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Friends of Greek and Roman Studies

It is a great pleasure to begin this newsletter by thanking the Honorary Patron of FGRS, His Excellency, Eleftherios Anghelopoulos, The Ambassador of the Republic of Greece, for the generous gift he has donated to Friends of Greek and Roman Studies. His Excellency also honoured us by attending the performance of *Oedipus the King*, which the students put on in February. Since he has requested to be invited to this term's performance of *Antigone*, it is perhaps fitting that we begin with two reviews of *Oedipus*, one by Anna Avdeeva, an alumna of GRS, and one, unsolicited, by Jack Healy, a professor emeritus in the Department of English.

Reviews of *Oedipus Rex*

Anna Avdeeva, BA/10

Every year since 2002 the College of Humanities has put on a dramatic reading of an ancient Greek tragedy, directed by Josh Beer. Many remember the breathtaking performances that marked Sophocles' *Electra* (2008), Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (2009) and *Orestes* (2010). 2011 saw Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* with Iain Moggach in the lead role.

Oedipus Rex was, in every respect, dramatic from the very start, when the aged priest (Brendan O'Kelly) made the audience pity the plight of the Thebans. Each scene – the dreadful knowledge torturing the blind prophet Teiresias (Robert Fournier), the explosive reaction of Creon (Tristan Wicks) falsely accused by Oedipus, the unbearable realization by Jocasta (Nora Parker) of the truth, the revelations of the House Messenger (Rebecca Warmington), who described for the audience the death of Jocasta and self-blinding of Oedipus (acts which are conventionally left behind the scenes) – was so intense that it sent shivers down many spectators' spines. Genuine sorrow laced the voices of the chorus (Morgan McKinnon and Sarah Trick) as, on her awful discovery, Jocasta's face changed from joy to misery without her uttering a word, and when Oedipus made his last appearance blind and broken.

Iain Moggach had dreamt of playing Oedipus since 2004, when he saw a production of the tragedy in Cambridge, England. A highly-talented actor, Iain brilliantly portrayed Oedipus through his transformation from a man of power to a crippled wreck. The drama of his downfall was intensified by the contrast with Creon, who sympathetically but firmly resisted Oedipus' pleas to be sent into exile. Oedipus' decline moved many to tears, as he emerged from 'the palace covered in 'blood' (Iain later revealed that the drying paint glued his eyelids together, rendering him, in effect, temporarily blind), and was pulled away from his last support, his children (Judy and Tim Kennedy Klaassen) – a very poignant ending to the dramatic reading.

The College calls each of these performances a 'reading', since there is minimal use of props and costumes, and scripts can be referred to onstage if necessary. However, these particulars went unnoticed in this highly dynamic performance. 'Reading' also means 'interpretation'. There is no better way of experiencing Greek drama than watching it on stage, and coming to any one of the tragedies put on at Carleton is as educating as reading an entire book about it. Who would have thought that there could even be comedy in this most harrowing of tragedies? Yet Sophocles finds a place for all-important comic relief through the character of the Corinthian Messenger (Robert Watkins), only to be followed by the dreadful revelation of Oedipus' true identity, under torture, by the Theban Shepherd (Ben Cavell).



It is the director's interpretation of the play, the hard choices he has to make – both at the auditions and in selecting the parts of the text to be 'read' – and his guidance during the rehearsals that make these dramatic readings what they are: carefully balanced masterpieces of stagecraft which, on the one hand, reveal new dimensions of plays familiar to students of Greek, and, on the other hand, remain accessible and highly enjoyable for spectators without a background in Classics. This is what Josh Beer has been doing for ten years and will hopefully continue to do in future, though some would also like to see an Aeschylean tragedy.



Jack Healy
Professor Emeritus
Department of English
Carleton University
(an email to Josh Beer)

A production of *Oedipus Rex* puts one in contact with the brutal, unadorned truths of a human condition utterly at the mercy of forces outside our control, with an intimate knowledge of what makes us tick, using us against ourselves with an indifferent, almost casual, venom. Not music to the dance of time as Powell put it, but equations in the dance of Fate through and across the carcass of human pretension. I think the students who took part in this production really did a terrific job at getting deep into the sinews of the tragedy, managing a collective dive into the irrational underbelly of all those very Greek rational moves that Sophocles divides up between the main protagonists in the surface text. These are all young people, none of them professional actors, limited, by their years, in the amount of Classical knowledge they have, compared to yourself, with a lifetime of empathetic immersion in Sophocles and Company behind you. I can only assume that they have contracted part of the enthusiasm and integrity from your direction and from the sympathetic surround of the Humanities programme. David Gardner's particular sensitivity, it struck me, was also part of the nuance and discipline of the performance.

At times, I would just close my eyes and listen to the ironies unravel, to the quality of voice that the different actors brought to the so-compact, so intricately-choreographed script, measuring in my mind the weight of feeling and tone brought to the words. There is a terrible economy, an economy of horror and terror, to this play that even professional performances - dragged down by either gothic or Easter Island settings - often miss.

Your students, not least that magnificent, stomach-turning final chorus, touched the genuine heights and appalling depths of *Oedipus Rex*.

Someone (why not the Dean and the other Faculty admirers?) ought to take these performers out to a banquet of celebration. And the President ought to get an invited selection of Alumnae and the Board of Governors and perhaps the Humanities parents to witness a final (post examination, pre-graduation, during graduation?) performance at such a banquet celebration. Winning at basketball is very good for Carleton: so would be a grand performance of this play by these remarkable students.

Anyway, Josh, thanks for the tip-off and congratulations all around again.
Jack

Faculty Files

Many congratulations to our remarkable **Greg Fisher** on the publication of the two books below, one scholarly book and one novel.

Between Empires. Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity (Oxford, 2011) - now available.

The Iranian Conspiracy: A Novel (Campbell, Ca., 2011). Available via Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Abebooks.

When archaeologist Andrew Thorpe hears about the chance discovery of a new Latin inscription at a remote volcano in southern Syria, he is drawn into a web of intrigue rooted in one of the greatest mysteries of the ancient world. Andrew realises that he has stumbled across evidence for the location of the lost tomb of Iran's most famous emperor, Shapur the Great, and, after the sudden and violent death of a long-time colleague in Damascus, he becomes determined to uncover the secrets embedded in the inscription to prevent a sinister and shadowy Iranian nationalist group, the Sons of Cyrus, from reaching their goal. Together with help from Rachel Champion, a journalist who has had her own brush with the Sons of Cyrus, and Rachel's brother Jack, a British diplomat, Andrew embarks on a quest which takes him to some of the most secretive and spectacular archaeological sites of the Middle East. From the forgotten city of Madain Salih in Saudi Arabia to the rose-red Syrian city of Palmyra, and from abandoned Roman fortresses on the Euphrates to the ancient church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Andrew and Rachel battle unseen forces to prevent an international catastrophe which threatens to destroy the prospects for peace in the Middle East once and for all.

Shane Hawkins has stepped down as coordinator of GRS to take a well deserved sabbatical. Recently, the multi-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek and Rome* appeared, in which Shane wrote the entries on "The Greek Language" and the "Pronunciation of Ancient Greek". Fully sensible of early Greece being filled with the spirit of music, he has dusted down his Homeric kithara and can be heard producing mellifluous tones at various locations around Ottawa. Not neglecting his love of Latin poetry, he is also exploring the scatological underbelly of Catullus.

He is due to give a lecture on said topic in Halifax this month at a meeting of The Atlantic Classical Association. Who said that Classicists are priggish conservatives? See more on Beer below.

Elizabeth Klaassen, like a veritable Scipio Africanus, has leapt in to restore Rome's fortunes by becoming the new coordinator of GRS even as she is completing her commentary for Bryn Mawr Press of Silius Italicus' *Punica* Book 14. Commentaries on other books of this unduly neglected Latin epic poet are expected to be forthcoming from *illa femina fecunda*.

Susan Downie continues to wow her many students with her deep love and appreciation of ancient Greek history and archaeology. Following on from her highly successful sites course in Greece in 2010, she is organizing a further course in Greece on the Bronze Age for May 2012.

Finally, the Beer. **Josh Beer** formally retired in June after 45 years teaching GRS at Carleton. The celebrations, held consecutively in three different locations, lasted continuously for over 12 hours in honour of his favorite god, Dionysus. He was last seen and heard walking, bedecked with flowers, and bottle in hand, propped up on three legs, going past the Ottawa Police Station on Elgin St, and singing "Some say that death is a tragedy, but when it comes it's all over". Since it was 7.30 am and the sun was already up, he was scarcely going gently into the night. Many were genuinely surprised, however, when he appeared reincarnated in September with a new mask as an adjunct professor of The College of Humanities. Some were heard to cry "hasn't he gone yet?"

Events

Tuesday, October 18, 7:30 pm, Thinking about Kings, Christopher Smith, DT 2017

Wednesday, October 19, 10:00 am, Working with Fragments, Christopher Smith, PA 2A 46

Wednesday, October 19, 6 pm, New Light on the Etruscans, Christopher Smith, PA 303

Wednesday, November 9, 6 pm, Weapons of Warfare: The Equipment that Won an Empire, Leanne Bablitz, CAC lecture, PA 303

Tuesday, November 15, 8 pm, Greek play reading of *Antigone*, PA 303

In the next issue Trevor Hodge, Professor Emeritus, will write about what he has been doing during his retirement.

Tentative AIA Programme 2011-12

Date	Speaker	Title	Sponsors	Place
Tues Oct 18 @ 7:30 pm	C. Smith, Br. School, Rome	Thinking about Kings	Carleton, AIA, CIMS	Arts Lounge, 2017 Dunton Tower, CU
Wed Oct 19 @ 6:00 pm	C. Smith, Br. School, Rome	New Light on the Etruscans	Carleton, AIA, CIMS	303 Paterson, CU Reception
Tues Oct 25	G. Schauss, Wilfred Laurier	Recent Work at Miletos: The Spark That Ignited Western Thought	CIG, AIA	LAC Aud
Wed Nov 16	J. Delgado	Kamikaze: Discovering Kublai Khan's Lost Fleet	AIA	LAC Salon A
Tues Dec 13	R. Harris, Parks Canada	Topic: Canadian Arctic: Frobisher Expedition	AIA	LAC Aud
Wed Jan 18	S. Higgins	FYROM	AIA	SMD 224, U of O
Wed Feb 22	C. Epstein, Office of the President, Concordia	The Diniacopolous Collection in Montreal: Ancient Treasures and Modern Mysteries	AIA	SMD 224, U of O
Wed Mar 21				SMD 224, U of O
Tues Apr 17	P. McGovern	Uncorking the Past: the Quest for Wine, Beer and Extreme Fermented Beverages		TBA

Donations

This newsletter is circulated to all friends *gratis*. If anyone would like to make a voluntary donation, a Canadian tax receipt will be issued for all gifts of \$10 Canadian or more. (Please provide a postal address). Cheques should be made out to Carleton University, though you should clearly mark on your cheque that it is intended for FGRS, College of Humanities. Send to:

D.G. (Josh) Beer
Greek and Roman Studies
College of Humanities
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6