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ABSTRACT

The development of more than 325 short radio talks, designed to inform the general public, on the relevance and contemporaneity of classical civilization to our times, is discussed in this address. Materials are derived from a wide range of sources and include such writers as Cicero, Plautus, Horace, Ovid, Quintillian, Aeschylus, and Plutarch. Comment is made on how these materials can be used to improve student attitudes toward the study of Latin. (RL)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On a December Sunday in 1963, a few months after my arrival at Goucher, I was reading the editorial page of the Sunday Baltimore Sun, when I came across a rather disturbing item in the "Letters to the Editor" section. A local gentleman was making a very provocative statement to the effect that there was little of worth in Greek and Roman antiquity. His contention was that most of Classical civilization was a series of lewd rites in honor of capricious and barbaric divinities, and that it was only with the arrival and dissemination of Christianity that positive benefits began to emerge from ancient culture. You can well imagine the reaction that this letter elicited from your friend Natunewicz. I immediately sat down and wrote a long letter to the Sun, replying to the simplistic generalizations of the Sunday correspondent. Fortunately my letter came to the attention of Mr. Charles Ives, one of the senior editors, and himself the product of an education extensively grounded on the Classics. To make a long story short, the Morning Sun subsequently printed my entire letter and the Classics had their day in Baltimore.

Afterwards I also found out that the letter which had provoked my own was but the most recent in a series that had begun several months previously, when there was a vigorous debate over whether or not the Maryland Censor Board, the only one of its kind in the country, should be retained. It appears that virtually all the persons who like to write regularly to the Sun editors had expressed their thinking in print on this point as well. In the process of the whole epistolary debate, reference had been made to Aristophanes and other ancient writers whose works their contemporaries had not considered it necessary to censor because of a few obscenities. It was precisely this observation that had provoked the general condemnation of all Greek and Roman antiquity by the gentleman to whose letter I had replied.

As far as I know, the controversy may still be raging. My own letter was eventually answered, again on the pages of the Sun, by almost the entire crew that had previously been conducting the censorial argument. I am happy to report that all the replies were in my own favor except for that of my immediate provocateur and a

lady neighbor of his who wrote me with her poison pen. I was, she said, wrong to criticize the gentleman for picking on the Classics, because he was really a very educated person who had not learned Greek and Latin literature, as I had suggested in the Sun, from watching Steve Reeves and the other great epic actors in Cinecitta' productions. At all events this was where my own Sun correspondence on the subject came to a halt.

The story, however, does not end here. About a month after I had written to the Sun, I received a letter from Mr. David Samson, the owner and manager of the Charles County Broadcasting Company in southern Maryland. Mr. Samson's company operates WSMD, a commercial AM and FM radio station in the county seat LaPlata. Mr. Samson wrote that he was very much interested in my printed statements defending the Classics. So much so that he asked me to do three five-minute radio programs a week on the relevance of the ancient Classics to contemporary life, as a part of the station's public service broadcasting. Being the exhibitionist that I am, I took Mr. Samson up and, from the time that the programs started coming on the air in March of 1969, we have already done over 340. It has been a very pleasant and rewarding arrangement. For a modest weekly fee, Mr. Samson gets three five-minute tapes recorded in the Sunday morning quiet of my office at Goucher, which he plays twice, at 11:55 a.m. and 5:55 p.m., just before the noon and six o'clock news on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The intellectual and cultural content of the tapes, even though they are done in a popularizing vein, looks good in the description of programming submitted to the Federal Communications Commission when the times comes to renew the station's broadcasting license. For my own part I thoroughly enjoy having the opportunity to editorialize three times a week on any and every subject I wish, provided I can relate it to some aspect of Classical antiquity. In my professional bibliography each broadcast is a separate item and I am certain that it reaches a far greater public than the more scholarly projects on which I am currently engaged. For I suspect that I have a considerably larger radio audience in the southern Maryland, Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia areas than in the collective body of scholars the world over

who will be interested in the complete critical text of a ninth-century Latin chronicle that I have been commissioned to do for the Corpus Christianorum Series. Further benefits accrue from the program in the fact that I already have enough basic material to start teaching a college-level course on the contemporary relevance of the ancient Classics. Finally, Mr. Samson and I have been copywrighting my scripts and eventually we shall try to syndicate our five-minute segments. If we are successful, the original scripts will have to be worked over so as to provide brief spaces for commercials at the beginning and end, as well as the middle, of each script. For the present, however, our goals are pretty modest and we don't expect that our program, which is demurely entitled Classical Perspectives, will suddenly blossom out into Classical philology's answer to Eric Sevareid, Bob and Ray, Al Capp, and Billy Graham put together. Suffice it to say that right now Mr. Samson feels the program is performing an educational and cultural service for a rapidly growing region, and, as far as I personally am concerned, I feel that the four or so hours spent each week in choosing materials, typing scripts, and preparing tapes, is a healthy and broadening adjunct to my other professional activities in Classics.

As far as the source materials for these programs are concerned, they are clearly many and varied. Though the 340-odd programs we have already done, if spliced together into a single tape, would give us about a day and a third of continuous chatter about the contemporary relevance of the Classics, we have not even begun to scratch the surface of the great wealth of topics. The programs I have presented so far are just on the most obvious subjects. For these I have relied on texts of ancient authors, particularly biographers, historians, satirists, dramatic poets, and writers of fables. Anthologies of ancient quotations are extremely helpful, because they contain many fragments not otherwise conveniently found. Dictionaries of antiquities and the usual texts dealing with daily life in ancient Rome and Greece have been a valuable storehouse of information. Many of my ideas have come precisely at the time that I was working with particular course materials for specific classes. Thus, during the Goucher January Term, when I taught a course on Alexander the Great, I concurrently

worked up a series of eleven programs on Alexander, taking my texts from Arrian, Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus, and Curtius Rufus. In my first broadcast I took as the theme of the entire series Cicero's remarks in the Pro Archia, that both inspiration and edification are to be drawn from literature, and I stressed the fact that ancient literature in particular has much to offer us in this regard. From Cicero also came what I consider one of my better shows, the subject of which is how to win an election. Using the famous letter written to Quintus Cicero when the brother was running for the consulship, I demonstrated that most of the politicians of today, be they the Republicans with their stale and unimaginative Madison Avenue techniques, or the Democrats with their long-winded hypocrisy, studied charisma and blatant ethnic and religious exploitation, are rank amateurs and have never come close to matching the electioneering know-how of the shrewd and adroit old Romans. Other topics treated by Cicero which I have updated, include the nature of true courage, the duties of a public official, dishonesty in business, concern about letting the place of one's birth fall into neglect or decay, the evils of perfect consistency, and some ways of coping with piracy, the last of which can be tied in very nicely with modern air-hijacking.

From among the other old Romans, Plautus gave me a good topic in the famous song of Philolaches at the beginning of the Mostellaria where the young man compares the education of a child by its parents to the careful building of a fine home. Vergil too provides many ideas. The quotation about the descent to Avernus' being easy opens up the whole theme of how simple it is to get into trouble, yet how unsimple to extract one's self from it. The weather lore of farmers, as described in the Georgics, leads nicely into contemporary weather prediction, which is about equally reliable. Aeneas' odyssey and tribulations point to the general lot of all refugees and displaced persons, the difficulties they encounter in rebuilding their lives in new lands. The first Eclogue demonstrates that in war and political bickerings it is the innocent common man that suffers the most, like the poor, harrassed Vietnamese peasant in our own time. The impressive figure of the authoritative statesman controlling

the mob in the splendid simile of Aeneid I graphically points up the leadership deficiency of our own country in these times of unrest.

In the works of the other great Augustan, Horace, true-to-life situations abound passim. One Ode speaks of the cruelty of Venus, who time and again makes basically incompatible persons fall in love with each other. In the sixth Roman Ode, Horace utters the complaint common to every generation, namely, that society is going to pot. In one of the Satires he gives the perfect portrayal of the typical bore; in another, while describing his trip to Brindisi, he brings to mind the adventures of all of us who have travelled recently on the New Haven or Long Island Railroads. Elsewhere he cautions us that the best gifts are not always purchased in fancy stores, tells how disadvantageous it may be to have political connections, and gives a lesson on how the wealthy frequently exploit the poor for their own entertainment.

A later poet of the Augustan period, Ovid, moralizes on the hard and stony nature of men; tells you that, if you are looking for a boy friend, you must go "where the boys are"; teaches a lesson about too much absorption in one's own image; dwells on the rewards of genuine hospitality; analyzes the ingredients of feminine charm; proves that excessive suspicion is dangerous; warns against being a bad loser; makes a case for vegetarianism and nature foods; gives instructions on how to fall out of love; and cautions against excessive hair grooming. On the abortion question Ovid is non-committal: in the same poem in which he decries abortion as an unnatural and barbarian act, he allows to a lady friend that just one might not be too bad. In the little poem entitled the Nux, Ovid gives a good conservation lesson by showing how everything beautiful and productive is destroyed by man. In the Metamorphoses, as Herman Fränkel has pointed out, a sub-theme of the entire poem is lack of communication among human beings. In the Heroides Ovid's ladies lament the evils of separation in wartime.

When we move into the Silver Age, Juvenal is magnificently relevant in all his satiric poems, as he discusses the destructive and wasteful ambitions of the military, homosexuals and transvestites, the increasing indigence of the poor and the growing

wealth of the rich, urban blight with its uncontrolled street crime, and strident women's liberation types. Among the letter-writers the younger Pliny is most instructive as he describes how much his famous uncle valued time and, by implication, shows the tragedy of wasting time. Another letter, this one about his uncle's on-the-spot investigation of the eruption of Vesuvius, makes the point that, in the furtherance of knowledge, great personal risks must frequently be taken. The Younger Pliny likewise reinforces the notion that education is worth every cent we expend on it, whether through public taxes or private philanthropy. Elsewhere he discourses on the essential stupidity of being a horse-race enthusiast, and betting on the nags either at the track or off; he implies too that there is such a thing as responsible match-making and it needn't be done, as some individuals are trying to do in our time, by means of the computer. In his correspondence with Trajan he himself is instructed to apply due process to even the most far-our minority groups.

The Elder Pliny as well, through passages found in his thirty-seven books of Natural History, is capable of inspiring many a minisermon on such topics as the vices of the medical profession, the satisfaction to be drawn from cultivating a vegetable garden, and the destruction wrought in terms of both human life and natural ecology by reckless and irresponsible practices in the mining industry. In the seventh book especially, which is devoted to man, his strengths and follies, Pliny, through his interesting, if somewhat exaggerated examples of phenomenal human memory, vision, and physical power, evokes all kinds of nice comparisons with such modern phenomena as the computer memory bank, radar, sonar, female Olympians, and Russian weight lifters.

Even though the Elder Pliny is somewhat of a conservative prude, his strictures on all the efforts made to remove offending odors from the human nose and huge fortunes spent on perfumes whose benefits immediately vanish into thin air, are well taken and a timely rebuke to our overcosmeticized society.

Other Silver Age Latin writers give similar insights into what is the proper conduct for man. The younger Seneca in one Moral Epistle discusses both the good and

bad aspects of social drinking and, in another, makes it clear that no genealogy is flawless, that the criterion of nobility of birth is an empty one, and that true class can be achieved, regardless of social pedigree, through a combination of innate talent and industrious application to learning. The epigrammatist Martial impresses upon us the idea that it is better to possess less, but possess completely, and not be, as many persons are in our own times, a slave to installment buying. In other poems Martial decries changing the name one had at birth for the purpose of self-promotion; he gives many examples of how something good received from another can be corrupted by its new possessor; he challenges people either to act in accordance with their boasts and promises or shut up; he mocks his hosts who have elegant floral displays and fancy dishes, but meagre and mediocre food and wine. Among Seneca's contemporaries the Epic Poet Lucan indicts all widespread corruption in business, politics, and the military when he remarks that the sin shared by many is never avenged; indeed we may all ponder this point as we await further developments in the case of Lieutenant Calley. Another poet, Statius, in one of the Silvae, shows how adopted children can be loved just as much as natural children.

The best textbook ever written on pedagogy came from the hand of a first-century Roman, Quintilian, who, in his Institutes of Oratory, warned, among other things, that the first impressions acquired by children, whether for good or bad, are the most lasting; and that teachers must never make children begin hating their studies at a time when they are yet incapable of loving them, a situation, incidentally, that has very often occurred in first and second-year Latin courses. In other passages Quintilian criticized those who think they know everything about a discipline when they have scarcely mastered its rudiments, much like the student who has supposedly learned all the fine points of analyzing the great literature of Greece and Rome in his advanced placement courses at school, but cannot give a decent translation or syntactical analysis of a single line of Latin. Challenging the dilletantes in his society, Quintilian also maintained that we must form our minds by reading deeply rather than widely. On the topic of education there is likewise an interesting

passage early among the remaining fragments of Petronius, where the teacher Agamemnon bewails what is happening to the school system and seeks to explain the causes and effects of its degeneration.

If we turn to the historians, we learn from Livy's famous parable in Book II about the limbs' revolt from the belly, that every society has a need for an establishment. Modern-day conservatives, looking for the perfect model, might well turn to Livy's Coriolanus. The rape of Lucretia teaches us that it is dangerous to boast about anything that you possess, even your wife. Furthermore, Lucretia's unnecessary suicide might be used as an example to show that contemporary counselling is right in claiming that violated virginity or the fear of an unwanted pregnancy need not be the end of the world. From Livy too we can actually cite the instance of a person who literally gave his right hand for something. A century later than Livy Tacitus gave us just as much food for thought. Public administrators in many ways would do well to imitate Agricola. Itinerant chief executives should recall the troubles at Rome during Tiberius' prolonged absence and spend less time at their Hyannisports and San Clementes and more at their Washington desks. The great fire at Rome was a splendid example of mass clearance for the sake of urban renewal, yet there were many Romans then, as displaced city-dwellers now, who, in the process of being removed from minimal, yet adequate housing, have lost much more than they have gained in their updated slums Among the lesser narrators of historical events, Sallust, in the Catiline quite appropriately records Caesar's words to the effect that the public servant can never lose his temper.

Up till now we have been discussing Latin literature. But there are just as many, if not more, pertinent materials that can be culled from the authors of ancient Greece. Thucydides has splendid passages on capital punishment, on the perversion of traditional values and concepts in the heat of revolutionary fervor, on the political hindsight of the masses (today we might also add the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) and the ways in which it plagues national leaders. The little city-state of Egesta in Sicily, which deceived Athens into making her disastrous expe-

dition, is the Saigon of an earlier millenium. In the pages of Herodotus we see how Themistocles, by appropriating the income from the silver mines at Laureium to build up the Athenian navy, shows that while defense spending is an evil, it is a very necessary evil. The efficiency of the Persian pony express was a fine starting point for one of my programs during the recent post office strike.

Then too, while I was teaching my ancient drama course last fall, many program ideas came to mind. Kilissa, in Aeschylus' Libation Bearers, shows that a person with no blood relationship often has more love for a child than the natural parent. Prometheus, in one common interpretation, is the intellectual in revolution against the repressive clod. Pelasgus, in the Suppliants, demonstrates that even authorities in high places should consult with the people or their representatives on major matters affecting everyone's welfare. The frightened ladies of the Seven against Thebes remind us of the evil effects of unrestrained panic even in situations other than besieged cities. The jury system, in the Eumenides, is held up as the ideal vehicle for the dispensation of justice; most of us will still agree with this viewpoint, despite our disgust with aspects of recent show trials. For, one of the extreme alternatives to such a system would be the tyranny of Zeus, analyzed in such detail during the agony of the crucified Prometheus. From the plays of Sophocles we may come to such conclusions as that there is frequently a higher morality than the law of the state, that the second-best position is the role that has all the fun and none of the headaches, that, like Deianira, some wives nobly and quietly endure their husbands' marital infidelities; that other wives, like Tecmessa, tender, devoted, and long-suffering, have to put up with insensitive, overbearing, and egotistical brutes like Ajax while the latter are living up to their standards of the heroic arete, machismo, call it what one will. Deianira's dialogue with Lichas warns that just one lie will create credibility gaps in the future. In the same play, the Trachiniae, we see the tragedy of an innocent child caught in the conflict between his parents and compelled to make a choice. But of all the three great tragedians, Euripides is the richest in "contemporary" notions, whether he is ex-

pounding on the persecution and unhappy lot of the Athenian woman, or stating the necessity of not concealing one's troubles from true friends, or demonstrating that excessive prudery is not only sick, but destructive of the one who practices it. Euripides' Ion, in the play of the same name, makes the point that life in religious service can be very rewarding. In another passage the playwright states that flesh without mind or brains is like an ornamental stone statue, a remark that promoters and devotees of today's beauty contests might do well to ponder. Jason, as Professor Blaicklock has indicated, is the typical, insecure, middle-aged man of any generation. Any nurse who has spent long, frustrating hours with difficult patients will echo laments of Phaedra's elderly nurse, who also claims that the happiest people are those who don't get too deeply involved in others' troubles but maintain a constant personal detachment. Finally, among the comic writers, Aristophanes is not only a poet speaking out on the generation gap or against the evils of war and the abused power of the military-industrial-political complex. In the Ecclesiazusae he sees the failings as well as the benefits of women's liberation carried to the extreme; in the Wasps he shows how any court system can become corrupt; in the Acharnians, by his sympathetic depiction of the plight of the elderly veterans of Marathon, he underscores the frequently unjust abuse that the slick younger generations like to heap upon those who, in earlier years, have fought and endured many sacrifices in order to preserve everyone's liberty. In the Birds Aristophanes gently chides a system of religion which makes heavy drains on the devote's pocketbook in the matter of building expensive temples, supporting high-living priests, and shelling out dearly for every liturgical service.

Moving on from the dramatists and historians, we shall find other Greek authors whose works are thoroughly adaptable for discussion in terms of modern situations. Any one of Theophrastus' characters can be paralleled today. The lives composed by Plutarch or Diogenes Laertius, or the Fables of Aesop are inexhaustible mines of sermonettes. Lucian's fictional story of the moon explorers was a very pertinent program topic in July of 1969 when Apollo 11 was setting down on the lunar surface.

And I could go on and on through the entire corpus of Greek and Latin literature even in the genres not widely read. I once did a six-program series on the figures of speech and diction described in ancient rhetorical works; another series, in five parts, on poetic meters; still another, in seven installments, on the Latin and Greek derivations of contemporary medical terms. Very appropriate indeed, given the American public's current mania about doctor and nurse TV programs. I am now working on a very extensive series dealing with legal terminology of Latin origin. I have talked about the contributions of the great men of antiquity after whom sections of the lunar surface are named. I did a Latin-Greek analysis of the vocabulary of the space age. Another program dealt with the Classical origin of most of the names of cities, towns, and villages in New York State. I have discussed ancient and modern stoics, epicureans, skeptics, cynics, and eclectics. I have described the origins for the terms Oedipus and Electra complex. When I recently got fed up with persons complaining about the repression of our government and our laws, I did some programs on the Twelve Tables and discipline in the Roman army, using the early books of Livy and Polybius VI respectively. When Mrs. Natunewicz and I were buying a house in Baltimore last year, I was reminded of the instructions Cato gives on how to purchase real estate. In dealings with various "hackers" for minor maintenance jobs around the house, I have more than once recalled the words of Vitruvius to the effect that, rather than entrust my hard-earned money to a so-called "professional" who will just mess around with my property, I am better off buying a handbook and experimenting myself. To be sure, you know that at Goucher do-it-yourself courses are gaining national prominence. For my January Term next year, I am even considering a course on do-it-yourself literature in Roman antiquity and entitling it "The Practical Romans."

Then too, I have done a great number of programs using sources from medieval Latin literature, and, being quite fond of hagiography, I occasionally, for the appropriate feast days, like to bring in accounts of Christian saints like Benedict Patrick, Felicity and Perpetua, Blaise, and Thomas Aquinas. This, in a way, balances

my Halloween specials on the Harpies, Gorgons, and Furies. In still other programs I relate traditional Christian holidays and their accompanying rituals to Greek and Roman observances from which many of the rites are directly derived. It has been fun to compare ancient museums with modern museums; our own parades with Roman triumphs; the cocktail party where inane chatter takes place and much liquor is consumed on an empty stomach, to the ancient symposium, held after the main courses had been served, and at which intelligent conversation was stimulated by well-regulated drinking. During the census last year I talked of the Roman way of taking the population count. I spoke too of the functions of Roman censors as contrasted with the tasks of those three ladies in Maryland who, with what my colleague, Mrs. Sarbanes, calls the help of a single eye, decide the movies that are to be seen in the state. On other occasions I have championed the establishment of an enlightened ostracism for our own day, I have drawn parallels between ancient benevolent societies and contemporary lodges. Religious hierarchies, Pyrrhic victories, city planning, commercial monopolies, and the problems of the aged were just as much a part of daily life in antiquity as they are now. Political pollsters and private and governmental public opinion samplings are no better guides to the future than augurs, Pythian priestesses, haruspices, and Cumaean Sibyls. One can rig a favorable outcome for a political election today by stuffing ward leaders with patronage jobs to be dispensed, just as easily as one could stuff the sacred chickens in ancient Rome to obtain encouraging omens. The birds we watch in our updated practice of augury are those that carry American ping-pong teams to Communist China or Russian diplomates to Cairo. In sum, the ancient Greeks and Romans were no better off or different than we in the problems of life they faced; if anything, they had a clearer insight into them and grappled with them more forcefully and honestly. As I said at the start of this talk, the material is there and it certainly adds a splendid dimension to the regular teaching of the ancient languages, literatures, and civilizations.