which amply merits further investigation (cf. Woodman and West). Bloom's studies in the English poets are, at least, a useful foil. Latinists will be intrigued by the classicaly inspired definitions—such as *clinamen*, *tessera*, and *apophrades*—he uses for various categories of poetic influence and by his attempts to categorize the phenomenon, much as some of us do, in terms other than the mere individual relationship of one poet to the other. In this context, interpreters of Roman poetry often resort to the notion of genre, which is a prominent topic in several essays in this volume and a recourse that is not used by Bloom. As will

31 *From Virgil to Milton* (London 1945) 34. That is true from Dante to Joe Paterno; see *Paterno: by the book* (New York 1989) 40-46.
32 A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom. The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge 1975) 17.

be seen, genre has both an inherent elasticity and an even greater one of modern definition, but it usefully mediates between the extremes of framing the question of the poetical tradition in either completely individual or rigorously totalizing terms. That, ultimately, is the road taken by Bloom who defines the relationship in terms of the victimization of the later poet by his predecessors. Poets are "condemned to tradition" and respond with attitudes of hatred and bitterness. The most they can struggle for is "the illusion of a fresh priority." Bloom then proceeds to categorize, with six idiosyncratic classical terms, their attempts to make themselves discontinuous with their predecessors.

Bloom's focus is on the romantic poets—not an inappropriate point of reference, as James Zetzel's essay suggests—and even if his assessment needs to be qualified for the romantic tradition itself, it helps us appreciate yet more the achievements of the Latin poets which we often take for granted. Even though we cannot look into their souls, they dealt with the anxiety of influence successfully in their poetic works. Ovid, for instance, ostensibly did so by ignoring it; instead of anxiety, he displays a playfulness about the poetic tradition which, however, he understands all too well. Not surprisingly, therefore, some of his poetry has been read as poetology (cf. the discussions of von Albrecht and Fantham). That is precisely the kind of reading Bloom uses especially for Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Or, to give another parallel: while Horace is unanxious vis-à-vis his Greek predecessors and urges the Romans to write in that tradition in the *Ars Poetica* and elsewhere,[33] he is quite depressed, in the *Letter to Augustus*, about the Romans' obsessive preference for his Roman predecessors. Their appreciation of a poet's merit is proportionate to the length of time he has been dead. New poets like Horace are, in fact, victimized by such attitudes. This is not quite the same intra-poetic problem as discussed by Bloom, but an interesting variant: the burden of the past is inflicted on the poet by his audience. It is another salutary reminder that such an audience exists and needs to be taken into account by literary historians and critics. More generally, scholars of Roman poetry should be cheered by Lentricchia's pronouncement that "Bloom has put forth bold and important ideas which threaten to make the moribund subject of influence the pivot of the most satisfying historicism to appear in modern criticism . . . The ultimate impact of his four books will be to take the subject of influence away

33 See especially *A.P.* 268f.: *vos exemplaria Graeca/nocturna versate manu, versate diurna* and his boast in *C.* 3.30.13f.: *princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos/deduxisse modos*. For his attitude in *Epist.* 2.1, cf. my extensive discussion in *Atti del Convegno mondiale scientifico su Virgilio* 1 (Milan 1984) 245-49.

from the source-hunters and echo-recorders" and potentially "to reinforce our most traditional of approaches to literary study" (pp. 325f.). All this is very apropos for Latinists.

A second topic which is reappearing in modern literary criticism and has some obvious relevance to Roman poetry is the notion of the moral dimension of literature. Given the latitude of definition of both morality and its opposite, a mutual awareness by Latinists and modern critics of their discussions of the applicability of the concept can only be beneficial for refining it. Conforming to its construct of the poem as an autonomous entity, the New Criticism considered the moral dimension as being inherent in the poem itself instead of depending on either the poet or the reader: "Neither the quality of an author's mind nor the effect of a poem on the reader's mind should be confused with the moral quality of the meaning expressed by the poem itself" (Wimsatt 87). Scholes (p. 14), citing Ricoeur and Fredric Jameson, argues that to find such meanings is the essential task of the critical reader: ". . . we will have to restore the judgmental dimension to criticism, not in the trivial sense (discredited by Frye and others) of ranking literary texts, but in the most serious sense of questioning the values proffered by the texts we study." Todorov extends this notion by setting it in contrast with a value-free empiricism and emphatically concludes his discussion of "Pseudo-Issues and Real Issues" on this note: "Criticism needs to become aware of the ethical dimension from which it is inseparable: not to the detriment of empirical knowledge of facts, but by freeing itself from the illusions of another empiricism, whatever its nature, that would suffice unto itself. Here, for me, is where the real issue lies" (p. 181). Accordingly, Conte, in the words of Charles Segal, "does not empty character or other narrative elements of their human significance. He is always concerned to bring the semiotic analysis of literary structure back to the moral significance of the action: the questions of ideology, values, suffering, and history" (p. 15).

This is all the more appropriate as the moral aspect is central to much of Roman poetry. The time-honored view in Rome of poetry in particular was that it existed to inculcate morality. We find a succinct expression of it in Horace's *Art of Poetry* where the specific area of morals is that of marriage and marital conduct.[34] Song and poetry, according to Horace, first taught men "the wisdom to distinguish public from private property, to forbid random

34 See Griffin 204 and, for the Augustan context and other Horatian poems, my article on "Augustus' Legislation on Morals and Marriage," *Philologus* 125 (1981) 126-44.

sexual intercourse and impose the laws of marriage" (*A.P.* 396-98). The moral purpose of poetry was recognized as perfectly legitimate in Greece and Rome, although the result did not have to be overt moralizing. The basic fact is that "the Augustan poets found a source of inspiration in reflection on moral ideals, and some of their greatest poetry takes its origin from it" (Williams 578). I am not contending that their idea of morality in poetry is identical to that of the modern critics, but there is a great deal of common ground we can explore fruitfully.

6. *Some conclusions and challenges*

Several conclusions have emerged in the course of this survey concerning the desiderata and *agenda* for the literary criticism of Roman poetry today especially in America. For the sake of avoiding the genre of overt didacticism, a brief summary of the main issues will suffice.

1) While, as Thomas Habinek points out in his essay, Latinists may have been the stepchildren of the American classics profession, that situation makes it all the more imperative that they clearly state their methodological principles and procedures. What LaCapra says about historiography (p. 12) is applicable to the interpretation of Roman poetry, too: "Historiography that turns away from critical reflection . . . is not a craft. It is little more than a pampered profession." It is also an intellectually lazy one. Misguided and excessive as it often may be, the current intellectual debate about theory has raised fundamental issues that beg for the responsible and distinctive participation of classicists.

2) That does not mean that theory has to be embraced for the sake of theory and means should be converted into ends. Latinists need not follow the poststructuralists in particular on the road to inconsequentiality, trivialization of both research and criticism, and hermeticism. The very fact that ancient poets, and especially Roman poets deliberately reworking Greek models, are meticulously attentive to language flies in the face of current critical pronouncements about poetic language, the limits of its intentionality and meaning, and such voices need to be heard.

3) Interpreters of Roman poetry, while being able to learn much from the current discussion, are excellently equipped to overcome some of the major shortcomings of the current practice of literary theory and criticism. Again, I can limit myself to just a few illustrations.

First, classics in the U.S. increasingly is regaining its interdisciplinary orientation and with it the basis for the kind of dialogue some modern theorists

had in mind at least initially. The search for this wider referentiality, as we have seen, was a reaction against the purely intraliterary tendencies of the New Criticism, but the reaction often ended up with even greater isolationism or meaningless, totalitarian theorizing. In contrast, on the current scene of self-imposed and bureaucratic compartmentalization in the humanities, classics departments provide a more congenial context than many others for cultural poetics and criticism. They can do a great deal, for instance, to break down the false dichotomy between aesthetic and historical criticism.

Second, as Said, Graff, Eagleton, and a host of others have noted, the current practice of theory has little to do with the study of literature, but is primarily a sociological phenomenon in the American context. It is yet another dubious triumph of academe's endemic tendency to professionalization and, for that matter, solipsism to whose pursuit some of its denizens have been known to devote a lifetime. Said's acute comments (p. 4) in particular deserve to quoted in full because they also are a suitable backdrop for Ralph Johnson's spirited plea:

> But it is no accident that the emergence of so narrowly defined a philosophy of pure textuality and critical noninterference has coincided with the ascent of Reaganism, or for that matter with a new cold war, increased militarism and defense spending, and a massive turn to the right on matters touching the economy, social services, and organized labor. In having given up the world entirely for the aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text, contemporary criticism has retreated from its constituency, the citizens of modern society, who have been left to the hands of the "free" market forces, multinational corporations, the manipulation of consumer appetites. A precious jargon has grown up, and its formidable complexities obscure the social realities that, strange as it may seem, encourage a scholarship of "modes of excellence" very far from daily life in the age of declining American power.

In contrast, the damage suffered by the interpretation of Roman poetry has consisted largely of the matrix of the Vietnam war being imposed on the wars of Aeneas in Italy. All these, however, are salutary reminders of the historicity of literary theory and interpretation, much as modern theorists have been trying to escape it.

Thirdly, therefore, Latinists and classicists have a splendid opportunity to transcend such entropy and write for an audience other than themselves and professional theoreticians, i.e. precisely for "the citizens of modern society." In so doing, they need not lapse into anachronisms and make the ancient world over in our image (cf. Habinek's comments on such tendencies in the 19th century). Writing about Roman poetry with modern sensibilities requires a clear definition and awareness of various "horizons of expectation" as Charles Segal well demonstrates in his paper and the ensuing discussion. For classics, this outreach function is a matter of survival. The good news is that the demand for it certainly is there and is likely to increase if English departments become mere theoretical affiliates and the students who want to learn about authors, read literature, study and enjoy texts will turn elsewhere. Again, this should be an occasion not for complacency but for practicing our craft as responsibly and creatively as we can.

7. The contributions to this volume

I have already referred, at appropriate junctures in this introductory overview, to the various essays in this collection and therefore can limit myself to outlining their central arguments. In their diversity of perspectives and pluralism of method they are typical of current interpretive work on Roman poetry. They are atypical, however, in their reflection on method and, for the most part, in their concomitant familiarity with modern theoretical movements.[35] Some are more specific than others about textual application. Overall, they are a representative example of where the interpretation of Roman poetry is at today, and many of the contributors suggest some desirable directions for future work.

In his opening essay, James Zetzel raises several hermeneutic issues, such as the avoidance of "the high priori road" (following R.S. Crane). He speaks for most Latinists when he stresses that "theory must arise from the text, not be imposed on it," and he proceeds to discuss extra- and intraliterary considerations—a complex of critical issues that has been with us since the Romantic period or, more correctly, the literary criticism of the Romantic period which Zetzel uses as a point of reference throughout, just as many contemporary critics do. He also comments on the role of historical

35 The contrast is instructive with a fine collection of essays on Roman poetry that appeared only sixteen years ago (T. Woodman and D. West, eds., *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry* [Cambridge 1974]) and affirmed "no specific knowledge in the recent history of literary criticism" (p. 129).

understanding, poetological readings, und he uses Catullus' poem 34 as a specific illustration.

In his animated repartee, Peter Wiseman plays the historian, returns to a discussion of Catullus 34, and refines the relationship between "romantic," biographical and historical aspects on the one hand and intrinsically "literary" ones on the other. The question ultimately turns, as is is so often the case in literary criticism, on the privileging of one hypothesis over the other, although we are not left with a sense of aporia.

With Francis Cairns' essay on Propertius 4.9 we enter into the current controversy over genre, its definition, and boundaries. Written by the leading exponent of the generic approach to Roman poetry, his paper is an erudite tour de force. The underlying question is to what extent the multiplicity of associations and inspirations, which is so typical of much of Roman poetry, can be accommodated to such generic definitions. In his response, therefore, William Anderson accentuates the problematic nature of the concept of "genre of content." Given the phenomenon of a thousand points of contact and the varying degrees to which they are compelling, how many topoi does it take to make a genre? Anderson also discusses the interaction between extraliterary factors, such as Roman cult and topography, and the poetic tradition that is being utilized.

The discussion of genre is further refined by Gian Biagio Conte and set in the context of empiricism, hermeneutics, and semiotic theory. Conte emphasizes that genres are more than a taxonomical convenience. Instead, consciousness of genre informs the horizon of expectations of both author and reader. Conte's discussion is refreshing for its lack of dogmatism and his incorporation of the requisite historical perspective as he seeks out "the cultural project of the author and at the same time the expectations of his addressees." Jasper Griffin in his reply differentiates between stylistic levels and genres. He cautions against overemphasis on genre in current criticism; I might add that its definitions are rather broad even in ancient literary criticism. The strict definition of epic, for instance, operates in purely formal terms, i.e. any hexametric poetry is epic, including the *Idylls* of Theocritus and Vergil's *Eclogues*. Content is wide open: "Epic," writes Theophrastus, "is the encompassment of divine, heroic, and human affairs."[36] Even Callimachus' famed *Aitia* prologue most likely does not define epic, but elegy, as Alan

36 Theophrastus as cited by Diomedes grammaticus 1.483, 27ff.; see the detailed discussion by Koster 86ff. Hirsch, 1967, 68-126 also has a useful discussion of "The Concept of Genre."

Cameron makes plausible in a forthcoming book. Another important consideration is that genres were not static but evolved.

I cited Charles Segal's essay earlier as a paradigm of the successful application of modern concepts to an ancient poem. His judicious employment of the notion of "boundary anxiety" to Lucretius illuminates many important aspects of the text and does not stumble into anachronisms. In fact, Frederick Ahl in his response extends the range of legitimate applications to other poets and correctly perceives this characteristic to be one of the major reasons for their richness and polyphony (a term used already in ancient Homeric criticism). Accordingly, the resulting discussion was extraordinarily productive and methodologically focused and most of it is therefore included in a slightly edited version.

Ovidian criticism, especially as it pertains to the *Metamorphoses*, has freed itself in recent years of previous, more schematic modes of interpretation and therefore is a particularly good example of the current pluralism and diversity. Michael von Albrecht presents a critical survey of the major scholarly and interpretive trends and outlines some desiderata. Ovidian criticism can still be enriched by a great range of procedures, including "traditional" studies of style and the composition of individual books. The impulse for the latter, as von Albrecht points out, comes from a development in the history of the reception of the *Metamorphoses* in illustrated editions. With its authorially intentional polyphonality the poem also is eminently suitable for reader response criticism and Iser's concept of "the implied reader." Elaine Fantham extends the argument by referring to narratology and scrutinizing the validity of poetological readings especially with regard to Ovid's rendition of the myth of the poet-singer Orpheus.

The last three contributions enlarge the critical panorama and address themselves to some larger issues rather than specific Latin poets or texts. As we have seen, Ralph Johnson's lively plea for an enjoyment of poetry that is unencumbered by theory lacks neither a considerable tradition nor contemporary analogues. Marilyn Skinner responds by emphasizing the role of theory as an ontological commitment, in this case feminism. She relates this to some concerns about the American classics profession in general,[37] a perspective which recurs, with a stricter Latinist focus, in Thomas Habinek's analysis of the role of Latin (as opposed to Greek) studies from the time of the

37 For a somewhat different perspective see my article "Classics beyond Crisis" in *CW* 84 (1991) 441-53 and *Classical and Modern Interactions*, ch. 6.

founding father of academic classics in the U.S., Basil Gildersleeve. Habinek concludes that, for a variety of historical and sociological reasons, the study of Roman literature has been considered inferior to that of Greek and has never been as pronounced. I would add that this very fact, in view of our increasing awareness of the historicity of interpretive trends, presents literary critics of Roman poetry with more genuine opportunities, choices, and challenges than exist for our counterparts in many other literatures. There is still incomparably much to be done, and the vitality of the study of Roman poetry will depend solely on our response.

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ROMAN ROMANTICISM AND OTHER FABLES

> "Come," said I to my friend, starting from a deep reverie,— "let us hasten home, or I shall be tempted to make a theory—after which there is little hope of any man."
>
> Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Hall of Fantasy"

The topic of this volume urges us to consider the dichotomy between hermeneutics and empiricism, or between literary theory and positivism, in the study of Latin poetry. These subjects are problematic, and they demand at the outset some brief acknowledgment of the difficulties posed by the question, before I even attempt to give an answer. It is, in fact, necessary to recognize that the antithesis between theory and positivism is a false one: any decision to avoid theory is itself based on a theoretical stance, namely that the interpretation of a text is somehow self-evident and requires no prior theoretical orientation. Self-evidence, however, is (to me, at any rate) not itself self-evident; and a survey of the interpretations of any text will show that what seems obvious to me now was not self-evident to critics a generation ago, and vice versa. But further qualification is needed: the position that I am now taking—against self-evidence—is itself a theoretical stance, and may not be self-evident to others. In short, the problem of establishing a theoretical basis for theory itself leads to an infinite regression; and that way lies madness or deconstruction. At the very least, it tends to a skeptical crisis with no Cartesian *cogito* to resolve it.[1]

I will not pursue this philosophical question here, as I obviously have no solution. The basic problem, as it relates to the use of theory in literary criticism, was recognized and formulated very clearly more than thirty years ago by a critic to whom I am greatly indebted here, R.S. Crane of the University of Chicago. To put it simply: honesty in literary interpretation

1 In keeping with its origins as a lecture, I have kept annotations to a reasonable minimum. I am grateful to Susanna Zetzel for commenting on several drafts of this paper, and for assisting me in problems of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature.

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