

AMPHORA

THE CLASSICIST PRESIDENT

by Susan Ford Wiltshire

On September 20, 1863, the last day of the Battle of Chickamauga, a thirty-one-year-old brigadier general from Ohio – already a classics professor, college president, and newly elected to the U. S. Congress – left the retreat of Union General William S. Rosecrans, whom he served as military chief of staff, and rode under heavy fire to the side of General George H. Thomas, still standing his ground against the Confederate troops on another front. The professor’s detailed battle reports to Thomas strengthened Thomas’ resolve to fight on and helped save the Union Army of the Cumberland. In time, the professor’s action that day helped take him all the way to the White House.

James Abram Garfield, the only professional classicist ever to serve as President of the United States, was born in a log cabin in northern Ohio on November 19, 1831. The fourth and youngest child of a near-destitute widow, Garfield was nevertheless encouraged by his mother to seek an education. First at nearby Geauga Academy, then at the Hiram Eclectic Institute – later Hiram College – Garfield’s education centered on Latin, Greek, and mathematics.

Garfield began keeping detailed diaries after he entered Geauga Academy on March 6, 1849, and continued this habit for the rest of his life. These diaries have been published, along with much of his extensive correspondence. Together they preserve substantial evidence of Garfield’s lifelong love affair with learning and especially with Latin. As early as April 15, 1850, he wrote in his diary in Latin that he loved books, “*Amo Libros.*” A month later he added, “Love Latin.”

After a brief stint of school teaching, Garfield, in the fall of 1851 at age nineteen, entered the newly established Western Reserve Eclectic Institute in Hiram, Ohio. Here he continued to flourish. He became greatly popular and excelled in all his studies. In time,



Fig. 1. James A. Garfield, major general in the Union Army during the Civil War, 1862.

Garfield had little more to learn from the resources of Hiram and began to teach there.

James had known Lucretia Rudolph, whom he eventually married, since both were students Geauga Academy. They became better acquainted as they both studied at the Eclectic Institute. Garfield now discovered one of the more practical benefits of studying Greek and Latin – its use as a means of courtship. In an early exchange of letters about their classical studies, Garfield wrote: “Today, the Virgil class finished the third book and are going about 50 lines per day. Are you ahead?”

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Book Review: *The Penelopiad*

by Matthew Clark

Margaret Atwood. *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*. Alfred A. Knopf, Canada (<http://www.random-house.ca>), 2005. Pp. xv, 199. Hardcover \$17.95. ISBN 0-676-97418-X.

Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* is one volume in a series of retellings of myths from around the world by various modern authors. Thirty-one publishers are participating in the project; other writers contracted to produce versions include Chinua Achebe, Donna Tartt, and A. S. Byatt; Karen Armstrong has written a general account of myth (*A Short History of Myth*, 2005) to accompany the series as a whole. The project overall has the appearance of a commercial enterprise, but the test of its value, of course, will lie in the quality of the individual volumes.

Atwood tells her story from two points of view: the principal narrator is Penelope herself, now dead and resident in the afterworld, but Penelope’s narrative is interrupted by a number of chapters from the point of view of the maids killed in Book 22 of the *Odyssey*. Most of these interruptions are songs or poems or prose poems, though there is also an “anthropology

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THE CLASSICIST PRESIDENT

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I presume so. Won't you come in to both Greek and Latin in the spring? We miss you very much in these two classes. What are your views now with regard to studying the classics? Have you reconciled yourself to devoting a few more years to them? I would like to hear your reasonings on the subject. I would much rather converse *'ore quam calamo'* [in person, not by pen] but it seems our leisure hours do not synchronize . . ."

After two years and hungry for more intellectual stimulus than Hiram and Ohio could provide, Garfield wrote the presidents of Yale, Brown, and Williams College about the possibility of entering as a transfer student. Mark Hopkins, the legendary president of Williams College, responded most favorably, so in the summer of 1854, leaving behind Lucretia, to whom he had become informally engaged, Garfield arrived in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He wrote to Lucretia that within three hours of his arrival he was being examined by Hopkins in Homer, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Livy, and Horace. In a later letter to Lucretia he wrote of the importance to him of this kind of education. His letter also sheds light on his powerful ambition, what he calls his "inner fires":

I do not feel satisfied merely to carry away the skin of a Massachusetts sheep, but I want to know something of the *men*, the *thoughts*, that are here. I feel the necessity of breaking through the shell of local notions and getting mentally free. I mean no disrespect for the influences and teaching that I had had, but I mean to say that to mould one's mind in one place and under one system of things must necessarily give it one particular channel, and not that breadth of field that is desirable . . . There are some splendid scholars in the class. Many come from Harvard, Amherst, and Yale to finish here. Lucretia, I must admit that those inner fires come surging up through every nerve and fiber of my being in strong desire and strong determination not to stand – at least, last of all. . . . *Honor* is not the object for which I labor; but when in a class I am miserable if *far* behind.

Upon graduation in August 1856 with honors from Williams, where he had also become a star debater and speaker, Garfield returned to Hiram as professor of ancient languages and, soon thereafter, as president of the school. He had fallen in love with another young

woman in Massachusetts, but feeling a sense of duty to Lucretia, he proposed to her in April 1858, and they married in November of that year. Garfield's restless energy took him away from home frequently in the early years of the marriage, absences that were hard on Lucretia who, in time, would be primarily responsible for raising their seven children. Lucretia, however, was also a scholar, and to the end of her life in 1918, she set aside time every day for reading and writing.

While at Hiram, Garfield was sent to the Ohio State legislature in 1859. During this time, he also campaigned tirelessly for Abraham Lincoln, who easily won Garfield's district in 1860. In August 1861, he joined the 42nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry as a lieutenant colonel. He fought successfully in the battle of Middle Creek in Kentucky in January of 1862 (see Fig. 1). He was promoted to brigadier general, and in the fall of that same year, was elected to the U. S. Congress as a strong supporter of abolition. In December 1863, at the urging of President Lincoln, Garfield resigned his military commission and took his seat in Congress.

The move to Washington and to political life did not dim Garfield's attraction to the classics. From Congress he wrote to his good friend Burke Hinsdale on January 1, 1867: "My love for Latin and Greek, and the history of antiquity, is growing every day. I have stolen many hours since I have been here and given them to Cicero and Horace. I am also trying to study French – but I presume I shall be cut short when Congress gets to work."

Garfield's diary entry of January 5, 1872, describes a typical day: "Still writing letters and working off accumulated Department business. Criticised additional chapter of Hinsdale's forthcoming book, on the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels. Answered Prof. Demmon's inquiry on the meaning of "*Monstra Natantia*" in the third of the first book of Horace's *Odes*. The Professor thought the words meant ships. I say it means animals; marine monsters."

In other diary entries from the congressional years, Garfield describes puzzling over the structure of Horace's *Ode* 1.4 to Sestius; helping his sons with their Caesar; reading to them Mommson's account of the Servile War or Plutarch's History of Romulus; slipping over to the Library of Congress between debates to spend an hour among the



Fig. 2. James A. Garfield, twentieth president of the United States, 1881.

Latin classics; reading Cicero's letters, Livy, Ovid, and Plutarch; and reading Euripides and Sophocles. He was fascinated with Pliny the Younger, whom he found unjustly neglected, and he expressed his desire to translate Pliny's letters. He writes of his determination to collect a complete set of the Latin classics and of turning to Lucretius for rest when he was too weary to sleep.

On October 27, 1873, Garfield wrote: "I have come to dread these continual changes of home, from Washington to Hiram. Middle life, and especially scholarly life, needs regular habits . . . I fear also that these constant changes may unfit me for steady continuous life in one place – which feeling of unrest would ill become an old man. This is probably the first time I have used the words 'old man' as applied to myself in the near future. But if I live ten years longer I shall be in the near neighborhood of old age. I must resume my reading of *De Senectute* [*On Old Age*]."

At that writing, Garfield was forty-one years old. Seven years later in 1880, after eight consecutive terms in Congress, Garfield won a race for the U. S. Senate. Then at the Republican Party's convention in Chicago in June, he became the successful compromise candidate for President on the thirty-sixth ballot after the convention became deadlocked between Ulysses S. Grant and James G. Blaine.

Garfield won the presidency against Democratic candidate General Winfield Scott Hancock and was inaugurated on March 4, 1881 (see Fig. 2). After serving in office only four months, President Garfield was boarding a train at Union Station on July 2 on his way to Williamstown for a meeting of the Williams College Board of Trustees. There Charles

NOVEL APPROACHES TO THE CLASSICS: PART III

by Thomas Falkner

The Human Stain may not be Philip Roth's finest novel, but its protagonist, Coleman Silk, is surely among his most exceptional: a fictional character who, through a secondary process of characterization, makes his own life a fiction. By birth, Coleman Silk is a light-skinned African American raised in East Orange, New Jersey. But as a graduate student in Greenwich Village in the early 50's, he exchanges his Black identity for a Jewish one, disowning race and family in the bargain. He lives the rest of his life successfully – if that is the right word – “passing” as a white Jewish classics professor and administrator at “Athena College” in the Berkshires.

The Human Stain is a powerful meditation on identity and hybridity and the paradoxes of race in America. Silk's self-fabrication is enabled by America's violent racial history – of slaveowners, sexual domination, and pigmentation in greater and lesser amounts.

The Silk family was so fair-skinned that, despite the general Negrophobia of East Orange, “. . . the neighbors were on the whole friendly with the ultra-respectable light-skinned Silks – Negroes, to be sure, but, in the words of one tolerant mother of a kindergarten playmate of Coleman's, ‘people of a very pleasing shade, rather like eggnog’” (122-23).

Fairness of skin is the genetic legacy of America's racial past, its human stain and corporeal sign, as novelists from William Faulkner on have described so well. In *The Human Stain*, racial hybridity allows a social and cultural mobility that both liberates and estranges, that enables one to choose from two identities and to have no identity at all. At first, Silk participates in this condition tentatively and even playfully. In high school, he practices at being Jewish on the advice of his boxing trainer, Doc Chizner. As the two drive to a match at West Point, Doc advises him not to mention that he is colored, to let people think that he is Jewish. Doc's principle – let others sort you out on the basis of

what they think they know – works so well that Roth's narrator, the redoubtable Nathan Zuckerman, is taken in. He introduces Silk as “a neat, attractive package of a man even at his age, the small-nosed Jewish type with the facial heft in the jaw, one of those crimped-haired Jews of a light yellowish skin pigmentation who possess something of the ambiguous aura of the blacks who are sometimes taken for white” (15-16).

Silk's forays across the color line become bolder. After dropping out of Howard University, he enlists in the navy, and he realizes that he can play his skin color however he wants. His

experiment as a white midshipman is a qualified success. He passes undetected, apart from a humiliating night in a white Virginia whorehouse, the disgrace of which he memorialized in a tiny blue tattoo that he came to regard as “the emblem of what cannot ever be

removed.” Later, after the war, after losing a white girlfriend and taking up with a secular Jew, amidst the multi-ethnic and multi-racial license of New York, he makes the change permanent.

Silk's biography becomes a blend of fact and fiction. He truly had graduated valedictorian from East Orange H.S. in 1944: “back in those days, studying my high school Latin, taking advanced Latin, taking Greek, which was still part of the old-fashioned curriculum” (22). He enrolled at NYU, completing a B.A. and then a Ph.D. in classics. A first appointment at Adelphi University is followed by the position at Athena. Curiously, the narrator suggests that “Coleman was . . . perhaps among the first of the Jews permitted to teach in a classics department anywhere in America” (5). Whatever the situation at Athena, the history here is skewed, and in *Refugee Scholars in America* (1984) Lewis Coser has documented the influx of classical scholars who came to America from Germany in the 1930's and who struggled with the anti-Semitism that

At the core of Silk's Faustian wager is the quintessential American myth, the individualist who finds in America the freedom to slough his past.

Gateau, an unbalanced partisan of the Stalwarts, the rival Republican faction, gunned him down. Garfield lay ill for seventy-nine days, conscious most of the time, and finally died on September 19, 1881. He was forty-nine years old, two months shy of his fiftieth birthday.

In 1882, on the first anniversary of Garfield's death, the Williams Board of Trustees established the Garfield Chair of Ancient Languages (currently held by Professor Kerry A. Christensen). On the same occasion, Mark Hopkins, former president and still a professor at Williams, delivered a “Memorial Discourse” to the Trustees about Garfield, which is contained in Hopkins' *Teachings and Counsels* (1884). Hopkins spoke of Garfield's humble beginnings, his intellect and versatility, his way of winning the confidence of people. But what interested Hopkins most was Garfield's combination of intellectual thirst and political acumen:

But as President Garfield had, from his early struggles, in common with President Lincoln, a ground for the sympathy of the masses, so had he, from his broad scholarship and varied attainments, in common with John Quincy Adams, a ground for sympathy with persons of the highest culture. It was a common remark . . . that no President except John Quincy Adams had been equally equipped in scholarship and statesmanship.

Garfield was a romantic in the nineteenth-century sense – a lover of literature, adventure, politics, people, and life in general. He flourished in the educational, social, military, and political worlds. He was thorough and charming and charismatic. In him, the heart and mind were married, and it was his love of the classics throughout his life that fuelled them both.

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Book Review: *The Penelopiad*

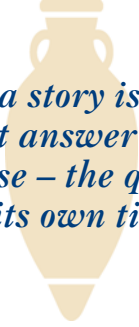
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lecture" by the maids and the transcript of a mock trial of Odysseus. This doubled narrative structure nicely matches the two questions Atwood poses in her introduction (xv): What was Penelope really up to, and what led to the hanging of the maids at the end of the story?

Penelope herself is at the center of the story. Atwood, unlike Homer, presents her whole life, from birth to life after death. Penelope's troubles start with her family. Her mother, a Naiad, is cold and distant. Her father tries to drown her, and when that does not work, he becomes "if anything, rather too affectionate" (10). Penelope's troubles continue with her cousin Helen. Atwood's Helen is rather unpleasant, with none of the anguish and introspection of Helen in the *Iliad* and none of the wit and charm of Helen in the *Odyssey*. She is vain and selfish, and she continually taunts Penelope, who in Atwood's version, is plain and a bit dull, if clever. When Odysseus rather surprisingly wins Penelope for his bride, things begin to look up a little. In Ithaca she is lonely at first and without a friend, but gradually she makes a kind of life for herself.

The great crisis of her life comes when Odysseus goes off to war and she has to take over the management of the estate and the kingdom. She rises to the challenge, and in a way, this period is the happiest in the story. Only at this point does Atwood's version begin to parallel the *Odyssey*. Once the war is over, Penelope waits for the return of Odysseus, and waits, and waits. Travelers bring stories of his adventures, but Penelope always suggests a revisionist account. "Odysseus had been in a fight with a giant one-eyed Cyclops, said some; no, it was only a one-eyed tavern-keeper, said another, and the fight was over non-payment of the bill Odysseus was the guest of a goddess on an enchanted isle, said some . . . ; no, said others, it was just an expensive whorehouse, and he was sponging off the Madam" (83-84). When Odysseus finally does return, in disguise, Penelope recognizes him instantly, but she keeps quiet so as not to burst the bubble of his self-esteem as a trickster –

and also to protect her own reputation as a faithful and cautious wife. Scholars continue to argue about what Homer's Penelope knew or guessed. I suspect that part of the magic of Homer's version lies in its ambiguity. Atwood certainly has an author's right to tell the story her own way. The question is not if her version is right or wrong but if it is convincing and alive.



*When a story is retold,
it must answer – or at
least pose – the questions
of its own time.*

After Odysseus' return and recognition, Atwood poses her second question. "I've always been haunted by the hanged maids," she says (xv). Indeed, they pose a serious moral problem for readers today (as do, for example, the Trojans sacrificed to Patroclus in the *Iliad*). According to Homer, Odysseus orders the maids killed because they were disloyal: they were sleeping with the suitors – or so said the old servant woman Eurycleia. Atwood suggests some other possibilities. First, granting Homer's version, we could simply dismiss the maids as victims of another time, another culture, another moral system. Atwood notes this possibility in one of the maids' chapters, but really only to dismiss it.

Penelope offers another explanation: she herself had encouraged the maids to consort with the suitors so they could gather information for her; unfortunately, she had neglected to let Eurycleia in on the scheme, so Odysseus kills the maids out of ignorance. Or else, Penelope suggests, Eurycleia actually knew that the maids were spying for Penelope and let them hang out of resentment. The maids claim that Penelope let them be killed so they would not reveal her sexual escapades with the suitors. Or else, as the maids suggest in their anthropology lecture, their rape and hang-

ing "represent the overthrow of a matrilineal moon-cult by an incoming group of usurping patriarchal father-god-worshipping barbarians" (165). I am not sure where all this leaves us; because of the abundance of possibilities, none is explored in any depth.

Revisions and revisionings of myth begin as early as Homer; the twentieth century has seen a number of notable versions of the story of Odysseus. There is no single right way to retell a myth. The familiar events can be retold, but from a new point of view; new events can be imagined; or the story may be mined for new truths. When a story is retold, it must answer – or at least pose – the questions of its own time. It also should live as a story on its own. The story of Penelope deserves to be told, as much as the story of Odysseus; it is certainly a story for our time. The maids also deserve a hearing. I am not, however, satisfied that Atwood has really given us Penelope. Because the slim volume tells Penelope's whole story, from birth to her life after death, no moment is explored in much depth. Atwood tells us the story, but she does not reveal much about the characters. Moreover, Atwood seems at pains to display all her research – mostly derived from Robert Graves' eccentric compendium, *The Greek Myths* (1955). But the details and variants, as fascinating as they are, lie on the surface, undigested.

Several of my students have read Atwood's *Penelopiad* – some liked it, some did not. But it has provided an opportunity for lively debate on a number of topics. This revisionist version could easily find a place in courses on Greek myth or the epic tradition.

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NOVEL APPROACHES TO THE CLASSICS: PART III

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had characterized the discipline to that point. Silk's newly invented past is a model of verisimilitude. His grandparents become immigrants from "somewhere in Russia," the family name changed from Silberzweig to Silk, the ancestors lost in the diasporic melee. His late father was a saloon keeper with a fanatical respect for the English language who pushed him to be a serious student.

At the core of Silk's Faustian wager is the quintessential American myth, the individualist who finds in America the freedom to slough his past and by dint of native talent slides into a new life and identity. But for Silk that freedom is a residual by-product of the racial oppression that provides the requisite physical capital, and the project of the self-made man is doomed to failure.

This hybridity has its counterpart in the novel's profound relationship to the classics. Roth announces his textual strategy, offering *Oedipus the King* 99-101 as the book's epigraph:

OEDIPUS: What is the rite of purification? How shall it be done?

CREON: By banishing a man, or expiation of blood by blood . . .

Greek tragedy is the primary intertext for *The Human Stain*, and Coleman Silk is introduced in full tragic potential, as he lectures on the *Iliad* and the quarrel of Agamemnon and Achilles. Silk's estrangement from the social world, like that of Achilles, involves a woman and a quarrel with institutional authority. It begins with his innocent but revealing use of the word "spooks" in a classroom, which the administration denounces as a racial slur. After his resignation from Athena over this incident, his affair with the young and illiterate Faunia Farley and the outrage it provokes complete the process of his withdrawal from the community.

But Achilles provides only one paradigm:

[Silk] knew what can corrode and warp a man who believes himself to have been grievously wronged. He knew from the wrath of Achilles, the rage of Philoctetes, the fulminations of Medea, the madness of Ajax, the despair of Electra, and the suffering of Prometheus the many horrors that can ensue when the degree of indignation

is achieved and, in the name of justice, retribution is exacted and a cycle of retaliation begins. (63)

These texts have the force of prophecies received but ignored, and their resonances provide a silent choral wisdom that the protagonist chooses not to heed.

Silk's capacity for outrage and his determination to confront the indignities he suffers qualify him as a Sophoclean hero, and the Oedipus plays provide a rich set of analogues. (On the connection between Silk and Oedipus, see also Geoffrey Bakewell, "Philip Roth's *Oedipal Stain*," *Classical and Modern Literature*, 2002, 29-46.) Silk's name Coleman ("Coal-Man"), like Oedipus' name ("Swollen Foot"), provides a physiognomic clue as to his true identity. The Jocasta figure here is split in two. Iris Silk, whose death is indirectly caused by Coleman's paroxysms of rage, is, like Jocasta, unaware of her husband's secret past, and they too have four children who carry his secret within themselves unawares. Silk's affair with Faunia Farley, though not incestuous, is scandalous and fraught with tragic potential. A victim of violence and abuse, true to her sylvan name she communes better with cows and birds than humans, and her dark nature gives this deeply sexual relationship forbidden overtones.

Most of all, it is Silk's secret past that likens him to Oedipus, and the dark mysteries of race provide an American corollary to the Greek horror of incest. Silk comes by his own design to a crossroads of race and identity, cutting irrevocably the ties to his true father and mother and family. The *anagnorisis* (recognition) in the novel will be Zuckerman's, who will come to discover Silk's secret only after his death, though Zuckerman's narrative enables the reader, like the audience of *Oedipus the King*, to "know the story" almost from the outset. This knowledge allows us to appreciate the story's fully ironic structure: that a black man should be convicted of racism by a white community; that a once second-rate college should turn against the dean who had made it respectable; that a man seeking to escape racism by passing as a Jew should encounter anti-Semitism and die at the hands of the Jew-hating Lester Farley; that Silk himself, armed by "the

prophylaxis of the whole of Attic tragedy and Greek epic poetry" (63), should fail to see the tragic trajectory of his life. Even the glee with which Silk celebrated his new identity has a parallel in Oedipus' declaration of himself a "child of fortune."

The theme of banishment that is declared in the novel's epigraph connects with both of the Oedipus plays. The connection with *Oedipus the King* is to the collective guilt and pollution that devolves from his secret origins and to the thematics of exposure and its consequences. Silk's banishment from the family and the community connect the novel with *Oedipus at Colonus*, a play in which the ritual of social expulsion is shown to be in truth an exercise in hypocrisy. This theme is amplified by setting Silk's story against the background of the Clinton impeachment, as America indulges in "the ecstasy of sanctimony . . . eager to enact the astringent rituals of purification" (2). Like Oedipus, Coleman Silk finds in the terms of his ostracism the grounds on which he liberates himself anew from the smugness and political correctness of Athena College: the college becomes an academic Thebes, its faculty narrow-minded and ritualistic in their rejection of their former leader. Silk's dismissal, like the expulsion of Oedipus, becomes an angry *self-exile*, his isolation a determination to live his remaining years on his own terms.

Silk bitterly rejects the hypocrisy of family and community that disguises self-interest as principle. Like the aged Oedipus, Silk finds his own family capable of betrayal, and he is outraged to find that his children have joined in the general disapproval of his relationship with Faunia. Yet here too among the four children there is a spectrum of fidelity and betrayal; his love for his idealistic daughter Lisa and his strained relationship with his son Mark recall Antigone and Polyneices, respectively.

All of this notwithstanding, *The Human Stain* remains a novel, not a tragedy. The general incompatibility between tragedy and the modern novel has been well examined; in his recent work *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (2003), Terry Eagleton has questioned the critical traditions that position the two genres as polar opposites and the novel as inherently anti-tragic. To be sure, Roth's purposes are far from those of great tragic novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or their twentieth-century successors. Yet

WHATEVER HAPPENED IN THESSALY? A POSTMODERN FANTASY

by Hazel E. Barnes

Prologue

“Alcestis’ tomb could have been somewhere not far from here,” I pointed out. “Euripides’ chorus tells Heracles that he will find it just outside their city of Pherae, by the road leading to Larissa.” We were sitting on the grass by the river – Stella, a university student, her aunt Clio, retired from teaching at an American school in Athens, and I. It was in the spring of 1948. The latest Greek civil war was already going on then, but it was a strange war to live with. Terrible things were happening in the mountains, but in Athens life was pleasantly routine for us, as it was in most of the heavily populated areas in Greece, which was steadily recovering from the Nazi occupation. Nobody had opposed my accepting my friend Stella’s invitation to spend Easter week at her home in Larissa. Nor did her family object to our plans to go for a picnic lunch in the countryside near Larissa, which was at that date only a small town. Everything was so peaceful and unspoiled that I was already yielding to my familiar temptation – to imagine that I was in a setting no different from what ancient Greece had offered – when the feeling was reinforced by a chorus of frogs croaking exactly as Aristophanes had imitated them in his comedy: “Brekekekex, koáx, koáx, brekekekex, koáx.” Finally they subsided, and my thoughts returned to Euripides’ *Alcestis*.

“The play leaves too much unfinished,” I complained. “I want to know what happened when these two finally confronted each other after the three days of imposed silence. The work absolutely demands a sequel. If only the playwright had made this the first of a trilogy of dramas instead of placing it fourth as a substitute for the traditional satyr play! He has shown Admetus awakening to a fuller realization of just what he had done and promising to make a better future for the two of them. But how much had he really changed? And Alcestis – surely her reopened eyes would not have looked at the world and Admetus exactly as before. Just try to imagine the complexities this master of psychological nuances could have explored! I wonder whether the final resolution would have

been reconciliation or bitter tragedy.”

“Euripides wasn’t Aeschylus,” Stella reminded me. “And he never made up stories without some support in existing myth. Besides, there was only one ending possible. The plot of Admetus and Alcestis was that of a fairytale and could have only the happy ending requisite for all fairytales. As the third day comes to a close, the two fall into each other’s arms, proclaiming their joy at their reunion, declaring they will never be separated again. Admetus swears that he will love and honor her more than ever now that he has seen her true worth, surpassing his own, he admits frankly. She tells him that she would gladly do it all over again rather than to live without him. So they lived happily ever after until they were very old, and they died painlessly at the same hour of the same day.”

I responded with horror. “Euripides would never have settled for that! I don’t presume to guess what he would have done. But I prefer to imagine a scene halfway between Medea’s denunciation of Jason and Ibsen’s Nora saying goodbye to Torwald. Alcestis would cut Admetus’ protestations short and insist that, if she is to stay with him, he must agree that they will together and as equals rule over the household and over Pherae as co-sovereigns.”

“A born again feminist!” jeered Stella.

And Clio said, “If she had tried anything like that, Admetus would have sent posthaste for Heracles and begged him to take her back to the tomb, burying her alive if necessary.”

“I admit to the anachronism,” I confessed, “but I insist that there must have been some radical change for both of them. If all went on as before, then her death and resurrection were for nothing.”

Stella took up the challenge. “Well then, if we are really going to let our imaginations run, we can begin with that supposed death. What happened during the time that Alcestis’ body lay in the sepulcher? Did she lie inert, waiting for Death to take her? Or did her shade actually go down to Hades? Could she have, as Socrates hoped would be the case, met and talked with the great ones of the past? Socrates could have held his own with them, but I cannot imagine Alcestis – or myself – doing so.

But maybe she had some sort of indescribable experience that transformed her. If so, then perhaps instead of reproaching Admetus, she merely looked at him compassionately and held herself aloof. I can envision her going often to the temple, possibly becoming a priestess. Or else she joined the followers of Orpheus (were they around then?) and spent the rest of her life preparing for a blissful existence after death in the realms of eternal ether.”

“This is all nonsense,” snorted Clio.

Stella and I turned on her. “Well, what do you think? Did she just once again become the devoted wife? Do you believe that Admetus was worthy of the gift she gave him?”

“Admetus got what he deserved,”

Clio replied. We stared at her in disbelief. “That is, the second time,” she added.

“What do you mean – the second time?”

Clio was silent for so long I began to think our futile imaginings had somehow offended her. Or was she just bored with them? At last she spoke:

“Over the centuries many Greeks, even, perhaps especially, among the less educated, have not always distinguished clearly between the ancient myths of heroes and our half-legendary history. We have clung to and nourished them all as part of our past. It’s probably only half-belief. Still, I have a friend who finds Mycenae depressing because of all the murders that purportedly took place there. Or maybe it’s more like what you Americans have done with the tale of Washington cutting down the cherry tree or throwing the silver dollar across the Potomac river. At any rate, people retell the stories, particularly cherishing the ones connected with the places where they live. In Thessaly, parents have been telling their children about Admetus and Alcestis for generations. But what they have passed down goes far beyond what Euripides wrote. I don’t know whether the longer version was generally known in ancient times and preserved only by the people in Thessaly since that is where it was supposed to have happened. More likely the narrators let their imaginations fill in where they, like you, found the story unfinished. I will tell you what I remember my grandmother telling me,

and in the way that I have often imagined it to myself.”

“First let me give us some more resins,” said Stella. She did so. Fortunately the frogs remained quiet.

Clio’s Tale: What Happened in Thessaly

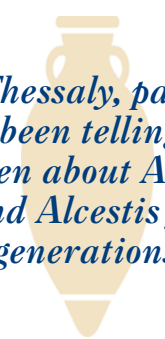
Alcestis fell into a dreamless sleep, a night such as the great King of Persia himself might envy. She woke when she felt the two obols being lifted from her eyes. Her first thought was that Charon was collecting his fare, but the god who stood at her side, shedding his own light, was not Charon. It was Hermes, as she could tell by the wings at his ankles and the snake-entwined staff he held. Admetus had told her that during the year Apollo had spent in Pherae, Admetus had learned that it was possible to converse with a god so long as you remained respectful and did not ask personal questions, or inquire about matters outside mortal experience, or express curiosity concerning oddities such as why the immortals took pleasure in the smell of burning meat. So she was not fearful now but rather bewildered and asked, “Have the Fates gone back on their promise? Do they insist on having Admetus after all?”

“No,” Hermes answered. “Admetus still lives. But when Death came to take you, Heracles wrestled with him and overcame him. The gods were so pleased with your willingness to die in your husband’s place that they have let Death stand defeated. You and Admetus are both reprieved.” He handed her the two obols. “Keep them for next time,” he said. Hermes continued, “Before Heracles moves the tombstone and comes in, I have something to give you. It is a gift from Persephone, one that will make you yourself guardian of your future. Do you remember the two drops of Gorgon blood that Creusa had in her possession? Athena had given them to Creusa’s great-grandfather, Erichthonius, and they had been handed down to her. One of the drops was a deadly poison, the other had the power to heal diseases and injury. Creusa used the poison in her thwarted attempt to kill Ion, whom she mistakenly believed to be her husband’s bastard son. Athena later took back the second drop and gave it to Persephone. Wisely so. What even Creusa did not know was that this one did more than heal. Whoever takes this drop will live forever, cannot die. Persephone wants you to have two

drops like those first given to Creusa. (Several drops of the Gorgon’s blood had been preserved when she was killed.) Keep them hidden and use them when you see their time has come. The vial with the poison is sealed in black. The life-saving one bears the image of the Gorgon.” He handed her a small box holding two tiny vials. “Heracles is moving the stone. Do not say anything to him. I have explained to him that it is the gods’ will that you do not speak to anyone for three days.”

As sunlight flooded the tomb, Alcestis’ dazzled eyes saw a man who dwarfed the landscape. She shrank back as he came toward her and extended his hand. But he spoke gently. “Don’t be afraid. I am here to take back the best of women to the best of men.”

“At least to the best of hosts,” said Hermes and disappeared.



*In Thessaly, parents
have been telling their
children about Admetus
and Alcestis for
generations.*

Alcestis needed the hero’s hand as they walked to the palace. Heracles had insisted that she cover herself with a veil. “Admetus has the right to see you before anyone else does,” he told her. Alcestis obeyed, but reluctantly. She would have liked to feel the sun on her face, to see clearly and exultantly everyone and everything in this world so miraculously restored to her. On the way Heracles talked incessantly. He explained how it had all come about: Admetus’ hospitable but deceptive reception of him as a guest, his own drunkenness, and then his discovery of the true situation. He rehearsed his decision to redeem himself by proving that he could achieve the impossible. “After all,” he asserted, “I had been defying Death everyday of my manhood. Why not at last meet him face to face?” After that he related some of his past exploits. At times he paused as if expecting an expression of admiration from Alcestis, then recalled that she was not permitted to speak to him. She slightly pressed his hand now and then at what he obviously thought were exciting points, but in truth she hardly

listened to him. She was trying to foresee how her husband and others at home would greet her return.

They found Admetus in the courtyard. Inwardly impatient, Alcestis stood quietly by as Heracles told how he had won this veiled woman as a prize in some games and wanted to leave her here while he continued on his mission. He brushed aside Admetus’ protestations that it would not be fitting. Alcestis thought, “How Heracles loves his hoax!” And she wondered if this was the real reason he had insisted on the veil. Was this just another of those pranks that Admetus and his friends liked to play on one another? Then she reflected that Heracles was telling the truth. He had in fact won her in a contest, and now he was handing her over to Admetus as a thank-you gift to his host. Then Admetus was lifting the veil, and all thoughts were lost in a rush of emotion. The mixture of joy and incredulity on his face made her start to laugh in sheer happiness though she quickly suppressed all sound at a warning gesture from Heracles. A passionate tenderness overwhelmed her to meet the love she saw in her husband’s eyes. At that moment no words were needed.

If only it could have lasted forever! But Heracles stopped them from embracing, saying that it was dangerous for Admetus to have close contact with someone come so recently from the world of the dead. They must wait out the three days. Then Admetus had to go through the ceremony of farewell as Heracles set out again. The maids took Alcestis inside and brought her food and wine which, after a minute of hesitation, she consumed with evident pleasure; she signed that she would like to have more.

She had not quite finished when Admetus came and knelt before her. He appeared anxious and agitated. Passionately, in a jumble of words, he tried to express to her the excess of his grief at losing her and his unbounded gladness at having her restored to him. He described how, in her absence, he had tortured himself, trying to relive the precious times they had shared. He realized now as never before how much of the happiness of his life had centered and depended on her. But the great love he had had for her then paled beside what he felt now. He loved her, not only as his treasured wife, but as a woman without peer. What she had done for him put her with the truly great heroines; she was close to a goddess. How privileged he was, how honored, to be

Did You Know...

Bono, the nickname of the lead singer of U2, is short for *Bono Vox* (which all the Web sites say means “good voice” or “good in voice” but which actually means “a voice for good” – quite prophetic!) His real name is Paul David Hewson.

The popular puzzle **Sudoku** began as “Latin Squares,” developed 200 years ago by a blind Swiss mathematician. To learn more, see <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/LatinSquare.html>.

Matthew Bogdanos, the Marine colonel responsible for recovering antiquities in Iraq, has a B.A. (Bucknell) and an M.A. (Columbia) in classics (see his book *Thieves of Baghdad: One Marine’s Passion for Ancient Civilizations and the Journey to Recover the World’s Greatest Stolen Treasures*, 2005).

Novelist **Clive Cussler** sends his hero Dirk Pitt on an adventure in *Trojan Odyssey* (2004) that links the ancient world with the modern by interweaving a new theory about the geography of Odysseus’ journey with Celtic myth and a modern-day murder mystery. His underwater exploration organization NUMA (National Underwater and Marine Agency) creates a bond with the Roman past, recalling the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, who brought a new order to Romulus’ Rome by establishing priesthoods and religious worship.

Kevin Marshall, a classical studies junior at Loyola University New Orleans, was a six-time champion on *Jeopardy* in January 2006. His success also earned him a place in the 2006 Tournament of Champions in May.

WHATEVER HAPPENED IN THESSALY? A POSTMODERN FANTASY

continued from page 7

the husband of his Alcestis returned from the grave.

Gradually pride gave way to a humility almost abject. Alcestis perceived to her amazement that Admetus had taken on the role of suppliant. He confessed that he should never have let her die in his place. He had realized this as soon as he had returned from the burial. At first it was the thought of how he must appear to others that pricked him; but then he felt shamed in his own eyes. Even his terrible grief seemed tainted as he reminded himself that he had chosen to live without her rather than to accept the death fated for him. How could he live, forced to see himself as inferior to the wife he had loved less than himself? Surely, he declared to her now, he would not have been able to bear it but would soon have chosen to join her in the Underworld.

Alcestis made gestures of remonstrance, but he went on and on. Now he wondered to himself and to her just how it was that he had done as he did. He blamed the gods in part for creating the situation. By decreeing that he need not die if someone could be found willing to take his place, they appeared to give their approval to the idea that he should save himself by searching for such a person. Apollo himself had tricked the Fates into allowing him to live beyond his allotted time; small wonder that he, Admetus, had come to see himself as standing above others. Yet pushing aside all that, he admitted that he had been wrong and begged Alcestis to forgive him and to join with him wholeheartedly in building a better life in the future. Alcestis was too overcome to respond appropriately, even inwardly, but she managed a half nod of affirmation.

That was not the end of it, of course. For what remained of the first two days, except for when they slept – Alcestis in their old bed, Admetus where Heracles had stayed – Admetus spent the time describing over and over again his sufferings, his self-condemnation, the explanations that were half-excuses. The third day brought a reprieve. Admetus’ father arrived and insisted that Admetus come with him to make ritual sacrifices to the gods of the Underworld to thank them for letting Alcestis return.

She chose to go outside, away from the palace, to the field by the river.

Only one maid accompanied her, and she, at a sign from Alcestis, stayed at a distance. Alcestis exulted in the feeling of her own movements as she walked about. Her delight surpassed even the regret she had felt when she had said goodbye to all the world’s loveliness: the bird calls, the new leaves shimmering in the sunlight, the caressing warmth of the air, the endless variety of the grasses and the flowers, the grace of the dancing butterflies. Even the croaking of the frogs was like music. All this deliciousness of nature! How could she ever have brought herself to leave it? Could she, would she, do it if the choice had to be made over again? This thought almost made her stop looking and listening to what surrounded her. It was as if Admetus were still speaking to her, his remembered words blocking out everything else and demanding that she pay attention solely to them. She must decide what to do with them.

Ironically, it was Admetus’ self-questioning that led her, for the first time, to question herself about her own action. At the time when she consented to take his place in death, it seemed that she had no choice. Since his parents had refused to save him, she was the only one left. A wife had a duty to put her husband first, just as slaves must serve their masters, but slaves were not expected to die for their owners. There had been a fleeting moment when she had tried to picture how it would be if Admetus had died and she had lived on. The thought seared her like fire. She *could* not. To miss him at every turn and to know that he was gone because she had chosen not to save him would be unbearable. But he had viewed it as bearable – and preferable. Was it that she loved him more than he loved her? Or was there something else?

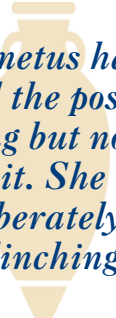
Was hers the willing sacrifice of a lesser for a greater person? First of all, of a woman for a man? Were men always superior to women? Why? Certainly male and female were equally essential to ongoing human life. Men went off to battle and to dangerous exploits. Admetus had gone with Jason on the expedition to steal the Golden Fleece. But women bore the pain and risked death in childbirth every day. And she had sometimes envied Admetus for having had the chance to go on that glorious adventure. Admetus had accepted the

possibility of dying but not the reality of it. She had met it deliberately and unflinchingly. Had she thereby shown herself to be greater than he? In his impassioned declarations Admetus had implied as much. Was this realization the reason for his extreme discomfort? Was it her duty now to restore his image of himself? To show him that he was unalterably on a higher level? The alternative, to insist on her being recognized as superior, was unthinkable. And, perhaps after all, her consent to die his death was balanced by his brave acknowledgment that he had been wrong to accept her gift. Could they henceforth live as equals in each other's eyes? She would wait and see. Meanwhile she must decide what to say to him at the end of this day when the ban against her speaking would be lifted.

As the hour drew near, she still had no clear plan. It was Admetus himself who provided the solution. Returning from the ceremonies, he had his distressed agitation under control. Perhaps the sacrificial offerings had somehow marked the end of the crisis, and her reassuring gestures had been sufficient to console him. In any case, after a long embrace and impassioned kiss, he asked her, quite naturally, what it had been like for her during that time that she lay in the tomb before Death had come to take her and had been turned away. Had her shade already gone down into Hades? "I had been sleeping when Hermes woke me," she began truthfully. And then, seizing the opportunity for diversion, she proceeded deliberately and calmly to lie to her husband.

In place of her peaceful slumber, she fashioned a wondrous tale of how, with Hermes, the guide of the dead, she had visited that other world. She described things as she had heard about them as a child. For people loved to talk about what was reported to go on down there. She told how she had trembled at the sight of the punishment of the famous doers of evil: Ixion on the wheel, Tantalus forever trying to eat and drink the ever receding fruit and water, the daughters of Danaus commanded to carry water in sieves, and other unhappy ones. Mostly the shades were motionless as though suspended between life and death. But some favored ones were in a lovely sort of meadow, moving about blissfully and singing the praises of Demeter and Persephone. She narrated all this in great detail. Throughout, Admetus listened intently, seemingly pleased that things in Hades were as he had been told they were.

Now signs of dawn were appearing, for Athena did not prolong the night for this pair as she later obligingly did for Odysseus and Penelope. Alcestis hastened to conclude her story, saying that a messenger had come to tell her she was to retrace her steps; she was soon asleep in the tomb until Hermes woke her. She told Admetus that Hermes had given her the vial of poison to use



Admetus had accepted the possibility of dying but not the reality of it. She had met it deliberately and unflinchingly.

against any enemy if need should arise. She did not mention the one said to insure never-ending life. She felt reluctant to suggest that she had the power to stave off Death permanently – assuming that Admetus or anyone else would believe her. She had hidden the little box in the veil Heracles had given her. On the first night she had laid the veil itself at the bottom of a chest she had brought with her as part of her dowry, which everyone knew she alone had the right to open. But these things were only in her thoughts during the moment of absolute silence that followed her simple statement, "This is the end of my story."

Admetus, who had been totally caught up in her account, looked visibly fatigued. With apparent effort, he brought them back to the present. "You must answer me finally," he said. "Can you forgive me for choosing my life over yours?" His voice was anxious and pleading but at the same time hopeful and expectant. Perhaps he felt that his case was serious but had been well presented. Alcestis took a deep breath. She laid her hand caressingly on his cheek, and she said, "We have both been born again. I have been brought back from the grave. You have been saved from drowning in a pool of despair. The gods have given each of us a second life. We will make it together." She added lightly, "I am glad that you have not had time to have that stone statue made of me, the one that you said would lie in my place. Our bed would not be big enough for three." Their love-making was apocalyptic, enhanced for Alcestis

as the wonder of nature had been intensified for her that morning. Eventually they both slept far into the daylight hours.

In the days that followed, Admetus was keeping his promise that their renewed life would be better. He was always tender with her, ever seeking to protect her from the slightest discomfort. He was more gentle with the slaves when they failed to carry out orders exactly as given or were careless. Perhaps he remembered instances in the past when Alcestis had urged leniency. Or else he had modified his view of how much he had the right to demand of others. Each day he talked with her about what he planned to do or had done, giving her a chance to respond. When she timidly questioned him, he listened and replied respectfully. On a few occasions he asked her opinion about a proposed action; once he followed her suggestion. And she never saw him looking at one of the slave women in a way that in the past had left her slightly uneasy.

After a week or so, Admetus decided to play the host on a grand scale. First he gave a great festival for the Thes-salians. He mentioned the idea of inviting Apollo, but dropped it. Alcestis decided he had spoken facetiously. After this there were smaller gatherings for which he asked men from more remote places to come to spend a few days at the palace. For Alcestis' pleasure he told them that their wives, too, would be welcome. On each occasion he made a little speech with everyone present. He expressed his pride in Alcestis and his gratitude. He himself sketched the narrative of recent events, sparing Alcestis the embarrassment of having to speak publicly. He acknowledged that too late he had regretted that he had accepted Alcestis' self-sacrifice, but he explained that he had taken the divine pronouncement that a substitute would be acceptable as a command that he must find one. But the gods had sent Heracles just in time, no doubt foreseeing that Admetus would hide his grief, give the hero hospitality, and receive the glorious reward. Possibly the immortals had known from the beginning all that would be and planned it so.

As for the guests, a few whispered among themselves that the whole tale had been a hoax, a deception. No mortal could die and come alive again. Such a thing had never happened and could not happen. They hinted darkly that this sort of hubris might very well offend the gods and bring disaster. But

THE PLAGUE OF ATHENS: CURRENT ANALYTIC TECHNIQUES

by Robert J. Littman

Health and disease have played an important part in human religion and history. Although our conquest of disease has extended the modern lifespan to seventy-eight years in the Western world, compared with twenty-five to thirty-five years in the ancient world, we are still frightened by and concerned with plagues. In the modern world, emerging strains of viruses and bacteria, such as influenza and AIDS, cause much anxiety and millions of deaths on a yearly basis. These continuing tragedies are reminiscent of past centuries in which a husband and wife endured the deaths of half their children from infectious disease. In addition to the normal patterns of disease in childhood, epidemics would often strike out of nowhere and carry off large percentages of the population. For example, a plague that occurred in the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180) killed a tenth of the population of the Roman Empire, and the Black Death (bubonic plague) wiped out nearly half the population of Western Europe in the fourteenth century.

A number of accounts of plagues and pestilences have reached us from ancient Egypt, the ancient Near East, and classical antiquity. An early reference to what is probably bubonic plague is found in 1 Samuel 5, which tells of events in the eleventh century B.C. God has sent pestilence to smite the Philistines because they offended Him by capturing the Ark of the Lord. Similar descriptions of plagues occur in classical literature. In Homer's *Iliad* 1.443-67, Apollo sends perhaps typhus or bubonic plague upon the Achaeans because they dishonored his priest Chryses. In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* 1-131 (especially lines 14-57), a plague strikes Thebes because of the death of Laius. The most famous account of a plague in classical literature, however, is Thucydides' graphic description of the historical Plague of Athens, which struck the Athenians in the second year of the Peloponnesian War (430 B.C.) and devastated the population. While this was not the most important plague in antiquity in terms of mortality and political and socio-economic consequences, Thucydides has made it so because of his influence as a historian.

Thucydides presents a detailed description of the symptoms of the Plague of Athens that is marked by careful observation and woven into a terse narrative about the devastation of war and disease. In his *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.47-55, Thucydides describes how the disease was accompanied by a pustular rash, high fever, and diarrhea and how it usually resulted in the death of the victim. He relates that it originated in Ethiopia and spread into Egypt and Libya and through the Near East before arriving at the Piraeus, the port of Athens. From the Piraeus, the epidemic moved rapidly into the city itself. Thucydides indicates that it was highly contagious and infected anyone who cared for the sick. He himself suffered from the plague but was one of the lucky ones who survived. Others were not so fortunate. Entire families were wiped out, and the dead became so numerous that corpses could not be buried and were left where they had died.

Thucydides states that he will set down the nature of the disease and

explain the symptoms by which it may be recognized if it should ever break out again (2.48.3). He was influenced by Hippocrates, who lived at the same time, both in his description of the plague and also in his application of Hippocratic doctrine to his writing of history. In a sense, his account of the disease parallels the overall themes of his work: history as an example and a force that repeats, and the decay of Athens both by war and disease.

The political ramifications of the Plague of Athens were enormous. Since the epidemic did not penetrate the Peloponnesus, Athens was devastated by the outbreak, but Sparta was relatively unscathed. The Plague of Athens carried off perhaps twenty-five percent of the population of Athens during the first few years of the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian leader Pericles perished of the disease in 429 B.C. The plague was a major reason for the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War. It was economically and socially devastating to Athens, both at the time and in

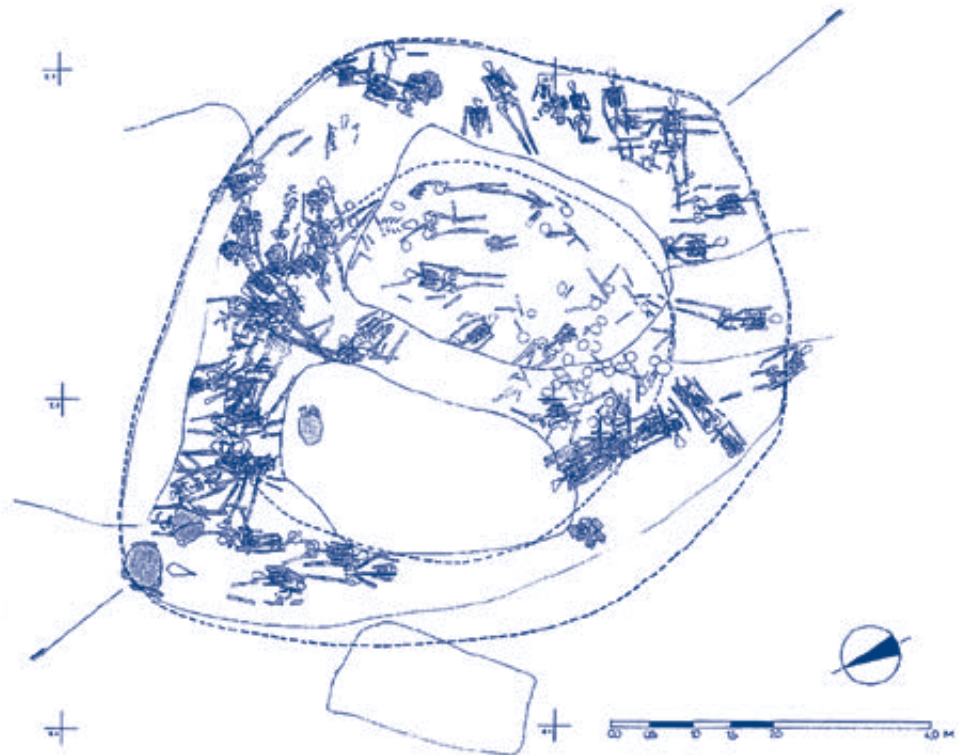


Fig. 3. Plan of the mass burial in Kerameikos. Reprinted with permission from E. Baziotopoulou-Valavani, "A Mass Burial from the Cemetery of Kerameikos," in M. Stamatopoulou and M. Yeroulanou, eds. *Excavating Classical Culture, Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Greece* (2002), 191.

the subsequent centuries. The combination of disease and war depopulated Athens and changed Greek history, which might have been very different had Athens won the war.

The Plague of Athens has been important both for its literary influence and its scientific interest. The Roman poet Lucretius wrote a long and horrifying account of the plague, imitating Thucydides, in Book 6 of *De Rerum Natura*. In the sixth century, Procopius imitated Thucydides in his account of the bubonic plague that struck Byzantium. But there have been many more scholarly investigations of the Plague of Athens than literary imitations.

Since the Renaissance, scholarly studies have mirrored the medical concepts of the time in which they were written. By the late nineteenth century, most physicians and medical scientists performing research in the burgeoning laboratories of Western Europe and the United States generally had accepted what was known as the germ theory (the theory that micro-organisms cause disease), and ancient epidemics became the subjects of fresh studies founded on the new approaches of epidemiology, which is the study of the distribution and determinants of health events such as diseases and wellness in human populations.

Numerous essays on the Plague of Athens appeared in the twentieth century, and most scholars and physicians, equipped with an etiology and some statistical application of fatalities in the modern variants of the disease, attempted to identify the Athenian pestilence with one or more diseases. Since Thucydides provided the symptoms, the resultant studies were symptomatologies, which were correlated with a disease that presumably matched the ancient description. Two “diagnoses” became prominent in the modern literature on the Athenian plague. The first diagnosis was smallpox, which seemed to incorporate almost all of the Thucydidean details. Along with M. L. Littman, I argued for smallpox as the Athenian plague in “The Athenian Plague: Smallpox,” *TAPA*, 100 (1969), 261-75, an article often cited as the “smallpox essay” by other scholars researching the problem.

The second most common retrospective diagnosis has been endemic typhus, represented by “The Plague of Athens,” a section in the widely read *Rats, Lice and History* (1934) by the prominent twentieth-century epidemiologist, Hans Zinsser, who was one of

the pioneers in the study of typhus and developed the first typhus vaccine in 1934. Two other frequently cited studies followed Zinsser’s diagnosis: W. P. MacArthur, “The Athenian Plague: A Medical Note,” *CQ*, n. s. 4 (1954), 171-74 (with a response by D. L. Page on 174) and John Scarborough, “Thucydides, Greek Medicine and the Plague at Athens: A Summary of Possibilities,” *Episteme*, 4 (1970), 77-90. Scarborough, especially, calls attention to Thucydides’ description as accurate in its own contexts but incapable of accounting for any evolutionary shifts in the causative organisms. He argues that any modern diagnosis is flawed because of possible mutations over time. While Scarborough might be correct if the disease described by Thucydides was caused by a micro-organism that was prone to mutation (as typhus is), other micro-organisms, such as smallpox, are very stable over time.

In 1994, Thomas E. Morgan analyzed Thucydides’ medical knowledge, or the lack of it, in “Plague or Poetry? Thucydides on the Epidemic at Athens,” *TAPA*, 124 (1994), 197-209. Morgan, a physician-classicist, argues that Thucydides desired to contrast the tragedy of war and the pathos of the disease with the lofty ideals presented by Pericles in the funeral oration. Thus, in his opinion, the descriptions of the plague are quite imprecise not only because the Hippocratic or other terminologies varied from those of modern epidemiology but also, more importantly, because Thucydides employed dramatic license in his account of the plague. The weakness in Morgan’s argument is that his thesis is somewhat inconsistent with Thucydides’ statement that he describes the symptoms so that the disease can be identified if it breaks out again.

Other possible candidates for the identification of the Plague of Athens have ranged from measles, typhoid fever, bubonic plague, anthrax, and ergotism, to toxic shock syndrome with staphylococcus, scarlet fever, Rift Valley Fever, and arboviruses, but none of these possibilities has gained many adherents among students of ancient epidemics, as suggested by James Longrigg, “The Great Plague at Athens,” *History of Science*, 18 (1980), 209-25 and by David M. Morens and me in “Thucydides’ Syndrome Reconsidered: New Thoughts on the ‘Plague of Athens,’” *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 140 (1994), 621-28 and 631.

Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, new methodologies

developed that allowed fresh examinations of diseases, plagues, and pandemics in the ancient world. These methodologies were based on new academic disciplines, including forensic anthropology, demography, and epidemiology. Recent studies of the Plague of Athens reflect these developments in methodology.

In 1992, I collaborated with Dr. David Morens, a noted epidemiologist at the National Institute of Health, to bring the techniques of epidemiology to the examination of the disease and to use such devices as mathematical modeling to look at various possibilities; the results of our research were published in “Epidemiology of the Plague at Athens,” *TAPA*, 122 (1992), 271-304. Mathematical modeling allowed us to examine infection and attack rates based on the various candidates and to determine how long it takes a particular disease to spread in a city and how long it would be able to remain endemic. Several diseases, such as measles, had to be eliminated as possibilities because the population of Athens was too small to sustain an epidemic of them for more than a few months. Thus, the best possibilities were narrowed to typhus, typhus-like diseases, and smallpox.

Demography, teamed with molecular biology and anthropology, is also proving useful in the study of ancient disease. This is well exemplified by Walter Scheidel’s *Death on the Nile: Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt* (2001) and Robert Sallares’ monumental account of malaria in ancient Rome, *Malaria and Rome: A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy* (2002). Using molecular biology, genetics, and parasitology, as well as demography, modification of life tables, and techniques of anthropology, Sallares has reached the startling conclusion that this endemic disease substantially affected life expectancy in the Roman Empire. As these new disciplines develop and as our scientific tools increase, the next century should bring new and exciting insights into the history of plagues and disease in the ancient world.

In addition to new developments in methodology, scientific discoveries and new technology have allowed fresh insights into the very essence of life. Chief among these are the discovery of DNA and the ability to analyze it, MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), and CT Scan (Computed Axial Tomography), that is, three-dimensional pictures of hard and soft tissue inside the human body.

THE PLAGUE OF ATHENS: CURRENT ANALYTIC TECHNIQUES

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The study of ancient DNA has begun to provide new clues for the study of plagues of antiquity. Ancient microbial DNA has been successfully extracted; see A. R. Zink et al., "Characterization of Mycobacterium tuberculosis complex DNAs from Egyptian mummies by spoligotyping," *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*, 41 (1) (2003), 359-67. Four-hundred-year-old DNA of *Yersinia pestis*, the micro-organism that causes typhus, has been extracted from dental pulp; see Michel Drancourt et al., "Detection of 400-year-old *Yersinia pestis* DNA in human dental pulp: An approach to the diagnosis of ancient septicemia," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science U. S. A.*, October 13, 95 (21) (1998), 12637-40. The extraction of human DNA is more problematic. There are claims that Neanderthal DNA has been extracted and other claims that it is not possible to extract DNA more than 800 years old.

In any event, microbial DNA might provide a useful tool for identifying the Plague of Athens. In 2001, a mass grave that belonged to the plague years was discovered at the cemetery of the Kerameikos in Athens (see Fig. 3). The excavation was conducted by Effie Baziotopoulou-Valavani, a member of the Greek Archaeological Service. Her excavation report and the date of the finds are included in M. Stamatopoulou and M. Yeroulanou, eds., *Excavating Classical Culture: Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Greece* (2002), 187-201. The study of the skeletal material was undertaken by Professor Manolis Papagrigorakis of the University of Athens. (Manolis Papagrigorakis et al., "DNA examination of ancient dental pulp incriminates typhoid fever as a probable cause of the Plague of Athens," *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 2006). He was able to extract ancient microbial typhoid DNA from the remains. He has posited that the probable cause of the Plague of Athens was this disease. It is premature, however, to draw this conclusion. We know from Hippocrates that typhoid was most likely endemic in the Greek world. The presence of an endemic disease does not necessarily indicate that it was the cause of death. The other problem is that the sampling is extremely small – three skeletons. He has made an intriguing start that one hopes will lead to new information

about palaeopathology and the plague years.

Other modern technology may also one day be applicable to the study of the Plague of Athens, particularly if more physical remains from the plague years are unearthed. The Manchester Mummy Project under Dr. Rosalie David has used new scientific techniques and analyses to look at physical evidence of ancient disease, including schistosomiasis. David's multidisciplinary team, made up of archaeologists, scientists, and physicians, applies modern forensic and clinical techniques to examine ancient tissue and establish what diseases affected people in the distant past. They have found that many familiar diseases and conditions – obesity, osteoarthritis, slipped discs, blocked arteries, and pleurisy – affected the ancient Egyptians. But the researchers particularly want to track the progress of schistosomiasis, a chronic debilitating disease that today is estimated to affect 200-300 million people in seventy-nine countries. In some Egyptian villages, it can affect as much as eighty percent of the population. It has been found extensively in ancient mummies.

CT scanning is also particularly useful in the study of ancient mummies since it allows analysis without the destruction of the mummy. The Egyptian Mummy Project, under the direction of Dr. Zahi Hawass of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt, with my collaboration and that of Dr. DeWolfe Miller of the University of Hawaii, has begun using a portable CT scanner (donated by Siemens of Germany) to study the remains of mummies, including Tutankhamen. Recently, the Stanford-NASA National Biocomputation Center in Palo Alto scanned the mummy of a 2000-year-old child from the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose, California. Using more than 60,000 high-resolution X-ray images from scans, they generated thirty-five times as much data as that from the scanning of Tutankhamen (Michael D. Lemonik, "Secrets of a 2000-Year-Old Child," *Time Magazine*, 166, No. 7, August 15, 2005, 56-57). This new technology could also prove an invaluable forensic tool in studying ancient plagues.

Why is it important to study the diseases of the past? The history of medicine and various practices of the past allow us to understand modern medical practices. Our Western scientific medicine, with its emphasis on observation, natural rather than divine causation, and experimentation, as well as our medical ethics, are all in the Greek Hippocratic tradition. When researchers today do medical experiments, they often make use of rats and other laboratory animals to see the progress of disease, susceptibility, and the acquisition of immunity in the short generations of their lives. The study of the history of medicine, however, allows us to use humans, that is, the humans of the past, as laboratory subjects and to track out how they lived and how they died. Using modern methodologies and technology, researchers in the not-too-distant future may be able to provide an explanation convincing to all for the identity of the Plague of Athens that so devastated Athens in the fifth century B.C. and that even today makes its impact on the historical and scientific imaginations of readers of Thucydides' history.

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Book Review: *The Songs of the Kings*

by Mary-Kay Gamel

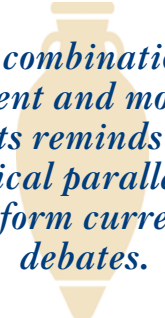
Barry Unsworth. *The Songs of the Kings*. Doubleday (<http://www.randomhouse.com/doubleday>), 2003. Pp. 336. Hardcover \$26. ISBN 0385501145; W. W. Norton & Company (<http://www.wwnorton.com>), 2004. Pp. 342. Paperback \$14. ISBN 0393322831.

The *Songs of the Kings* is the fourteenth novel by Barry Unsworth, a historical novelist who never visits the same locale twice. He has set novels in Greece in 1908 (*Pascali's Island*, 1980), contemporary Venice (*Stone Virgin*, 1985), and fourteenth-century England (*Morality Play*, 1995). *Sacred Hunger*, which deals with the eighteenth-century slave trade, won the Booker Prize in 1991, but my personal favorite among his previous novels is *The Rage of the Vulture* (1982), a tale with distinct echoes of Conrad that is set in Istanbul as the Ottoman Empire dissolves. In all his novels, Unsworth does not seek exoticism or escapism in earlier times and places but uses historical locales to reflect on significant political, social, and artistic issues.

After 9/11, as talk of war escalated and Western forces gathered to avenge an outrageous violation by an Eastern enemy, the Trojan War offered provocative parallels. One result was a number of theatrical productions across the United States and Great Britain of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, in which a young girl is sacrificed to make the war possible (on these productions see now Edith Hall, "Iphigenia and her Mother at Aulis," in *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today*, edited by John Dillon and S. E. Wilmer, 2005). Another result is this powerful novel of ideas, Unsworth's most politically engaged narrative to date.

In *Songs*, set at Aulis where the Greek forces are gathered to sail to Troy, the central characters are not Agamemnon, Iphigenia, and Clytemnestra, as in Euripides' play, but rather Calchas, here an Asian priest; Odysseus, now Agamemnon's chief advisor; and a Homer-like Singer. The central theme of this novel is how position and power distort ways of knowing and communicating. The priest seeks "meaning, not

stories," but Odysseus uses rhetoric to manipulate the king, and like an embedded reporter, the Singer is gradually seduced into promoting the war effort and the sacrifice that will make it possible.



The combination of ancient and modern elements reminds us that historical parallels can inform current debates.

Unsworth's narrative is rich with details drawn from classical myth, texts, archaeology, religion, and history. These are not used to provide "atmosphere" but to forward the novel's themes. For example, the meaning of the omen mentioned in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* – a pregnant hare killed by two eagles – is repeatedly debated. At the same time, the analogies with contemporary history and politics are very clear. Helen's departure with Paris is only a pretext; beset by economic problems in the Argolid, "Commander-in-Chief" Agamemnon is undertaking this war to acquire a vast maritime empire with "abundant cheap metals." His advisors who, like some of our contemporary chicken hawks are "besotted with military power" despite having "never worn a sword," invoke "justice" and "destiny"; the Greeks, they argue, "have a duty towards these people" who "live in ignorance and superstition . . . to bring light into their darkness" (282).

Unsworth's portrait of Odysseus is especially acute: frustrated by poverty, driven by ambition, the lord of barren little Ithaca uses his intelligence and fluency in order to deceive and spin. The novelist even puts contemporary language into his characters' mouths – Odysseus tries to "incentivize" Iphigenia, Diomedes says war always involves "collateral damage," Achilles worries about his "image," Iphigenia thinks she and Achilles "are on the same wavelength." This does not reduce the story to

an obvious allegory of contemporary figures and events but demonstrates the danger of accepting others' language and ideas without question. When intellectuals and artists are complicit with those in power, truth is the first casualty.

Unsworth's boldest addition to the story is Iphigenia's Asian slave girl. As an underling and outsider, Sisipyla has knowledge unavailable to her mistress, a shrewd ability to assess others, and the skill to play the roles expected of her while keeping her own counsel. After the plan to sacrifice Iphigenia comes to light, she tries to convince the princess that the glorious "destiny" Odysseus has dangled before her is "only a word You are using their language. They have put their language into your mouth" (333). She comes up with a courageous plan to save her mistress by substituting herself as the victim, but Iphigenia prefers clichés and decides to "save this great expedition, forge the Greeks into a single nation, and be remembered in the songs as the savior of a whole people" (333).

The combination of ancient and modern elements reminds us that historical parallels can inform current debates and that classical texts, including those of Homer and Euripides, have ideological dimensions. The Singer begins by denying that a Song is like a political speech (93). But Calchas insists "songs are about what people already believe or what it is wished they should believe" (224), and the Singer ends up justifying his submission to the powerful: "it is the stories told by the strong, the songs of the kings, that are believed in the end" (296). This novel helps the reader question songs that serve the interests of kings – ancient or contemporary.

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WHATEVER HAPPENED IN THESSALY? A POSTMODERN FANTASY

continued from page 9

most accepted the story. Clearly Admetus had long been favored by Apollo, and everyone had heard that Heracles had achieved deeds only a little less impossible than this one. The men envied Admetus for having so nobly dutiful a wife. The women disagreed among themselves as to whether a wife should be expected to die for her husband, but they all admitted that they themselves would never have had the courage to do so voluntarily. They concluded that Alcestis must be different from other women. Perhaps she should be revered as a *daemon*, a holy one whose power persisted even after death. Indeed, as the years went by, there were rumors that someone had come across a roadside shrine at which offerings to Alcestis were laid. Alcestis laughed at these, inwardly fearful lest she be suspected of encouraging so outrageous a claim. Admetus denied the reports almost resentfully. As time went on, he seemed disinclined to talk about the earlier events. When one day his son and daughter asked him to recite once again the account of the miraculous happenings, he refused. "All that should be let rest in the past," he said. "We must attend to what the present demands of us."

In fact, before long, action was urgently needed on two matters: First, their daughter's marriage. Out of the many men who asked for her, three appeared to be most appropriate. Alcestis, having watched the girl's face when she had heard them named, told Admetus which one she would like to see chosen. But he announced that he had already selected one of the others and had begun to make arrangements. Alcestis was dismayed that he had not consulted her in making the decision, and she sadly reflected that for a long time now he had seldom shared his thoughts and plans with her as he used to do in the months closer to the day of her return.

Soon after the wedding came the news that, with Agamemnon as leader, a fleet was gathering at Aulis to sail and make war against Troy. Immediately Admetus declared that he himself would join them. But Alcestis pointed out that these warriors were not of his generation, and she reminded him that Helen's abduction had nothing to do with him. It was her former suitors who

had sworn to defend her and whomever she chose as husband. The case was different with their son Eumelus. Though he was too young to be a serious contender, his father had sent suitor's gifts on his behalf, and Eumelus was bound by the oath. He had to go to Troy. A slight altercation arose when he asked if he could take with him the pair of mares which Apollo himself had raised while he worked out his sentence as Admetus' servant. Admetus had never permitted anyone but himself to drive them and at first refused his son's request. But Alcestis, who evidently still had some influence, persuaded him that Apollo would surely want the animals he had tended to show their superiority and that glory would be reflected on their owner as well.

Shortly after Eumelus had set sail with his eleven ships bound for Aulis, Admetus summoned his neighbors to join him in a series of hunting expeditions, perhaps to distract himself from anxiety over Eumelus; possibly he also still felt impelled to prove that he was not afraid to face dangers. On the hunts he displayed a certain recklessness, which one day resulted in his getting a deep gash in his thigh when he went too close to a wild boar. Things were never the same after that afternoon. The injury gave him such pain that he prayed aloud for death. Gradually the wound healed over, but he could not move easily or without discomfort, and he remained very weak; soon, for himself and for all around him, he became an invalid. Ashamed to have his acquaintances see him so diminished, he stayed inside the palace and refused to receive visitors. The man whose hospitality had made him famous lived now as a recluse. But not as a resigned recluse at peace with himself. Deprived by weakness and by pride from meaningful activity, boredom brought him as much suffering as his physical ailments. Pitying him, Alcestis was almost glad when she once caught sight of him awkwardly making his way into the area where the maids slept. Her emotions were mixed when she noted how short a time he stayed there.

Admetus' self-pity was all too evident. Twenty times a day he announced to Alcestis that he was dying, at first with despair, then insisting that Death could not come too soon. Finally one

day he timidly asked Alcestis if it would not be best if he put an end to himself, deliberately. Not knowing whether what he secretly wanted was agreement or dissuasion, she evaded, asking if he did not fear that it might be unlawful and an offence to the Divine Will if he preempted their right to determine his end. She told him, "You would be angry if any of your slaves destroyed themselves. You are the property of the gods as your slaves belong to you." His response showed that he did *not* want to be dissuaded. He said, "The gods have made me a Tithonus, extending my life beyond natural limits but letting me wither away to worthlessness."

"None of the Divine Ones is likely to turn you into a grasshopper," she replied a bit tartly.

Admetus continued to argue, "The gods have given me the power to choose for myself. I have the right to die; it would not be self-destruction, it would be self-deliverance."

On the third day after that, Alcestis heard the words she dreaded but was sure would finally be spoken. Admetus said to her, "Alcestis, you can and must help me. You can give me the poison that Hermes gave you. If you love me, you will do this unless . . ." He paused, then added, "unless you are saving it for yourself."

So shocked she seemed almost to stop breathing, Alcestis exclaimed, "How could I possibly see you die by my hand!" In truth, the thought that she might herself one day find in this gift from Persephone a release from suffering was not wholly new to her. Though she had hidden the fact from Admetus, she had been having increasingly severe pain in her right side and was wondering how much more of it she could bear without collapsing.

For the next couple of days Admetus, while reiterating his complaint that the gods were making him pay now for having had his life prolonged earlier, did not bring up his former request. But then Alcestis, coming upon him unexpectedly, discovered him apparently trying to open the chest that she had kept tightly fastened. Admetus muttered something about accidentally stumbling against it, but both knew the truth, unacceptable though it was. Realizing that he was actually ready to steal from her, she was hardly surprised when, a few hours later, he first openly begged her to give him the vial of poison, then threatened that, if she did not love him enough to obey, he still had the strength to force her to let him have what he so desperately wanted. Alcestis

looked silently at him for several long minutes; at last she said, “Very well, as I once chose to die for you, so I will do now what I believe is right for me to do – though it is with even more regret this time.” She walked into the room where the chest was, opened it, and took out the vial she needed.

As Admetus watched, she poured its content into a cup, added a little wine, and handed it to him. Before touching it with his lips, he said solemnly, “Alcestis, you have saved me once again, may you always be remembered as the most devoted of women.” He drank the mixture. After emptying the cup, he inquired whether the poison would work quickly or how long it would take.

“Hermes did not tell me,” she said. “Best to lie down for a bit and try to sleep.” Alcestis left the room. She violently threw the empty vial onto the stone floor, where it smashed into bits. It was the one with the image of the Gorgon.

Epilogue

That evening Stella and her brother and I went to an old taverna. It was on the very edge of Larissa. Along with townspeople were some country types, seated at the tables in the far corner. Three musicians played a mixture of current popular hits and the old-style pieces that predated the taverna itself. When they began to play the traditional half-Oriental numbers, one by one several of the rustics danced in the central space, giving intricate performances of their own invention. Finally a truly ancient man, a shriveled, bent-over figure, who looked almost incapable of moving, stepped into the now empty circle. A hush came over the conversations, and all around seemed to hold their breath. “Who is that?” I asked.

Stella whispered, “We call him ‘the Antique.’ Nobody knows much about him. We can’t even guess how old he is. He lives in a little shelter, and the neighbors slip food into his place. Most of the time he sleeps, but now and then he comes here. Look at him.”

I watched incredulously. It was like seeing a newly emerged moth, little by little transforming itself from shapeless chrysalis to winged glory. In perfect harmony with the music, the man at first appeared to be dancing while standing still, flexing his muscles rhythmically but without changing his position. Gradually he proceeded to move his legs and feet in exquisitely complex steps, then his arms and hands in a manner to

Q Who was buried in the Mausoleum of Augustus?



Fig. 4. Tomb of Augustus in 1982 (#ac822933). Photo credit: Leo C. Curran, 1997 (<http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas>).

arouse envy in a hula dancer or a striptease artist. Finally, as if to show himself more than equal to the others who had danced, he performed the tricks that they had done. By a gesture, he ordered that a glass be placed on the floor in front of him. Bending over, he lifted and drank from it, using only his mouth. His glass was larger than the ones the others had used.

The crowd applauded. “The Antique” slowly, with a sort of hopping motion, started back to his seat. As he passed our group, I spoke to him in Greek. “What is your name? Is it Admetus?”

He croaked out some sort of reply, but I could not understand it. What he said sounded like “Brekekekex.”

Hazel E. Barnes is Professor of Philosophy Emerita at the University of Colorado at Boulder where she taught also in the Departments of Classics and Humanities. She translated Sartre’s Being and Nothingness and has written several books on Existentialism. Publications in classics include The Meddling Gods: Four Essays on Classical Themes (1974). Her latest book is The Story I Tell Myself: A Venture in Existentialist Autobiography (1998). The imagined sequel to Euripides’ Alcestis was written to be read at her ninetieth birthday party, solely for amusement.

Ask A Classicist

A This large, circular family mausoleum in the Campus Martius in Rome was completed in 28 B.C. (Suetonius, *Augustus* 100). Originally it was about 295 feet in diameter by 137 feet in height. Pillaging and multiple uses over the centuries damaged the mausoleum, but it was restored to its current state in the 1930’s by Mussolini (see Fig. 4). The burial chamber of the mausoleum, which consists of a circular hall surrounding a central concrete pillar, is not open for visits.

Most of the individuals interred in the mausoleum were cremated, and no ancient remains have survived. First to be buried, in 23 B.C., was Marcellus (Augustus’ nephew and son-in-law). Marcellus’ interment was followed, in 12 B.C., by that of Agrippa (Augustus’ life-long friend and second husband of his daughter Julia) and, in 11 B.C., by that of Octavia (Augustus’ sister).

Drusus, the son of Augustus’ wife Livia, was buried in 9 B.C., and the burials of Augustus’ grandsons Lucius (A.D. 2) and Gaius (A.D. 4) preceded the burial of Augustus himself in A.D. 14. Augustus had excluded the two Julias, his disgraced daughter and granddaughter, from burial in the mausoleum, but his third wife Livia, having survived to see her son Tiberius made emperor, was interred in A.D. 29. Tiberius was buried here in A.D. 37 as was Tiberius’ nephew Germanicus (A.D. 19) and Tiberius’ son Drusus (A.D. 23). In A.D. 37, Germanicus’ son, the emperor Gaius Caligula, gathered up the remains of his mother, Agrippina the Elder, and his brothers Nero (not the future emperor) and Drusus for burial in the mausoleum. Gaius Caligula himself was buried here after his assassination in A.D. 41.

Poppaea, the second wife of the emperor Nero, was also buried here (uncremated) in A.D. 65 after Nero kicked her and her unborn child to death. The interment of the emperor Nerva, who succeeded the autocratic emperor Domitian, is the last (A.D. 98). He was the only non-Julio-Claudian buried in the mausoleum.

FROM SCROLL TO DATABASE: WHAT DO CLASSICS LIBRARIANS DO?

by W. Gerald Heverly

Libraries have changed drastically over the last twenty years. Computers have replaced card catalogs. Online journals and other electronic resources have become as important as the printed page. In this changing landscape, librarians educated in classics are still in demand. Despite technological advances, and sometimes even because of them, my career as an academic librarian continues to draw heavily on the knowledge of Greek, Latin, and classical civilization I acquired during my graduate studies.

As is true for most librarians, some of my key responsibilities are traceable to antiquity. Acquiring books, for example, was a major activity of the renowned library of Alexandria, in Egypt. In *Libraries in the Ancient World* (2001), Lionel Casson relates that the Ptolemies “sent out agents with well-filled purses and orders to buy whatever books they could, of every kind on every subject” (34). Collecting on this scale would be financially impossible today, but acquiring material is still a major undertaking in research libraries. Subject specialists, sometimes called selectors or bibliographers, build a library’s collection by ordering books, journals, CD’s, and other materials in disciplines with which they are familiar. In addition, subject specialists maintain their section of a library’s collection by reviewing titles for preservation, replacement, offsite storage, and withdrawal. At NYU, where I have been employed for the last four years, I serve as the subject specialist for classics, Hellenic studies, and philosophy.

The Alexandrians also devoted much effort to organizing their library’s vast holdings. Callimachus, best known as a poet, compiled its first serious catalog. His *Pinakes* (*Tables*), which survives only in quotations, was a detailed bibliography, in 120 books, of everything written in Greek. Scholars consider this work an expanded version of a comprehensive catalog to the library’s holdings, which Callimachus compiled while employed there (Casson, 39). A well-organized collection makes for easily-found books. Cataloging is still, therefore, a central activity in libraries. Today’s catalogers create online records for the items a library acquires. In doing so, they ana-

lyze and describe material according to established national standards, following a systematic structure designed to help library users locate information. The records they produce make possible the computerized library catalogs familiar to us all.

One aspect that has not long been a part of librarianship, however, is public services. Services that we take for granted, such as the reference desk, were unknown in antiquity. Public services, also called user services or reader services, constitute an important component of any modern library’s activities. Public services librarians assist users in locating and evaluating information, provide research consultation (in-depth or specialized assistance), and conduct library tours and classes on the use of library resources. Along with subject specialists and catalogers, public services librarians constitute most of the professional staff in an academic or research library. Some librarians work exclusively in one of these three capacities. More common, however, is a mix of duties. At NYU, for example, most subject specialists also have public service responsibilities. In an average week, I spend six hours at the reference desk, a couple of hours instructing individuals or classes in the use of the library, and another couple of hours consulting with people about their research via e-mail, on the telephone, or in my office. The rest of my week is devoted to committee work, special projects, and my subject specialist duties.

Answering reference questions perhaps best illustrates how useful my classical education has been. Here is a small sample of the questions dealing with classics that I have fielded over the past few years: What is Aeschylus’ attitude toward women in the *Oresteia*? How did the Romans make bread? What depictions of Aphrodite survive in ancient art? What stylized gestures did ancient orators use? What recent scholarship is there on Plato’s *Symposium*? Some of these questions were asked when I was working at the reference desk; others came via e-mail or a phone call to my office. Not all were from students taking classics courses. Indeed, interesting classics questions are often asked by people from other disciplines. A doctor-

al student in modern European history once asked me to vet his translation of *ignoramus et ignorabimus* (“we do not and shall not know”), the slogan of the nineteenth-century skeptic Emil Du Bois-Reymond. Sometimes questions come even from other librarians. Once a colleague cataloging a book in Latin asked me what he should enter as its place of publication. The title page said “Berolini.” Not recognizing the locative case form of Berlin, he assumed he was dealing with an Italian place name, which, of course, he could not verify. To be sure, I am not asked questions such as these on a daily basis, but they do arise frequently enough to help keep my work interesting and pleasantly challenging.

Library instruction provides another opportunity to use my classical background. Students taking a classics course sometimes need an overview of the research strategies and reference sources relevant to an assignment. At the instructor’s request, I design and conduct a library session tailored to the specific requirements of the course. Recently I have provided library instruction for undergraduate courses in classical mythology, Greek tragedy, Vergil, and Graeco-Roman art. Introducing students to reference tools that will open up new worlds to them is particularly rewarding.

My institution’s special collections department has also given me interesting opportunities to apply my training in classics. Precious materials such as rare books, manuscripts, and archives require special care and security. In most academic libraries, a department exists specifically for this purpose and is usually called special collections. For years, NYU’s department had a large number of uncataloged books in Greek and Latin, printed mostly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. No one had the time or knew the ancient languages well enough to determine what these books were about and whether they should be kept or sold. Shortly after I began working at NYU, the head of special collections asked me to review them and decide their fate. Because many turned out to be landmark editions of the classics (including an Aldine Ovid and Lambinus’

Lucretius), the project proved especially satisfying.

My position also constantly challenges me to learn more about classics. In order to make sure that I order all the important books coming out, I routinely read reviews of titles published about the classical world. In this way, I learn about new developments in scholarship and more. Recently, for instance, a book review made me aware of Achilles Tatius, a Greek novelist of the second century A.D. I frequently consult the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and other reference works when deciding whether to buy books on specialized topics. For example, when I was trying to determine whether to order a book entitled *La Peucezia in età romana (Peucezia in the Roman Era)*, I learned from an Italian encyclopedia that the Peucetii lived in southeastern Italy, came in contact with the Romans in 291 B.C., and remained peaceful during the Social War. Similarly, I knew little about papyrology until three years ago, when NYU began participating in the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS). Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, APIS is a database that combines high quality images of papyri with descriptive information about each item. Our special collections department houses a collection of papyri that is being cataloged and scanned for APIS. As coordinator of this project, I have studied handbooks of papyrology in order to improve my knowledge of the field. I have also experienced the thrill of working directly with the papyri in our collection, including fragments of Homer nearly two thousand years old (see Fig. 5).

Many librarians with a background in classics use it in their jobs as routinely as I use mine. The cataloging department at Yale handles a steady stream of books in the classical languages. Anthony Oddo, who leads the department's Arts and Sciences Team, catalogs some of these items himself and frequently deciphers title pages in Greek or Latin for other catalogers. Phoebe Peacock, classics specialist at the Library of Congress, uses her knowledge of classics when answering questions about the ancient world at the reference desk. Off the desk, her language skills are called upon by members of Congress who request Latin to English or English to Latin translations. Some legislators even request references to classical sources that bear on matters before the House or Senate (e.g., Cicero on the abuse of power). As a matter of policy,

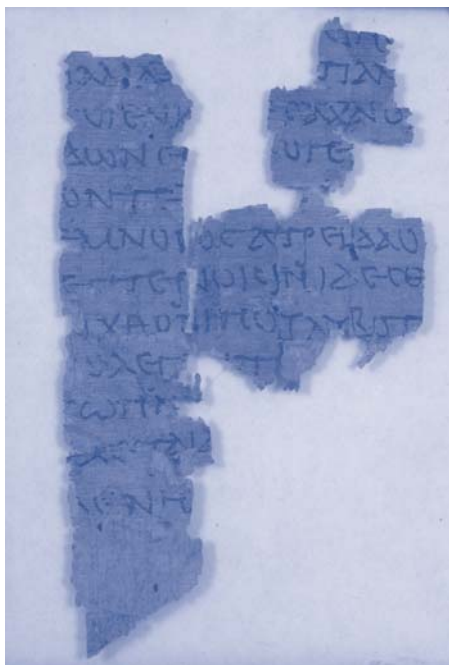


Fig. 5. Papyrus fragment (NYU Inv. 524) of Homer, *Iliad* 3.188-99, from Karanis, early first century A.D. Photo credit: Fales Library, New York University.

however, Ms. Peacock is not told the identity of Congressional inquirers.

Even at smaller libraries, it is possible to use a classical education routinely. The head of special collections at Trinity College (Hartford), Jeffrey Kaimowitz, oversees his institution's numerous early printed editions of the classics. He has mounted several exhibits at Trinity featuring these books and uses them as a teaching resource when speaking to classes about such topics as the history of classical scholarship, the transmission of texts, and Neo-Latin poetry. Building on his routine responsibilities, he has twice taught a course on Renaissance printing, which includes a healthy classics component, through Trinity's continuing education program.

Karen Green, classics librarian at Columbia University, has also had an exciting opportunity to apply her knowledge of classics beyond her regular duties. Two years ago, she was in Egypt's Western Desert, setting up a field library near the Amheida excavation site. This reference collection, which will eventually include about a thousand volumes, focuses on Graeco-Roman Egypt and is consulted by faculty and students working on the dig.

By now it should be clear that librarianship offers an interesting and rewarding career for someone who has studied classics. The study of Greek and Latin certainly hones analytical skills and

attention to detail, both of which are essential for library work. Furthermore, graduate study of classics fosters not only in-depth knowledge of the ancient world but also reading knowledge of French, German, and Italian, languages for which there is a steady demand in research libraries. Anyone who can read these languages, even with a dictionary, has a distinct advantage when applying for a job as a subject specialist, cataloger, or curator of special collections. In addition, teaching experience gained during graduate school is good preparation for work in public services. Assisting readers at the reference desk and instructing groups or individuals in the use of the library require the kinds of communication skills sharpened by classroom teaching.

A degree in classics will, however, normally not be enough to land a library job. For most professional positions, an M.L.S. (Master of Library Science) is required in addition to any stipulated subject or language expertise. As the shortage of academic librarians grows, institutions may become more flexible about requiring the M.L.S. for certain entry-level positions. In any event, both the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) report nervously that academic librarians are in short supply. Applicants proficient in ancient and modern languages are especially sought. Thus, graduate students and other classicists contemplating alternative careers to teaching may find it worth their while to explore librarianship. ACRL's Western European Studies Section, to which many classics librarians belong, maintains a Web site for anyone wishing to learn about the kinds of library careers open to people with foreign language skills and subject expertise (<http://www.columbia.edu/~klg19/WESS/index.html>).

W. Gerald Heverly (gerald.heverly@nyu.edu) has been an academic librarian for eighteen years, first at the University of Pittsburgh (1988-2001) and now at NYU (since 2002). He earned an M.A. in classics and an M.L.S. from the University of Pittsburgh. This article grew out of a panel session on library careers that he organized for the Spring 2004 meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States. He thanks his fellow panelists for their encouragement and valuable comments on a draft of the article.

NOVEL APPROACHES TO THE CLASSICS: PART III

continued from page 5

Roth's textual strategy certainly deepens the pathos of the work, and the tragic intertexts reinforce the loss and suffering that permeate the novel and engulf its characters. Silk suffers at the hands of elitist colleagues but is himself capable of self-service and cruelty. His decision to abandon his family takes a terrible toll on his mother and siblings, and his uncompromising rage is a contributing factor to the death of his wife. Other characters, brutalized by the world, lead lives of unredeemed unhappiness: Faunia Farley suffers the tragic loss of her children; her ex-husband, a Vietnam veteran, suffers from traumatic stress. The novel's tragic ambiance is captured at Silk's eulogy and funeral, as his children assemble to mourn his passing and Mark sings the Kaddish, recalling the shared sense of family loss after the passing of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. Yet the novel ends with a gesture toward the power of art to establish truth and liberate readers from ignorance and hypocrisy. Just as *Oedipus at Colonus* works to restore Oedipus to his former greatness, the novel that Zuckerman vows to undertake (which is *The Human Stain*) seeks to rehabilitate the damaged reputation of its protagonist.

Thomas Falkner (tfalkner@mcDaniel.edu) is Provost and Dean of the Faculty, and Professor of Classics, at McDaniel College in Maryland. He co-organized the panel "Classics and Contemporary Fiction" at the 2006 meeting of the APA. "Novel Approaches to the Classics," Parts I and II, can be found in Amphora's online archive at www.apaclassics.org (issues 2.1 and 3.1).

From the Editor

by Anne-Marie Lewis

With this issue, *Amphora* is entering its fifth year of publication. We have grown from eight pages to twenty (and will expand to twenty-four with issue 5.2). We now have readers around the world. Our Editorial Board has seen some recent changes: we thank departing members Marty Abbott and Matthew Santirocco for the service they provided to *Amphora* during their terms. We welcome to the Editorial Board Sally R. Davis, Elaine Fantham, and Chris Ann Matteo. We also welcome T. Davina McClain, our new Assistant Editor.

We feel very privileged at *Amphora* to be part of the steady and growing interest in all aspects of classical studies. Notable evidence for this lively interest can be found not only in Hollywood films but also in the quantity and variety of series being published by major presses:

Blackwell Publishing

<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/serieslist.asp?subj=RD&site=1>) publishes several ongoing series: Introductions to the Classical World, Guides to Classical Literature, Companions to the Ancient World, and Sourcebooks in Ancient History.

Cambridge University Press

(<http://www.cambridge.org>) has been publishing and continues to publish volumes of essays in its Cambridge Companions series (volumes on Aristotle, Herodotus, Homer, Plato, ancient Greek law, early Greek philosophy, the Hellenistic world, Greek and Roman philosophy, Greek tragedy, Augustine, Ovid, Vergil, the age of Augustus, the age of Constantine, the age of Justinian, the Roman Republic, Roman satire, and the Stoics are in print).

Duckworth (<http://www.ducknet.co.uk>) publishes several series. *Ancients in Action* introduces major figures of the ancient world (volumes on Catullus, Cleopatra, and Spartacus have already been published). *Classical Inter/Faces* concentrates on how classical ideas have helped to shape the

modern world (due out in fall 2006, for example, are *Celebrity in Antiquity: From Media Tarts to Tabloid Queens* and *Rome and the Literature of Gardens*).

Oxford University Press (<http://www.oup.co.uk>) publishes several series including Oxford Classical Texts, Clarendon Ancient History Series, Greece and Rome – New Surveys in the Classics, Oxford Approaches to Classical Literature, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies, and Oxford World's Classics (ancient texts in translation).

Random House (<http://www.randomhouse.ca/features/themyths/note.html>) has recently launched a new series entitled *The Myths*; three titles have been published already: *A Short History of Myth*, *Weight* (the story of Atlas and Heracles) and *The Penelopiad* (reviewed by Matthew Clark in this issue). The release of these three books will be followed each year by fresh retellings of the myths by other contemporary authors.

Routledge (<http://www.routledge-ny.com>) has a new series entitled *Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World* (volumes on Zeus and Prometheus have already been published, and new volumes on Oedipus, Heracles, Athena, Medea, Apollo, and Dionysus are due out in the summer and fall of 2006). Another series entitled *Women of Antiquity* will contain volumes to be published in 2006 on Neaera, Olympias, Cornelia, Julia Domna, and Julia Augusti (by *Amphora's* own Elaine Fantham).

A summer (and autumn) of good reading lies ahead!

THE OHIO WESLEYAN “VIRGIL VIGIL”

by Donald Lateiner and Lee Fratantuono

The Department of Humanities and Classics at Ohio Wesleyan University decided with great student and faculty enthusiasm to spend the night, the entire night, with a poetic sorcerer. On Friday, March 24, 2006, at 9:00 p.m., deep in the bowels of Sturges Hall (see Fig. 6), we began our third annual marathon reading of a great ancient poetic text – this year the *Aeneid*, part in Latin, most in English. The reading extended from the first word *Arma* (weapons of destruction) to the last, *umbras* (ghosts). It continued through dawn and deep into Saturday morning. In the beginning, many students of Latin, Greek, folklore, Latin literature in translation, and friends from our Humanities program hushed in expectation as we launched the long (trust us!) epic on the high seas of silence. Soon we entered the poetic storm, but many stayed on board until midnight. After some fell asleep (not at the helm, though), the faithful band of classicists and straggling friends was reduced to eight students and two faculty members by the time the last Italian warrior was killed.

Brad Cook (now at San Diego State University) organized the successful 2004 reading of Homer’s *Odyssey*. At that event, students and faculty read from twenty-four different Homeric translations. Donald Lateiner directed the 2005 reading of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. On that occasion, about sixty students

selected for readings their favorite stories and incidents from Ovid’s varied and violent tales. The new University President, Mark Huddleston, joined our poetic frenzy. Professor Lee Fratantuono marshaled the caparisoned Ohio hosts for this year’s reading of Virgil’s epic masterpiece. Most participants used Allen Mandelbaum’s translation, but a few read from Robert Fitzgerald’s or from other twentieth-century translations, and Professor Richard Elias read many of John Dryden’s finely tuned couplets.

This year’s “Virgil Vigil” would have been candlelit, but university regulations forbade this pyrotechnic realism. Nevertheless, epic love, epic death, epic defeat, and epic glory rang through the halls of Ohio Wesleyan, while guests and rhapsodes munched on dates, figs, dolmadhes, olives, and (yes) pretzels and potato chips. Drink included Virgil’s Microbrewed Root Beer.

The devoted and the merely curious came, saw, and heard how Aeneas fled from Troy after the lethal trick of the wooden horse. They heard and read of the monstrous Harpies, the voracious Cyclops, betrayed Dido, the mysteries of the underworld and tortured and happier lives after death, bold and beautiful Camilla, optimistic Pallas, and justifiably furious Turnus. Energetic students even acted out certain moments of the drama, such as Anchises’ assisted exit from the burning city of Troy.



Fig. 6. Sturges Hall at Ohio Wesleyan University. Photo courtesy of Ohio Wesleyan University.

Very tentative plans have already been made for the spring 2007 Ohio Wesleyan classical night watch. Some ideas that have circulated among the stalwart Virgilians of 2006 include, on the Latin side, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Horace’s complete poetry, and Lucretius. On the Greek side, the likely choice is Homer’s *Iliad* – if the current alternation of Greek and Roman works is sustained. Another possibility that we have explored is having an outdoor, daylight, afternoon recitation of something that will draw greater attention to the central significance of classics on campus – and not require the lengthy overnight commitment.

Basking in Virgil’s vision of the birth of ancient Rome was an experience of joy and bone-crushing fatigue. Virgil seems a different spirit at midnight, at 4 a.m., at the gray dawn, and at 8 a.m. Try it yourself, if you mayhap think otherwise! By the end of the Vigil’s martial March evening – more accurately, the beginning of the morning – the students still extant if not standing, along with their two groggy (*somniculosi*) faculty members, were ready for nothing but sleep. They were left on the shores of light with a sweeping view of Virgil’s epic masterpiece and the memory of the advice of Aeneas, which they had heard around 9:45 p.m., when they were still fresh and alert – *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit* (*Aeneid* 1.203), “perhaps, one day, it will be pleasing to remember even these things.”

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AMPHORA®

(ISSN 1542-2380) is published twice a year by the American Philological Association (APA). The APA, founded in 1869 by “professors, friends, and patrons of linguistic science,” is now the principal learned society in North America for the study of ancient Greek and Roman languages, literatures, and civilizations. While the majority of its members are university and college classics teachers, members also include scholars in other disciplines, primary and secondary school teachers, and interested lay people. The APA produces several series of scholarly books and texts and the journal *Transactions of the American Philological Association*. It holds an annual meeting each January in conjunction with the Archaeological Institute of America.

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The APA’s activities serve one or more of these overarching goals:

- To ensure an adequate number of well-trained, inspirational classics teachers at all levels, kindergarten through graduate school;
- To give classics scholars and teachers the tools they need to preserve and extend their knowledge of classical civilization and to communicate that knowledge as widely as possible;
- To develop the necessary infrastructure to achieve these goals and to make the APA a model for other societies confronting similar challenges.

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Sponsorship: *Amphora*, a publication sponsored by the Committee on Outreach of the American Philological Association, is published twice a year, in the spring and fall.

Audience: *Amphora* is intended for a wide audience that includes those with a strong enthusiasm for the classical world: teachers and students, present and former classics majors, administrators in the field of education, community leaders, professional classicists, and interested academics and professionals in other fields.

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Anonymous Refereeing: Submissions will be refereed anonymously.

Footnotes: *Amphora* is footnote free. Any pertinent references should be worked into the text of the submission.

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