

WE MUST CALL THE CLASSICS BEFORE A COURT OF SHIPWRECKED MEN*

ABSTRACT: *What if we put to our texts the injunction of the Spanish intellectual Jose Ortega y Gasset—"We must call the classics before a court of shipwrecked men to answer certain peremptory questions with reference to real life"? The answer that emerges from an investigation of several literary works depicting a shipwrecked person who has access to one or more texts—Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, and, at one point, Dante's *Inferno*—points to the transformative power of such texts. Ortega's own work lead to an exploration of authenticity and vocation in Vergil's *Aeneid*.*

I. Introduction: In Search of the Missing Text

Have you ever had this experience? You read something and forget about it. Then years later, in my case decades later, an image or phrase from the work comes vividly to mind. You go back and try to find it, but you can't.

That's what happened to me with José Ortega y Gasset, the Spanish philosopher, intellectual, anti-fascist activist, whose *Revolt of the Masses* I read as a student, and whose injunction "We must call the classics before a court of shipwrecked men" came back to mind as the situation of the classics, the humanities, and indeed liberal education has become more perilous. It feels as if we have been hauled out of the classroom and into some kangaroo court, and told to justify ourselves in the crassest possible terms—or else.

Could Ortega y Gasset provide us with any help or advice? I read through *Revolt of the Masses* again looking for the quotation, but with no success. I Googled it in various ways, but still no luck.

In my frustration I turned from searching for the passage to looking for places in literature in which a shipwrecked person gets hold of a text. To be sure, this doesn't happen often. Even in fiction, when the ship goes down you run for the lifeboat not the ship's library. Still, I found it useful to visit some literary survivors of shipwrecks and ask about the books they had managed to bring with them.

II. *Robinson Crusoe*

Robinson Crusoe, of course, came immediately to mind. Crusoe was lucky. When he washed up on a fictional counterpart of the Caribbean island of Tobago, the ship did not entirely break up and wash away. He was able to salvage many things from it, including some tobacco and not one but

three very good bibles . . . some Portuguese books also and among them two or three popish prayer books, and several other books all of which I carefully secured [in a seachest].¹

* This essay is adapted from a lecture given in honor of Jerry Clack at the Classical Association of the Atlantic States on October 8, 2010.

¹ D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Ann Arbor 1966) 60.

Only the bibles, however, won his serious attention, and that only after a terrible illness. In his affliction he looked to the tobacco to relieve his misery:

in this chest I found a cure both for soul and body. I opened the chest and found what I looked for, viz., the tobacco; and as the few books I had saved lay there too, I took out one of the bibles, which . . . to this time, I had not found leisure, or so much as inclination, to look into. (88)

Now he makes up for that neglect: after finding that rum infused with tobacco was a most potent medicine, he turns to the bible

and began to read, but my head was too much disturbed by the tobacco to bear reading, at least at that time; only, having opened the book casually, the first words that occurred to me were these: "Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." The words were very apt to my case. (88)

At first Crusoe cannot believe this promise of deliverance, but in time the text from Psalm 50, quoted in the King James version, becomes almost a mantra, guiding and slowly but profoundly changing his life. A week after finding the bibles—and the rum with tobacco cure-all—he starts reading the good book diligently.

July 4. In the morning I took the Bible: and beginning at the New Testament, I began seriously to read it; and imposed upon myself to read a little every morning and every night. . . . (90)

Soon

I was earnestly begging of God to give me repentance, when it happened providentially, that very same day, that, reading the scripture, I came to these words, "He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour; to give repentance and to give remission." (90)

In this case Defoe paraphrases the King James version of Acts 5:31, "Him hath God exalted with his right hand [to be] a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Or was one of the three bibles an earlier translation, such as Coverdale's of 1535 or the even earlier ones by Tyndale and Wyclif?

Crusoe begins over time to be thankful for what providence has given him on the island:

I was here removed from all the wickedness of the world; I had neither the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, nor the pride of life. I had nothing to covet, for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying. (120)

In short, in his tropical Eden he experienced a contentment denied him in his earlier life. The text the shipwrecked man found had made all the difference.²

² Professor Laura Rosenthal of the University of Maryland called my attention to a female Robinson Crusoe in a work produced in 1796 by Charles Dibdin called

III. *The Tempest*

In composing *Robinson Crusoe* (published in 1719) Daniel Defoe surely knew another story about a shipwrecked man with a book—in-
deed with a whole library. Shakespeare's drama, probably produced in
1611 (the same year as the publication of the King James version of
the Bible), tells the story of a Duke of Milan, who was rather too keen
on the liberal arts, as he admits when he says that his interest was

Without a parallel; those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother,
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies. (1.2.72–77)

His neglect of statecraft results in a coup d'état, and he and his
young daughter Miranda are put out to sea on

A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast—the very rats
Instinctively have quit it. . . . (1.2.146–148)

The kindly Gonzalo, however,

. . . of his gentleness
Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnish'd me
From mine own library with volumes that
I prized above my dukedom. (1.2.165–168)

Among those books was one about an art, not usually numbered
among the liberal arts—an art, which, as Caliban says:

. . . is of such power,
It would control my dam's god Setebos
And make a vassal of him. (1.2.372–374)

This dark art allows Prospero, the shipwrecked duke, to conjure
up the tempest that gives its name to the play, and to bring under
his control the wicked conspirators who drove him from Milan. But
his magical treatise has also provided Prospero with the power to
turn what could be a tragedy of revenge into a happy ending of
forgiveness and reconciliation:

. . . I'll to my book,
For yet, ere supper time, must I perform
Much business appertaining. (3.1.94–96)

His library no doubt helped sustain him during his years on the
island, but that magical book empowers him, and transforms his life
and those of all who were shipwrecked upon this wondrous isle.³

IV. *Treasure Island*

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, first published in book
form in 1883, is a fast-paced adventure story, often thought of as

"Hannah Hewit; or, The Female Robinson Crusoe." In her solitude Ms. Hewit spends
much of her time reading books on science that she found onboard her ship.

³ In *The New Yorker* (April 18, 2011) 80–94, Jonathan Franzen describes his
self-inflicted isolation on the island of Masafuera, 500 miles off the coast of Chile.
He brought with him *Robinson Crusoe*, which his experience on the island greatly
illuminates.

children's entertainment, and hence not worthy of being read as serious literature. Still, a close reading of the work, which is after all a classic in its own right, proves rewarding. We might approach it as a secularized version of the redemption story in *Crusoe*. Ben Gunn, abandoned on another tropical island by the wicked pirate Flint, suffers much as Crusoe did, but poor Ben is bookless. No bible to console and transform him! When the treasure hunters on the ship *Hispaniola* arrive, he is soon sharing the island with marooned mutineers, as dangerous as the cannibals of whom Crusoe was so frightened. One of these pirates, however, has brought a bible with him.

This bible is put to an unusual use. When the mutineers resolve to depose their leader, Long John Silver, they tear a piece out of it, marking one side with the infamous black spot, and on the other writing the word "deposed."

Long John Silver instantly recognizes that the piece has been torn from a bible, and swiftly turns that fact to his advantage:

"The black spot! I thought so," he observed. "Where might you have got the paper? Why, hello! Look here, now; this ain't lucky! You've gone and cut this out of a Bible. What fool cut a Bible?"⁴

As the sailors begin to blame one another, Silver exploits their superstitious anxiety about having mutilated the sacred book. But it was no random passage of scripture they had torn out, as young Jim Hawkins realizes when he sees the paper:

It was a round about the size of a crown piece. One side was blank, for it had been the last leaf; the other contained a verse or two of Revelation—these words among the rest which struck sharply home upon my mind: "without are dogs and murderers."

Jim's summary expurgates Revelation 22:15, the full text of which in the King James version reads, "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." If Jim or Long John Silver or any of the mutineers had been able to recollect the context of the passage, they would have even greater grounds for concern, since a few verses later comes this malediction: "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life. . . ." (19).

The recognition that the black spot is written on paper torn from a bible is a turning point in the story. Soon the rightful owners of the *Hispaniola* are back in command, Long John Silver is on his way to justice, and the surviving mutineers are marooned on "that accursed island."

Finally, just a word about one more shipwrecked man, the author of *The Divine Comedy*.

⁴ R. L. Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (1883) ch. 29.

V. Dante

The midlife crisis with which the *Inferno* begins is described as a metaphorical shipwreck:

And as one who, with laboring breath,
Has escaped from the deep to the shore,
Turns and looks back at the perilous waters,
So my mind, still in flight,
Turned back to look once more upon the pass
No mortal being ever left alive (*Canto* 1.22–27)⁵

And it is there, of course, that the figure who speaks in the poem finds not a text, but an author, one who has long been a stylistic model for him (line 87), but now becomes a spiritual and moral guide as well. One might expect a biblical writer, but it is Vergil, as we all know, who will show the way around the perils that beset him in the first stage of his progress towards paradise. What did Dante experience in his reading that led him to ascribe this role to Vergil? I leave that question aside for the moment, content simply to note once again the transformative power ascribed to certain writers.

I hope readers will add to this collection of texts, or tell me that somewhere in the television series *Lost* or in some footage cut from Tom Hanks' *Castaway*, or elsewhere in pop culture, another shipwrecked soul manages to salvage a book. But the texts we have looked at—*Robinson Crusoe*, the *Tempest*, the *Inferno*, and perhaps even *Treasure Island*—seem to me sufficient for our purpose—or rather the texts within these texts can be our guides. Each of them is a turning point in the plot of the work; more important, they enrich, transform or accord deliverance to one or more central characters, and they ask those of us who wish to affirm the vitality of literature whether the texts we love and teach have a similar power.

Is this what Ortega y Gasset had in mind—that classics, when called before the court of the shipwrecked, have to show that they have such power? This question poses a great challenge, but it is important to remember that the shipwrecked men we have seen are not the enemies of the texts they find. They put those texts to use; sometimes they sustain their lives with them, hanging onto them as if they were a life jacket in a winter gale.

VI. Ortega y Gasset

I finally found the quotation from Ortega y Gasset, or, more precisely, Facebook found it for me. In despair I posted a cry for help on my page and within twenty minutes Adrienne Mayor, author of *The Poison King*, had given me the reference I needed. It turned out the quotation was not from *Revolt of the Masses*, the only book of his that I owned, but from a remarkable essay on Goethe that Ortega y Gasset published in 1932, in Berlin, in the face of the Nazis. It was a time when it seemed the values and inherited

⁵ Dante, *The Inferno*, trs. R. and J. Hollander (New York 2000).

assumptions of European culture were being sucked into the abyss, when all was shipwreck.⁶

The passage I had so long been searching for surprised me. To be sure, it did not contradict what I had inferred from the texts I had been examining. Shipwrecks in Ortega were not bad things and shipwrecked men were definitely not the enemies but the friends and beneficiaries of the texts they found. Ortega's essay, however, raises a wider set of questions about how one approaches a classic, questions about authenticity, vocation, and even destiny.

Ortega's work is full of shipwreck imagery; indeed he adores the idea of shipwreck:

Life is, in itself and forever, shipwreck. To be shipwrecked is not to drown. The poor human being, feeling himself sinking into the abyss, moves his arms to keep afloat. This movement of the arms is culture—a swimming stroke. (126)

To an American reader, the passage calls to mind Walt Whitman:

Books are to be call'd for, and supplied, on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half sleep, but in the highest sense, an exercise, a gymnast's struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself, must be on the alert, must himself or herself construct indeed the poem, argument, history, metaphysical essay—the text furnishing the hints, the clue, the start of the frame-work. Not the book needs so much to be the complete thing, but the reader of the book does. That were to make a nation of supple and athletic minds, well train'd, intuitive, used to depend on themselves and not on a few coteries of writers.⁷

A page later Ortega explains what he means:

Consciousness of shipwreck, being the truth of life, constitutes salvation. Hence I no longer believe in any ideas except the idea of shipwrecked men. We must call the classics before a court of shipwrecked men to answer certain peremptory questions with reference to real life. (127)

There it is—the quotation I had been searching for, at its source and in context, that shows what Ortega had in mind. Shipwrecked men know that it does no good simply to possess a text, enjoy it, or venerate it. Shipwrecked men insist on more than that.

⁶ The article originally appeared in *Die neue Rundschau* in 1932. Translated as "In Search of Goethe from Within," it appeared in the *Partisan Review* in December 1949, and was reprinted in a collection of his essays published as W. Trask, tr., *The Dehumanization of Art* (Garden City 1956) 126–60. Ortega also spoke on Goethe in a keynote address at the Aspen Institute on July 12, 1949. The speech, "Concerning a Bicentennial Goethe," is printed in A. Bergstrasser, ed., *Goethe and the Modern Age* (Chicago 1949) 349–62. See J. T. Graham, *The Social Thought of Ortega y Gasset* (Columbia, Mo., 2001) 441.

⁷ F. Stovall, ed., *Democratic Vistas*, vol. 2 (1964) 424.

If we follow Ortega, the case to be made is not that the classics are part of a grand cultural tradition that we should all revere and defer to. Nor is it that they are passports admitting their readers to “the company of educated men.” Nor will it help to say, as Cedric Whitman once did, that these texts provide an anodyne to the agonies of the contemporary world. For all their apparent remoteness and undeniable difficulty, they may indeed provide a special kind of pleasure, “consummate moments” when thought and feeling are fused together in new intensity.⁸

But would we dare say that to the shipwrecked? They might insist on something more robust. Ortega would understand their feelings: “There is but one way left to save a classic: to give up revering him and use him for our own salvation—that is to lay aside his classicism, to bring him closer to us” (160).

But how is that to be done? By posing certain “peremptory questions” that Ortega says must be put to the classics. Those questions are not about immediate practicality. Ortega’s view becomes clearer when we look more closely at the subject of his essay, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

VII. Goethe

Ortega calls Goethe “the classic to the second power, the classic who . . . lived by the classics” (127), and goes on to make a bold claim about him, while as a writer he lived off the patrimony of the classics, he was also the person “in whom for the first time there dawned the consciousness that human life is man’s struggle with his intimate and individual destiny” (134). That is, Goethe’s life was not primarily a struggle with the external world, nor with his own body, soul, consciousness, character, or anything already in existence (see 129), but with something which has to bring itself into existence through a life lived with authenticity. “That is why we see Goethe perpetually scrutinizing his own life” (135). That scrutiny was not egotism or romantic subjectivism but a recognition of the universal human situation; whether we know it or not, accept it or not, our struggle is to live an authentic life.

The issue is authenticity, an intense one in a time when tradition, consensus about modes of conduct, inherited values, even civilization itself are in disintegration. Cultural shipwreck requires that one finds one’s own way of living a life that is worth living. The struggle then is for authenticity. Can the classic, singular nor plural, help us find that?

Ortega takes this line of analysis one step further when he suggests that Goethe had, as perhaps we all have, a distinctive capacity, or as Ortega sometimes phrases it, a “vocation.” He does mean that in a narrow occupational sense, nor in some grand theological fashion. He has in mind instead

. . . the subject’s fidelity to this unique destiny of his.
The matter of the greatest interest is not the man’s

⁸ See the discussion by G. Harpham in “The Next Big Thing in Literary Study: Pleasure,” *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago 2011) 99–122.

struggle with the world, with his external destiny, but his struggle with his vocation. . . . Does he subscribe to it basically, or . . . does he fill his existence with substitutes for what would have been his authentic life?
(133)

Thus the peremptory questions to be put to Goethe, (or to his biographers) are, in Ortega's view, two—what his vital vocation was (whether he recognized it or not), and then “to weigh [his] fidelity to this unique destiny of his” (133). That is what Ortega has in view in entitling his essay “In Search of Goethe from Within.”

Can we extrapolate from that? Can we reclaim the word “vocation” and the concept of authenticity for the study of literature, ancient and modern? Can we say to the shipwrecked, “These texts, the ones people have valued longest and most intensely, can help you with that?”

Ortega might well say no, since he believes that Goethe was the first to recognize that one's life is a struggle with “destiny,” a word he uses as a near synonym for “vocation,” or “authenticity.” But was Ortega right? Or did he fail to recognize that writers long before Goethe were struggling with similar questions? Perhaps the classic of all classics, Vergil, can also guide us through these difficulties to an answer.

VIII. The *Aeneid*

It's easy to find shipwrecks in classical literature—the cultural ones that Ortega had in mind, as well as the nautical variety. Ancient cultures are no different from modern ones in this respect; they are always disintegrating in some ways and reconstituting themselves in others. Within them individuals are often adrift, not quite sure who they are, or how they should live. The cultural codes that govern conduct give way. Thucydides, Tacitus, and many other ancient writers would, I suspect, agree with Ortega when he writes, “Life is, in itself and forever, shipwreck” (126). Classical writers often depict such cultural shipwrecks with great clarity.

But for our purposes it is not enough to *witness* such shipwrecks. If shipwrecked men find a copy of the *Aeneid* washed up in a seachest, they want to know if the hero of the epic has anything useful to say to them. They will be a tough audience! Shipwrecked men have been through too much to be persuaded by simplistic answers, but if Ortega is correct, they will listen attentively to serious talk about authenticity and vocation. “Wait a minute,” however, we can almost hear them say, “That's precisely my problem. I don't *know* what my vocation is or how to find it. I'm not just shipwrecked, I am adrift. How am I to become aware of that ‘vital vocation,’ the ‘destiny’ that Ortega talks so much about?”

Ortega has an answer to that; but he would not, I suspect, object if we ask whether it is an adequate answer. Ortega sounds confident enough: “Man recognizes . . . his unique vocation only through the liking or aversion aroused in him by each separate situation” (140). This is attractive, for surely a vocation should result in satisfaction,

happiness even. Liking or aversion, however, when made the criterion for life choices have a way of morphing into unhappiness, as is the case in Ortega's very next sentence: "Unhappiness, like the needle of a registering apparatus, tells him when his actual life realizes his vital program . . . and when it departs from it" (140).

That's not the way Vergil sees it. The *Aeneid* is not about liking or disliking, happiness or unhappiness. Nor is it focused on choosing a vocation. Good modern readers that we are, we want to see someone inwardly divided, tormented even, or at least struggling to decide about commitments. Along the way we would welcome some existential angst. The hardest thing for Aeneas, however, is what follows once he has accepted his vocation and sets off for Italy. In this sense, Ortega is right. Aeneas is not one of the self-absorbed figures we often encounter in romantic and post-romantic literature. Nonetheless, his story, as Vergil tells it, can be read as an exploration of the issues that Ortega has put before us. The epic is, in a sense, a poem about vocation.

After the destruction of Troy, Aeneas knows his vocation. It is not what he felt compelled to do when he first saw Troy in flames—die the conventional hero's death, killing as many enemies as he can before going down fighting. That code of conduct drove him into battle with wolflike fury:

. . . blind rage and desperation
Drove me; one thought comes—that death in battle is
a fine thing. (*Aen.* 2.316–317)⁹

All this changes, however, when he recollects the injunction Hector had given him in a dream:

Goddess-born, you must go . . . if strong right hands
Could save our town, this hand of mine would have
saved it long ago. Her holy things, her home-gods
Troy commends to your keeping: Take these as partners
in your fate, for these search out. The walls you are
destined to build after long roaming the seaways.
(*Aen.* 2.289–295)

Now he has to find a different kind of heroism and a different understanding of his vocation—forget the killing, run away from Troy, get blown over the Mediterranean, bring the *penates* to Italy, rescue them for a city you will never see. That's Aeneas' vocation. He knows it; he's told it in unmistakable terms and reminded of it from time to time as well. And he accepts that vocation. When he tells Dido "*sum pius Aeneas*" (1.378) he must have in mind his commitment to his vocation; that's why the verses continue, *raptos qui ex hoste penatis / classe veho mecum. . . / Italiam quaero* ("who is carrying with me in this fleet the household gods I snatched from the enemy . . . I am headed to Italy," 378–380). He knows his vocation and will stay faithful to it. Beware, Dido!

To be sure, the word *vocatio* never appears in the *Aeneid*, and the calling that does take place in the poem is most often the familiar

⁹ C. Day-Lewis, tr., *Aeneid*.

physical kind (but note 1.202 and 1.214). Aeneas' vocation is expressed, however, in another speech word, *fatum*. The meaning is not the same as its English cognate, "fate." It retains, moreover, connotations of its ancient etymology, from a verb for speaking "for." What has been spoken from on high he must fulfill. This *fatum* defines Aeneas from the second line of the epic—*fato profugus*. "Displaced by destiny," says our translator, using a term that is Ortega's favorite synonym for "vocation."

To be sure, what has been spoken to Aeneas, his *fatum*, is not swiftly or easily accomplished. Aeneas know his destiny, but it is up to him to figure out exactly how to fulfill it. The gods are as likely to hinder as help. They impede him, hide themselves; his own mother appears in disguise as a Tyrian huntress. And their oracles can be positively misleading, as Apollo's oracle at Delos proves to be (3.94). When it comes right down to it, Aeneas is mostly on his own, but at least, unlike so many of us, he knows what he is supposed to be doing.

Clarity about vocation and ongoing questions about the means of responding to it may be part of the reason why Christians have long found themselves at home in the *Aeneid*. They too know their vocation, at least in broad terms, however hard it may be to translate it into day-to-day living. The old prayer book puts it to them squarely:

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. That is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."¹⁰

Nothing is said there about "the liking or aversion aroused in him." Vocation, seen in this light, is not What makes me happy? but poses quite different questions, such as, What does it mean to love God with all my mind (*dianoia* in the Greek)? Who is my neighbor? And, of course, the inescapable one, How should those two commandments be acted upon?

The problem then, that the Christian faces, when he hears what the "Lord Jesus Christ saith," is not far from the problem that Aeneas confronts once he has left Troy and the old heroic code behind. Both know what must be done; but it is not clear how to do it. The parables in the Gospels provide some help with that question—Matthew, for example, soon after promulgation of the two great commandments morphs into the parable of the talents (25.14–30). The criterion for determining one's vocation, seen in this light, has to do with putting one's talents to work.

But what about Vergil? No parables guide his Aeneas. As one reads the *Aeneid* one keeps asking, Can this man stay the course? That is not far from one of the peremptory questions that Ortega sets for the biographer of Goethe: ". . . to weigh the subject's fidelity to this unique destiny of his, to his possible life. This permits us to

¹⁰ Matthew 22:37–40, quoted in the Book of Common Prayer (1928).

determine the degree of authenticity in his actual life” (133). While we cannot answer that question for the man Vergil, since we know so little about him apart from his writings, we can reformulate Ortega’s question and apply it to the hero of the epic, asking about Aeneas: Is he really true to his vocation; does he remain, is it credible that he remains, *pius Aeneas*?

We can, however, push beyond these questions; in fact we must push further if we are to stand with this text before the court of the shipwrecked, for then jury will surely insist on asking, What was the cost, and what were the rewards of Aeneas’ fidelity to his vocation? Was it worth it?

The *Aeneid* never explicitly answers these questions. So much the better, if our goal is to challenge, and to help, these shipwrecked men understand what vocation really means. No other work of literature, I believe, opens up as powerfully as the *Aeneid* the fundamental questions surrounding vocation and authenticity. Its achievement, at least in part, is to pose these questions and to provide a vantage point from which readers may see them in a fresh light. Can we ask for more?

IX. Conclusion: In the Classroom, not the Courtroom

Those who teach the classics understandably wish to defend them against their accusers by showing that these authors had the answers we need today. They got it right. But we stand in the classroom, not the courtroom. In that setting we are not advocates but questioners. Our vocation, handed down to us with all clarity by Socrates, is to ask questions that matter, not least those that, following Ortega, we have just been exploring—vocation, authenticity, happiness, destiny. These are transformative questions, and, as we have seen, some texts, the truly classical texts, are transformative too.

So, amid so many other obligations of the teacher comes one more, not to provide some definitive answer to these questions, but to clear a place for them, create a *locus amoenus*, in which our texts can be situated and such questions posed, set in perspective, and discussed with honesty, frankness, and mutual respect. Such places are rare in today’s world. Students need them. Our texts blossom in them. Shipwrecked men come to respect them.

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