

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Inconsistency in Roman Epic

How should we react as readers and as critics when two passages in a literary work contradict one another? Classicists once assumed that all inconsistencies in ancient texts needed to be emended, explained away, or lamented. Building on recent work on both Greek and Roman authors, this book explores the possibility of interpreting inconsistencies in Roman epic. After a chapter surveying Greek background material including Homer, tragedy, Plato and the Alexandrians, five chapters argue that comparative study of the literary use of inconsistencies can shed light on major problems in Catullus' *Peleus and Thetis*, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. Not all inconsistencies can or should be interpreted thematically, but numerous details in these poems, and some ancient and modern theorists, suggest that we can be better readers if we consider how inconsistencies may be functioning in Greek and Roman texts.

JAMES J. O'HARA is George L. Paddison Professor of Latin at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (1990) and *True Names: Vergil and the Alexandrian Tradition of Etymological Wordplay* (1996), as well as numerous articles and reviews on Latin literature.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ROMAN LITERATURE
AND ITS CONTEXTS

Inconsistency in Roman Epic

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ROMAN LITERATURE AND ITS CONTEXTS

Series editors:

Denis Feeney and Stephen Hinds

This series promotes approaches to Roman literature which are open to dialogue with current work in other areas of the classics, and in the humanities at large. The pursuit of contacts with cognate fields such as social history, anthropology, history of thought, linguistics and literary theory is in the best traditions of classical scholarship: the study of Roman literature, no less than Greek, has much to gain from engaging with these other contexts and intellectual traditions. The series offers a forum in which readers of Latin texts can sharpen their readings by placing them in broader and better-defined contexts, and in which other classicists and humanists can explore the general or particular implications of their work for readers of Latin texts. The books all constitute original and innovative research and are envisaged as suggestive essays whose aim is to stimulate debate.

Other books in the series

Joseph Farrell, *Latin language and Latin culture: from ancient to modern times*

A. M. Keith, *Engendering Rome: women in Latin epic*

William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman literary imagination*

Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and intertext: dynamics of appropriation in Roman poetry*

Denis Feeney, *Literature and religion at Rome: cultures, contexts, and beliefs*

Catharine Edwards, *Writing Rome: textual approaches to the city*

Duncan F. Kennedy, *The arts of love: five studies in the discourse of Roman love elegy*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the text: Latin poetry and the hermeneutics
of reception*

Philip Hardie, *The epic successors of Virgil: a study in the dynamics
of a tradition*

Alain Gowing, *Empire and memory: the representation of the Roman
Republic in imperial culture*

Richard Hunter, *The shadow of Callimachus: studies in the reception of
Hellenistic poetry at Rome*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Inconsistency in Roman Epic

Studies in Catullus, Lucretius,
Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Paddison Professor of Latin

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan
James J. O'Hara
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521646420

© Cambridge University Press 2006

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN-13 978-0-521-64139-5 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-64139-X hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-64642-0 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-64642-1 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs
for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this book, and does not
guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Marika

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
 Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan
 James J. O'Hara
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page xii
Introduction	I
1 Greek versions	8
2 Catullus 64: Variants and the virtues of heroes	33
3 Death, inconsistency, and the Epicurean poet	55
4 Voices, variants, and inconsistency in the <i>Aeneid</i>	77
5 Inconsistency and authority in Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i>	104
6 Postscript: Lucan's <i>Bellum Civile</i> and the inconsistent Roman epic	131
<i>Bibliography</i>	143
<i>Index of passages discussed</i>	159
<i>General index</i>	163

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan

James J. O'Hara

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

Like many short books this one has had a long gestation period. I need to thank all of my colleagues at Wesleyan University, where the most important work on the book was done, and at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where it was finished.

Many portions of the book were presented before audiences that asked tough and useful questions: I thank scholars at the University of Virginia (in both 1992 and 2003), Rutgers University (in both 1993 and 2003), Harvard, the College of the Holy Cross (my alma mater), Boston University, Smith College, the University of Michigan (where I did my graduate work), the University of Chicago, Agnes Scott College, the University of Georgia, Yale, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, Loyola College in Maryland, the North Carolina Classical Association, the Classical Association of Connecticut, and the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. Both after those talks and at other times I learned much from Wesleyan colleagues Michael Roberts, Marilyn Katz and Sean McCann, and from Peter Smith, Bruce Frier, Ruth Scodel, Alden Smith, and Lowell Edmunds.

Thanks go to those who have responded to my questions about forthcoming work: Rene Nünlist, Shadi Bartsch, Fred Williams, Katie Gilchrist, Richard Thomas, and Nicholas Horsfall.

What I have learned from David Ross in graduate school and beyond still informs every page I write.

My student research assistants Katherine Kelp-Stebbins (at Wesleyan), and Dennis McKay and John Henkel (in Chapel Hill) were of great help with my research, and each read the whole manuscript and made useful suggestions on both presentation and argument. Sydnor Roy also offered helpful and

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-64139-5 - Inconsistency in Roman Epic: Studies in Catullus,
Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid and Lucan
James J. O'Hara
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

challenging marginal comments. My colleagues Sarah Mack (Vergil and Ovid chapters) and Sharon James made helpful criticisms of both style and content, with particular attention to all of my favorite stylistic weaknesses. Richard Thomas and Nicholas Horsfall offered predictably learned and precise criticism of a draft of the whole book.

Over a period of years, series editors Stephen Hinds and Denis Feeney read a number of drafts, some of them amazingly lacunose and rough, and made many invaluable suggestions; only the other authors in the series will know how much they have done to improve this book. Pauline Hire, Michael Sharp and Jayne Aldhouse of Cambridge University Press were a pleasure to work with, and Linda Woodward was a tactful but effective copy editor.

The readers that I have thanked have improved my work a great deal, and saved me from numerous errors. Given my subject matter, all errors that remain are of course deliberate.

My dedication is to my daughter, a very good reader.