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# Paideia in America: Ragged Dick, George Babbitt, and the Problem of a Modern Classical Education

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*We are sure that at the present rate, Greek wisdom will be almost unknown to the general public within two decades.*

—Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath,  
*Who Killed Homer?* (2001)<sup>1</sup>

I.

IN SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet*, the prince's disappearance into the gloom escorted by his father's ghost convinced the night watchman that something was rotten in Denmark. And, indeed, it was. But for every Marcellus whose vision is encouraged by the sound and sight of Hamlet's dead father, there are as many more who are brave enough to eschew the evidence of their senses. This boldness is not limited to religious folk: there are as many visionaries of false prophecy as there are scolds and cranks. Some prophets—the simpler ones—compensate for the deficiency of their insight with an excess of busy energy. The more narcissistic ones console themselves by excusing their failures of persuasion on the basis of Cassandra's example. Apollo afflicted Cassandra by depriving her prophecies of the power to persuade; the god meant to punish her for refusing to share his bed. Modern narcissistic prophets actually believe they are similarly afflicted: some cosmic principle—the ineluctable law that history is doomed to repeat itself or the equally ineluctable consequence of Original Sin—makes the common man *congenitally* incapable of registering a prophetic warning. The prophet is consoled knowing that *by design* he is meant to be unheard. For such a man, the truest

solace and surest proof of his calling lie in being unheeded; this attitude transforms his loneliness into a manly virtue.

The example of old men preaching the end of things is so common that it has aged into cliché. Hesiod might be the Western canon's earliest archetype of the voluble crank whose disappointments in life fuel the conviction that the world is going to pot. If the dating is correct, he might be older than Jeremiah. The survival of his *Works and Days* and the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations proves, at least, that the sentiment is ancient. And the fable of Chicken Little might be even older. Pessimistic religion—millenarian Christianity comes to mind—is the heir of Hesiod's gloomy vision. In the hands of an optimistic secularism, the tale of Chicken Little is given a modern twist: instead of being eaten alive by Foxy Loxy, she is saved at the last moment by his unmasking. This happy version of the fable serves the didactic purpose of teaching "courage" to young children; less benignly, it warns against the opportunism of the conservative jeremiad.

At the close of America's twentieth century, the conservative jeremiad flourishes, both as an art and, thanks to Guglielmo Marconi and a lot of money, as a science—and the children of Hesiod and Jeremiah thrive as never before. If these prophetic moralists are to be believed, modern Western culture is, to quote from *Hamlet* again, "an unweeded garden / That grows to seed." In spite of its material successes—or, perhaps, because of them—it is a deeply flawed development: "Things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely." And so the unhappy version of Chicken Little, the one in which she is eaten by the fox, seems more familiar despite the popularity of Walt Disney. The intellectual history of the West proves the immutability of the belief that the clock spring of culture is winding down. In this view, the Enlightenment of Europe and America represent merely a momentary arrest of the downward spiral. Certainly the liberation of Western culture in the nineteenth century and the violent wars of the twentieth, abetted by technology and modernity's organizational know-how, did not help matters.

And if any equivocating Jeremiah survived the combined shocks of Charles Darwin, universal suffrage, trade unionism, and the rise of the New Deal, his equivocation was finally put to death by the *laissez-faire* morality of late-twentieth-century liberalism. The spectacle of free market economics, mass consumerism, and the emancipation of the individual convinced even the most sanguine Jeremiah that the world was, for sure, going to hell.

Not even the collapse of the Soviet empire was enough to dislodge this conviction. The twentieth century ended for America on 31 December, 1991, following the demise of the Soviet Union: on that date the last government functionary closed up shop and went home. A few years later, the world survived the advent of the second Christian millennium, but this piece of good news proves only that the dating convention is arbitrary and wrong. Just as America's twentieth century ended before the conventional calendar date, so the new millennium has not yet arrived—the world's continuing existence proves it. Faced with the erosion of Western hegemony over the rest of the world, today's prophetic conservative carries on Hesiod's and Jeremiah's ancient project. Scanning the expanse of modern Western culture, pessimism condemns our culture and yearns nostalgically for an imagined past. Today, two decades into the emerging century, we in America and the West are to believe that something is rotten here.

And, indeed, it is.

2.

ONCE UPON A TIME, every educated boy was made to learn some Greek and Latin. Today none of them learn any Greek and only a bare few learn any Latin. Who can say when this pernicious decline began? Near the end of the nineteenth century, American educators felt a need to offer the rudiments of a classical education to those "bound by their circumstances to the active and laborious employments of farming, of the mechanic arts, of business, of housewifery,

and of all the various handicrafts by which material subsistence is procured." America at this time was bustling; but if these laboring souls could not leave the farm or workshop for a high school or college education, their boys and girls could. America at this time was hopeful: if the parents of these children were ignorant of the elements of Greek or Latin, they at least could "keep up a somewhat intelligent sympathy with the young folks of their homes" by reading a "Greek Course in English" prepared specially for them. And, if nothing else, America was pragmatic: by giving enterprising parents a means of achieving some parity with their children's knowledge of the ancient classics, America's educators bestowed a means by which parents could strengthen their children's respect "with the accompanying continued and enhanced ability to influence them for their good." But even by 1882, this moral purpose had begun to slip. The "new education" of the late 1880s lauded science above the ancient classics; long before the rise of late-twentieth-century liberalism it was already fashionable to "ridicule the idea of devoting so much time in our schools and colleges to the study of dead Greek and Latin."<sup>2</sup>

In 1890, 203,000 students were enrolled in America's public high schools. Just over half of these students enrolled in a foreign language. Seventy percent of the foreign language enrollments (or 35% of the total high school enrollment) were in Latin and the remainder in German and French.<sup>3</sup> By 1905, the number of public high school students had tripled. Ninety percent of them were enrolled in a foreign language; of these, just over 60% (representing 56% of the total high school enrollment) were enrolled in Latin. By 1928, the high school enrollment had exploded to over three million. As a proportion of total foreign language enrollments, 1905 was Latin's high water mark; by 1928, Latin's share had declined to 47% of foreign language enrollments and 22% of the total high school enrollment. Within six years, the number of high school enrollments increased by 70%, to almost six million. At this time, Latin enrollments peaked in absolute

terms, with 899,000 enrollments, representing 45% of all foreign language enrollments and just 16% of the total public high school enrollment. By 1948, Latin enrollments had plunged to 429,000; its share of the total public high school enrollment sank to 7.9%. Between 1934 and 1962, the public high school enrollment grew to almost ten million students. While the total school enrollment doubled over this time, Latin enrollments as a percentage of the total enrollment declined slightly, to 7.1%.<sup>4</sup>

These are the figures for Latin only; if the data are correct, secondary school Greek went truant even before 1890. Hanson and Heath predict that “sometime in the next few decades” the “formal study” of Greek and Latin will go extinct.<sup>5</sup> Following in the train of Allan Bloom’s 1987 sensation, *The Closing of the American Mind*, they charge curricular reform, the institutionalization of education, careerism, counterculturalism, multiculturalism, French critical theory, and strangest of all, “postmodernism”—in a word, things born from “the catastrophe of the 1960s”—with felonious indifference to the values of Western culture and their classical roots. Ignoring the loss of Greek instruction before 1890 and glossing over the collapse of Latin enrollments between 1890 and 1962, they pin responsibility for the disparagement of the West’s classical identity on the university of the past thirty years.<sup>6</sup> They do not mean merely to lament the “demise of classical education.” Being Classics professors themselves, they do not mean to be so parochial. Their purpose is, instead, more grave. With their *Who Killed Homer?*, they hold the late-twentieth-century academy responsible for spending the next generation’s classical inheritance. By failing to preserve the Greeks’ “hard and peculiar way of looking at the world,” the academy has failed to arm the men and women of twenty-first century America with an intellectual and moral appreciation of the classical ideals that decisively shape Western civilization.<sup>7</sup> If this is true, something, indeed, must be rotten in Denmark. Hanson and Heath are too careful,

however, to liken themselves to Cassandra, and perhaps it is just as well they do not claim to be Marcellus.

Hanson and Heath refer to the full range of these ideals, the “*core values* of classical Greece,” as “Greek wisdom.”<sup>8</sup> Though we think we know what they mean by “core values,” considering how much trouble the notion of “wisdom” gave the Greeks themselves, the term “Greek wisdom” seems an unhappy one. And yet, their use of the term is deeply ironic. For if we ask today, as the Sophists did then, what makes σοφία (*sophia*) different than γνῶσις (*gnosis*), ἐπιστήμη (*episteme*) or τέχνη (*techne*), we will fare no better now, despite the advances of millennia, than they did then. Only an ignorant person can genuinely doubt the value of the classical content of Western civilization; anyone else who professes skepticism on this point is fatuous, up to no good or just mean-spirited. If classical learning is in danger of being forgotten, it is well that classicists should sound the alarm, if not lead the charge. But if we are to wage battle, surely we should know who the enemy is and how he thinks; and, as recent events have reminded us, surely we should have a strategy realistically calculated to succeed. It matters a great deal whether the absence of secondary school Greek after 1890 and the decline of Latin instruction between 1890 and 1962 is a harbinger of the unmooring of Western civilization or whether, as Hanson and Heath argue, we need be concerned only with the “catastrophe of the 1960s.”

Can anyone doubt that Greek’s and Latin’s command of our educators’ attention and, more generally, the appreciation of a classical education, were depreciated by the rising utilitarianism of post-colonial America? Not even Hanson and Heath eschew all the evidence of their senses. They accept that as early as 1800, leading men of the colonial and post-colonial establishment—such practical men as Thomas Paine, Benjamin Rush, and Noah Webster—questioned the value of the classical curriculum.<sup>9</sup> And surely it is reasonable to surmise that the Civil War’s emancipation of our politics and social and economic productive forces and the Spanish-

American War's liberation of our worldly ambitions played some important part in the decline of the classical curriculum. If the carnival spirit of the 1960s and its aftermath and the baneful influence of Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger contributed to the death of the "formal study" of Greek and Latin, how culpable are Adam Smith, Henry Ford and the *laissez-faire* capitalism of the preceding seventy years? Hanson and Heath attempt to evoke a tragic feeling for Latin in the 1960s—"lonely *amo, amas, amat* in the carrel"—but express no tragic sense for the earlier disappearance of *λύω, λύεις, λύει*.<sup>10</sup> If, as they say, the "liberal ideology" of the modern university "helped to ruin Classics in its eleventh hour," shouldn't we ask what—and who—brought Classics *to* this late hour?<sup>11</sup>

## 3.

HARD MEN do not speak in abstraction or resort to soothing euphemism when naming the perpetrator of a vicious crime. They do not speak of "causes" or "conditions"; instead, they name names. Judging is terrible work, and few things wear on a man's soul like the terrible work of convicting men of great wrongs. A man's ability to do this work with a peaceful conscience is why we say he is hard. Those who convict modern liberalism of murdering Homer think of themselves as hard and clear-sighted men. Of course, ideology and "isms" do not kill culture, individuals do. Hanson and Heath embrace this truism so tightly they make it a centerpiece of their indictment. The "present generation of classicists," they say, is "culpable and thus must be cited and condemned."<sup>12</sup> Among the modern classicist's manifold faults, the chief of them is his failure "to think and act like Greeks." The trouble is, as Hanson and Heath do not tell us what, on the cusp of the twenty-first century, "Greek wisdom" ought to mean, so they do not specify what kind of Greek our modern classicist should be emulating. *Who Killed Homer?* is written for a mass audience. One general reader might wonder whether

Hanson and Heath want the modern classicist to act and think like a fifth-century Spartan. Another reader, of a different political and moral temperament, will wonder whether they mean the classicist should act and think like one of Socrates' jurors. If one of the Homeric heroes is preferred, should it be loutish and conservative Telamonian Ajax or resourceful, deceiving Odysseus?

Not every wrong has a remedy, and not every criminal is caught. There is no perfect crime, but surely pinning the blame on a subordinate counts for a lot. Blaming the "present generation" of classicists for the demise of classical education over the past century and a half is like singling out a junior associate for his firm's failure. If the late-twentieth-century academy seems to have forgotten Homer, it is because generations of Americans between 1850 and 1962 decided that Homer no longer mattered. Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick certainly has no time for him—he has a fortune to make. And as for George F. Babbitt, a Boosters' Club meeting makes more sense than the glories of Greece. His ethic goes farther to explain the demise of classical education than the insidious infiltrations of French theory. *Babbitt* is set in 1920. His children, Verona and Ted, are more like him and each other than he or they dare imagine, and not the least of it is their shared indifference to the classical roots of everything they hold dear. He learned his values at his parents' knees and his children learned theirs at his. Although Verona recently matriculated from Bryn Mawr, already she has forgotten not only her professors' Greek scholarship but just about everything else as well. It's a millionaire husband she wants, and neither she nor her father can imagine what ancient learning has to do with it. If Ted, a student at East Side High School, is thinking about anything, it's the girl next door. His father isn't pleased that he failed his Latin examinations, but he isn't too concerned: the boy is good with motors and there's always law. The metaphor is overworked but it is nonetheless true: the modern university's boredom with classical Greece did not spring into be-



ing fully formed in the “catastrophe of the 1960s,” as if this attitude were some kind of deformed Athena blooming from Zeus’s Olympian forehead. Adam Smith’s invisible hand supplies a more apt metaphor: it reached out of the twentieth-century cash box and pushed Homer aside.

Ragged Dick and George Babbitt know many things, but imbuing their children with the values of the ancient Greeks is not one of them. *Their* parents never taught them. When they think of a marketplace, it’s not the agora they have in mind. Who, then, shall supply their deficiency? The ethic of Ragged Dick and George Babbitt let classical learning slip over the course of a hundred years before 1962 and, according to Hanson and Heath, the present generation of classicists let it slip during the thirty years since. What, then, might the legacy of the ancient Greeks mean for a twenty-first century American? And which of them should we attempt to follow in thought and deed?

Closely related to these questions, there is the problem of *who* is to propose the answers, *who* should put them into effect, and *how* shall they do it? To suggest that Ragged Dick and George Babbitt must change their priorities, that society must reform its values, gets to the bottom of the problem, but does so at the cost of utopianism. By the mid-nineteenth century, if not before, the civic establishment of parents and elders—the community of role-modeling adult men and women beyond the university’s walls—abdicated its role in the classical education of young adults. The establishment embraced the new role of promoting education as the means to a vocational end: in an increasingly competitive, closed world, an American education was redesigned to ensure a *good job*. Of course, if we are collectively responsible, then none of us is individually responsible.

A severer solution is to embarrass the “present generation of Classicists” in hopes of motivating them to amend their ways or, if that is not possible, to convince tomorrow’s generation of classicists to avoid repeating the present generation’s shame. This has the merit of delivering a psychological

appeasement: it is *satisfying* to expose miscreants and, what is more, in Babbitt's market economy, iconoclasm pays. But the merit of this solution is purchased at the cost of futility. Perhaps only a professional educator can really believe that "In a secular society where commerce is king and where the fine arts have never been deeply rooted, it is up to professional educators to provide the sustaining material of culture."<sup>13</sup> This will not do. Unless a proposal for reforming classical education includes a suggestion of how one might get Ragged Dick and Babbitt to reconsider their priorities, it is doomed to fail. There is no more powerful instrument of change than a recentering of social values, but for an honest man there is no psychological satisfaction in expecting George Babbitt to change his ways.

## 4.

THE ANCIENT GREEKS had a word, which, if it is not susceptible of precise definition in the modern world, at least avoids the common misfortune attaching to a word like "wisdom." Liddell and Scott defines *παιδεία*, *paideia*, as "the rearing of a child, training and teaching, education" and as the results of these achievements—culture and learning. A great philologist and classicist of the first half of the twentieth century took the noun for the title of his life's great work. In his magisterial study of Greek culture, Werner Jaeger attempted to explain the historical and intellectual processes—*paideia*—by which the ancient Greeks "constructed their ideal of human personality," the processes that shaped the Greek character.<sup>14</sup> Writing in 1933, he observed that so far as he could determine, no one had ever attempted to penetrate the "unique educational genius" of the ancient Greeks by documenting the interaction of these historical and intellectual processes. Given the depth of classical learning in the West up to this time, this seems astonishing. It is also interesting that as early as 1933 a German classicist could think, as Professor Jaeger did, that such a book might

be recommended to “all who seek to rediscover the approach to Greece during our present struggles to maintain our millennial civilization.”<sup>15</sup> Today, across the divide of a new millennium, this sounds more urgent, if not more promising, than ever before. Having elucidated the secrets of Greek *paideia*, Jaeger sought to use his newfound knowledge to lay the foundations for a “third humanism” for the ages. The first rebirth of humanism after Greek *paideia* itself was the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century. The second humanism flowered in the rebirth of German culture following Napoleon’s defeat in the early nineteenth century. Towards the end of the Weimar Republic in the 1930s, Jaeger advocated for a renewal of the covenant between individual and State by means of a redevotion to and rediscovered appreciation for classical ideals. He imagined the possibility of a Third Humanism arising Phoenix-like from disturbed German soil.

Here there is, however, a conundrum, one that is every bit as intractable as Ragged Dick’s and Babbitt’s twentieth-century ethics. For, despite his deep learning in Greek *paideia*, Jaeger was unwise enough to attempt an accommodation of his educational project with National Socialism. One’s confidence is not lifted if it is observed that Jaeger’s accommodation was purely a matter of expediency. His decision is regrettable: the Third Reich was not interested and the West dismissed Jaeger’s *paideia* as an unreliable guide. It is a daunting task to persuade Ragged Dick to reevaluate his American values. For most men and women, Greek *paideia* is no match for the American ethic of “getting ahead.” This truism sounds cynical, but it is a specific case of the general rule that it is easier to do wrong than to do good. Moreover, Ragged Dick’s ethics have all the additional advantages of incumbency and public respect. Babbitt’s ethics are banal but, after all, they also are patriotic. These are the challenges confronting American *paideia* in the best of times. The prospects of an American *paideia* become actually Sisyphian when confronted by the discredit of Werner Jaeger. If all his

learning proved ineffective in putting his judgment of the future of the West on a firmer footing, how can Greek paideia hope to challenge George Babbitt? Always pleased to disparage the message that he should mend his ways, Babbitt will dismiss the reformer's paideia with the coolness of a man who smells a rat. One does not have to agree with Camille Paglia that "professional educators" are the guardians—or vanguard—of a society's "sustaining material of culture" to agree with her further point, that

when they themselves cannot agree on what constitutes a basic body of knowledge for the young, then education disintegrates and the humanities are inevitably marginalized, disdained and ignored by average Americans busy with their daily lives.<sup>16</sup>

## 5.

WHAT, THEN, is to be done? We confront a double hazard, a veritable μέν and δέ dilemma: on one hand, modern culture teaches our professional educators to teach our young a Western anti-paideia and, on the other hand, we adults who are responsible for preparing our young to learn want nothing to do with it.

Partisans of the "culture wars" can argue which is the greater culprit—the foolishness of professors or the banality of our enterprising, consuming, money culture—but the fact remains: our faith in paideia has been mislaid, if not lost. When cultural critics attack the academy's left flank by charging from the right, they fight in a tradition as old as the Greeks. Hanson and Heath inveigh against the turgidity of academic writing since the 1960s but, strange to say, Aristophanes' *Clouds* lampooned Socrates on this very point in 423 BC. And more recently, K. J. Dover, perhaps the leading twentieth-century commentator in English on the *Clouds*, complained of the past two centuries' literature on Socrates as "repetitious and verbose to a degree credible only to those who have sampled it."<sup>17</sup> These complaints are timeless because the problems that give them voice are undying.

Since Teddy Roosevelt stormed San Juan Hill, our culture has been a monopoly culture. Monopolies are disfavored because of their evil effects. Once the spur is lifted and the sting of the crop no longer felt, even the best of horses strides to a halt. A culture's monopoly power protects its people from the pains of innovation—it is more pleasant to inherit the laurels of the past than to earn them anew. Because we are monopolists, we especially resent the admonition that we should strip our inherited values of their *laissez-faire* economic and hedonistic overlay and restore the classical brilliance that shines beneath. As if Ragged Dick's ambition and George Babbitt's banality were not enough, there remains the problem of staleness in monopoly culture. Staleness presents itself in the boredom and amnesia of the role-modeling, resourceful adults that inhabit the culture. When people grow bored with their culture's past, they quickly forget its luster. In 1882, the authors of the "Preparatory Greek Course in English" could hope to put mothers and fathers in a "somewhat intelligent sympathy" with their college-bound sons and daughters. One hundred years later, the circumstances are reversed: by encouraging our children to concentrate on business administration, engineering and pre-med, we mean to put our children in intelligent sympathy with the marketplace.

Taken all together, the developments I have reviewed—utilitarianism, the rising esteem of Ragged Dick's ambition, the social acceptance of Babbitt's banality, and the onset of fatigue, boredom and amnesia—contribute to the vulgarization of culture. Hesiod's *Works and Days* is perhaps our earliest depiction of cultural vulgarization. The Olympian immortals created the first generation of mortal man, the golden age of men. This fortunate race lived, in Richmond Lattimore's translation, "as if they were gods, their hearts free from all sorrow." Next came a "far worse" generation of men, the silver age. The childhood of these silver men lasted a hundred years, but then they aged quickly and died miserably. Already the pattern of cultural decline

was set. Hesiod famously despairs of his membership in the *fifth* generation of men, the race of iron that rusts. Children grow gray as they are born, and “the father no longer agrees with the children, nor children with their father.” He wished he had died before Zeus created the iron age of man or had been born after its destruction. Ecclesiastes works the same ground: the “dead which are already dead” are more fortunate than the “living which are yet alive.”<sup>18</sup>

Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been,  
who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Starting sometime early in the twentieth century the role-modeling adults of modern America, our resourceful custodians of culture, began to transform “by golly,” “gosh” and “doggone” into a unitary “goddamn.” A sentimental linguist might cite this as evidence of the impoverishment of language. One suspects that “Homer” today is more likely to evoke Homer Simpson than a remembrance of a scene from the *Iliad*. These changes are invidious, and the world today surely is a meaner place. Maybe two world wars, the struggles of capital and labor, and dreams of an easier tomorrow had something to do with it. But this cultural development did not happen on its own, as if culture is directed by some faceless, autonomous force. Still less can it be explained ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός by the small band of professional educators who grew up amidst the “catastrophe of the 1960s.” The responsibility for this cultural change rests, instead, with each one of us.

But this is a nettlesome truth. We cherish our middling values. We prefer Babbitt’s hoary example. He was Class of 1896. In the Annual Address to the Zenith Real Estate Board, he blamed “these blab-mouth, fault-finding, pessimistic, cynical University teachers” as a bigger threat to “sound government” than “avowed socialists.” Babbitt was not thinking of the Greeks when he recommended “selling efficiency and whooping it up for national prosperity!” as the academy’s chief mission. His “pep and piety” might be a

distinctively twentieth century American invention, but his attitude towards the academy's "grouches and smart alecks" is common. Hanson and Heath admonish us to "think and act like a Greek"—and so, *selectively*, we do. For there is no more effective way of coddling Babbitt's values and nurturing our anti-paideia than by pursuing the example of the ancient comic poets. Like Aristophanes, we lampoon workers and tradesmen in ideas—toilers in the academy—as fools or charlatans. But, as any criminal defense attorney knows, purpose and effect are easily confused. We cannot say whether Aristophanes' purpose was to instigate a repression against the Sophists or merely to provoke a good laugh at Socrates' expense. It might be that violence against Socrates was unintended, though this possibility would have offered little consolation to his widow. Or it might be that Aristophanes' purpose was to rally conservative Athenian moral and religious values by awakening or encouraging a popular, middling, prejudice against the intellectual activities of Socrates and men like him. In any event, we are encouraged to act and think like the Greeks. But which ones? Shall Socrates be our model . . . or his accusers? If it is true that much of the literature devoted to Socrates over the past two hundred years is overdone, it nonetheless would be interesting to know how the share of this literature devoted to close analysis of the *διαβολή* against Socrates has changed over the past two centuries. One might guess that a culture's fascination with the prejudice against Socrates waxes and wanes in concert with the awakening and repression of its attitude towards the critical, questioning, troublemaking component of education. No less than the attention given to the comic poets' slanders against the Sophists, our changing culture's obsession with or disregard of the popular prejudice against criticism reveals its own conflicted attitude towards this legacy of ancient Greek culture.

We might suppose in some particular case that a conservative jeremiad's purpose is to reform the university rather than coddle Babbitt's values. But so long as these values *are*

coddled, or if that is the jeremiad's effect, there will be little hope of reform. It is obscurantist or unpardonably naïve to doubt the power of these middling values. If a teacher teaches "Better *is* a handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit," the Chamber of Commerce will demand that she be fired. The teaching is, after all, uneconomical. If a professor utters, "Better *is* a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished," the regents will think him a crank and consider asking him to step down. And all the while the thunderous critics of modern liberalism will enable the vulgarization of culture by eschewing criticism of our mainstream American values, our twentieth century American anti-paideia.

## NOTES

1. *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (San Francisco 2001), 248.

2. William Cleaver Wilkinson, *Preparatory Greek Course in English* (New York 1882), 3, 4, 16.

3. Jamie B. Draper and June H. Hicks, *Foreign Language Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 2000*, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (May 2002), Table 1: Foreign Language Enrollments In U. S. Public High Schools, 1890–2000.

4. The absolute number of Latin enrollments increased over this period of time, from 429,000 in 1948 to 702,000 in 1962. Despite this growth, Latin's share of the total public school enrollment was kept in check by the faster increase in Spanish, German and French enrollments. Draper and Hicks (note 3), Table 1.

5. Hanson and Heath (note 1), xxix.

6. Hanson and Heath (note 1), 3, 16. For Hanson and Heath, our intellectual guardian—the modern university—failed to equip its wards—the educated sons and daughters of America—with a "Greek paradigm" fit for the twentieth century (note 1), 27. This failure is recent; they date it to just the past three decades (5, 6). Perhaps because the question embarrasses the argument of their book, they do not ask what role the academy might have played in this failure during the course of the first seven decades of the twentieth century.

7. Hanson and Heath (note 1), xxii–xxiii.

8. Hanson and Heath (note 1), xxiii.



9. Hanson and Heath (note 1), 12.

10. Hanson and Heath (note 1), 82.

11. Hanson and Heath (note 1), xxii. Professor Bloom, in the course of musing on the crisis of the modern university, remarks that “The universities never performed [the function of making scholarship vital for the community] very well. Now they have practically ceased trying.” *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, 1987), 256. If, as he argues, the universities quit trying in “the Sixties,” should he not offer why the effort was so difficult in the first place? When Hanson and Heath ask, “who killed Homer?” they answer: the liberal ideology of the modern university establishment. Since their *programme* is to convict modern liberalism, it does not serve their purpose to criticize the earlier decline of Greek and Latin study. Their attitude towards this decline is as gentle as their attitude towards liberalism is angry. As a measure of how much they excuse the decline in the standing of Classical learning prior to the 1960s, they benignly remark that the Greeks “were at least alive as the 1960s began” (Hanson and Heath, note 1, 19). Being “at least alive” is better than being outright dead but, still, it is an intolerably modest measure of success.

12. Hanson and Heath (note 1), xxv.

13. Camille Paglia, *The Mighty River of Classics: Tradition and Innovation in Modern Education*, Arion (Fall 2001), 104.

14. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York 1945), I. ix.

15. Jaeger (note 14), ix.

16. Paglia (note 13), 104.

17. K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes Clouds* (New York 1968 and 2003), vi.

18. Eccl. 4:2–3 (KJV).