

# CC 101: The Ancient World

Fall 2007

Tuesday, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

Tsai Performance Center

## Faculty

Franco Cirulli (Core)  
Jennifer Formichelli (Core)  
Kyna Hamill (Core)  
Brian Jorgensen (English/Core)  
Stefan Kalt (Core)

Thornton Lockwood, Jr. (Core)  
Stephanie Nelson (Classics)  
Robert Richardson (Modern Languages)  
Thomas Sullivan (Core)  
James Wood (Core)

Core Humanities is a four-semester sequence of courses that explore some of the world's finest and most influential works of literature, philosophy, religion, and the arts. The courses follow a chronological sequence that allows students to look at texts from the perspectives of their authors and original audiences and also to discover the qualities that make them timeless and enduring classics.

The First Semester introduces students to two fundamental components of the Western tradition: the world of the Hebrew Scriptures and the culture of the ancient Greeks. The course also considers the Babylonians and other peoples to whom the Hebrews and Greeks are indebted. Among the topics for the semester are: the character of a hero, the relationship between heroes and ordinary human beings, God or the gods, ancient cities, friendship and love, the meaning of justice. Key issues include: human experience of the divine, war (or man's struggle with human and natural forces whose essence is strife), the development of *logos* (human reason or cognition) as a response to the divine and to the forces of nature, and the development of art.

Grades will be determined by your seminar professor according to the university's regular grading system (A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, and so forth). Final grades will be based on a combination of written work, examinations, and class participation, in the following proportions:

Midterm exam	- 10%	Seminar papers	- 50%
Final exam	- 25%	Seminar attendance & participation	- 15%

Examinations Midterm will be set by individual instructors, final by the faculty as a whole. Examinations will be based on the lectures, seminars, and readings. They will include factual, short essay, and long essay questions.

Writing is an essential component of the Core Curriculum and is coordinated closely with the Boston University Writing Program. Students who successfully complete both semesters of the first-year Core Humanities (CC 101 and 102) receive credit for WR 100. Students who successfully complete both semesters of the second-year Core Humanities (CC 201 and 202) receive credit for WR 150.

Each seminar will require approximately 20 pages of writing over the course of the semester. Three assignments will be common to all seminars: a summary and commentary paper (2 pages), a paper involving the imitation and analysis of the style of a particular author (3 pages), and a thesis-driven paper with an argument analyzing a single work (5 pages). The remainder of the writing assignments will be developed by individual seminar leaders.

The Core Writing Center is available for help throughout the semester. Writing Tutors are graduate and undergraduate students who have been trained in grammar and compositional skills and are familiar with the works read in the Core. To make an appointment with a tutor, stop by the Core Office (CAS 119), call 353-5404, or use the form at <http://bu.edu/core/writing>.

Academic Conduct: All members of Boston University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. We have the same expectations of each other in this course. Seminar leaders take the issue of plagiarism seriously and expect all the work you do in this course to be your own. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how it differs from the appropriate use of other people's work, consult the *Academic Conduct Code* or your instructor.

Required Texts are available at the Boston University Bookstore:

<i>Gilgamesh</i> , trans. David Ferry (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992)	9780374523831
<i>The Harper Collins Study Bible</i> (New Revised Standard Version)	9780060786830
Homer, <i>The Odyssey</i> , trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998)	9780374525743
Aeschylus, <i>The Oresteia</i> , trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1975)	9780140443332
Thucydides, <i>On Justice, Power, and Human Nature</i> , trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993)	9780872201682
Plato, <i>The Republic</i> , trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968)	9780465069347
Jane Aaron, <i>The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers</i> , fifth edition	9780321331595

Schedule of Lectures and Examinations

Week 1 (Sept. 4) Introduction and <i>Gilgamesh</i>	Lecturers: Professors Eckel & Jorgensen
Week 2 (Sept. 11) Genesis	Lecturer: Professor Gillman
Week 3 (Sept. 18) Exodus	Lecturer: Professor Eckel
Week 4 (Sept. 25) Job	Lecturer: Professor Wiesel
Week 5 (Oct. 2) The Culture and Religion of Ancient Greece	Lecturer: Professor Scully

**Tuesday, October 9 – substitute Monday class schedule**

Week 6 (Oct. 16) <i>The Odyssey</i>	Lecturer: Professor Esposito
Week 7 (Oct. 23) <i>The Oresteia</i>	Lecturer: Professor Scully
Week 8 (Oct. 30) Thucydides	Lecturer: Professor Samons
Week 9 (Nov. 6) The Art of Classical Greece	Lecturer: Professor Kleiner
Week 10 (Nov. 13) <i>The Republic</i> I	Lecturer: Professor Wood
Week 11 (Nov. 20) The Question of Democracy	Panel discussion: Professor Samons & al.

**Thursday, November 22, Thanksgiving Day**

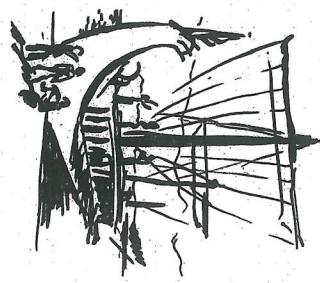
Week 12 (Nov. 27) <i>The Republic</i> II	Lecturer: Professor Fried
Week 13 (Dec. 4) <i>The Republic</i> III	Lecturer: Professor Hyland
Week 14 (Dec. 11) Conclusion	Lecturer: The Professors of CC 101

**Final Examination: Saturday, December 15, 9:00-11:00 a.m., Tsai Auditorium**

**CONCLUDING  
THOUGHTS**

*from the*

**CORE FACULTY**



**CORE CURRICULUM**

BOSTON UNIVERSITY



A key theme in CC102, the next leg of your Core education, will be “The Way” ... the way the cosmos functions, and the proper way to journey through human life. The readings in this course – your guides along this journey – represent the highest expression of both Eastern and Western traditions:

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*



The Analects of Confucius



*The Bhagavad-Gita*



Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*



Virgil, *The Aeneid*



Dante, *The Divine Comedy*



The Gospels of Matthew and John

*This chapbook given as a gift to the students of CC101 in December 2007, at the completion of their first semester in the Core Curriculum*

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All page and line numbers pertain to editions read in the Core.

Assembled by Zachary Bos, who set the text in the Garamond typeface.

SCHEDULE OF LECTURES  
Fall 2007

*Introduction and Gilgamesh*  
Professors Eickel & Jorgensen

*Genesis*

Professor Abigail Gillman

*Exodus*

Professor David Eickel

*Job*

Professor Elie Wiesel

*Culture & Religion of Ancient Greece*  
Professor Stephen Scully

*The Odyssey*

Professor Stephen Esposito

*The Oresteia*

Professor Stephen Scully

*Thucydides*

Professor Loren J. Samons II

*The Art of Classical Greece*

Professor Fred Kleiner

*The Republic I*

Professor James Wood

*The Republic II*

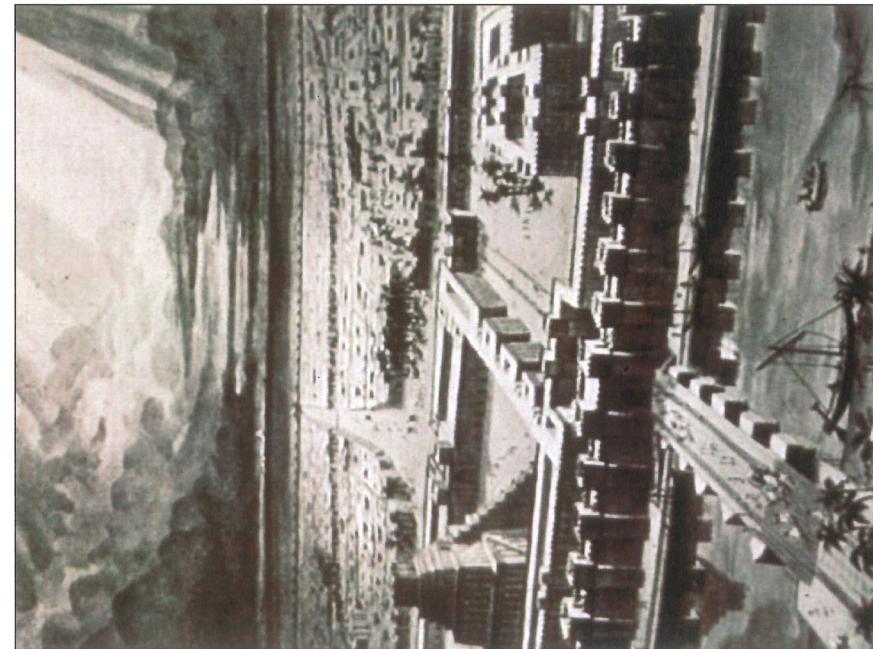
Professor Gregory Fried

*The Republic III*

Professor Drew Hyland

*Conclusion*

The Professors of CC 101



Artist's reconstruction of the palace  
quarter of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon

# THE CITY

Kyna Hamill

This semester I have been thinking a lot about the idea of the City, especially during the playoffs. The day after the Red Sox won the Pennant, one of my students came to class with a black eye. I asked “What happened?” and he sheepishly replied, that he “was wearing his Yankees cap” and was hit by a Sox fan. He is from New York. Maybe he should have known better. Whether he will admit it or not, he now has a little bit of Boston in him because living in a city even for a few months becomes a part of you.

When the Red Sox won the Pennant and the World Series, I know that many of you ran out towards Fenway; for no other reason than to be a part of something big. Though you might not have been a fan when you came to Boston, you must have felt that momentum of pride pulling you toward the centre of the action. Because it happened here, steps from your dorm room.

To participate in such a celebration – in a city at the peak if its civic life – will be a part of your memories of Boston. Hopefully you will remember these years fondly, you can say you were here when they won the Series, the second time this century – when the patriots ruled a football dynasty, when the Big Dig was *finally* completed, and when the Boston Southie became a film genre unto itself. Many of you will stay here when you graduate, many will return home, but the city is a now a part of you and you in turn are a part of the city.

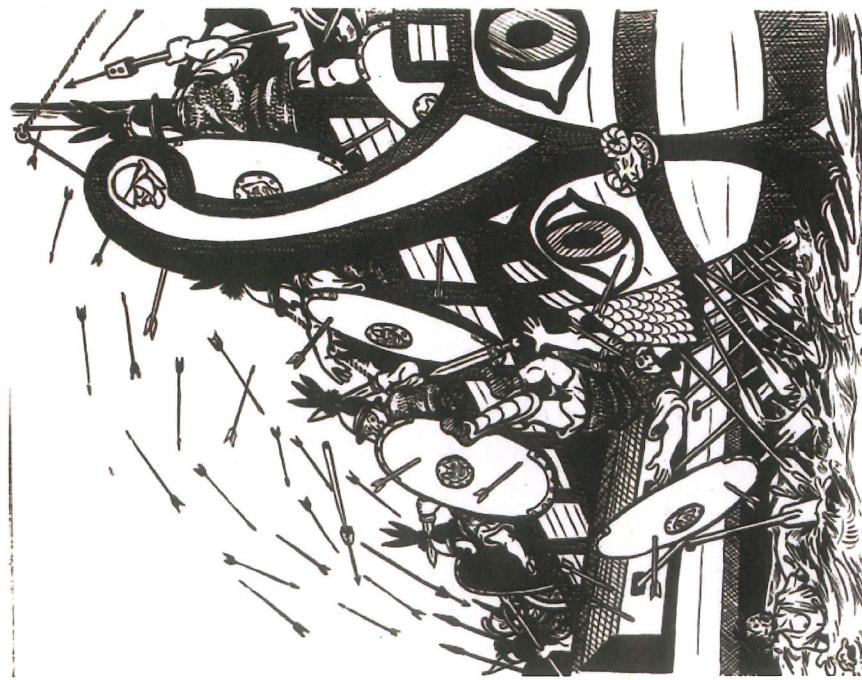
What does the city mean to you?

How has living in Boston – away from home for the first time – changed you? How do you see your own city now, through the lens of Boston life. Have *you* changed, or has the city where you came from changed?

This semester we explored the city in many ways:

*As the foundation of a civilized life  
As a sacred center  
As an empire  
As an incubator of plagues  
As a concept  
As it lives within us every day.*

We started in Uruk, not to be confused with Ur (Abraham’s city), or Uz (Job’s city) or Er (myth in Book X, *Republic*).  
*Which came first? The city or the self?*



νῦν δ' ἄγε νῆστα μέλαιναν τὸν στόλον εἰς ἀλαζῶν  
“... NOW LET US LAUNCH A BLACK SHIP INTO THE BRIGHT SEA.”

(from Homer's *Iliad*, Book 1, Line 141)

It was definitely Uruk.

Study the brickwork, study the fortification;  
Climb the great ancient staircase to the terrace;

...  
One league is the inner city, another league  
is orchards; still another the fields beyond;  
over there is the precinct of the Temple...

measure Uruk, the city of Gilgamesh.  
*(Gilgamesh*, 81-82)

The city of Gilgamesh was a civilizing force for Enkidu, the city  
where the two companions met and fought, where the temple was the  
center of city life, and where Enkidu died. Where Gilgamesh returned  
after his journey filled with grief.

Then in *Genesis*, the people said

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower  
with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name  
for ourselves”

But the Lord saw what they had built and said:

“Look, they are one people, and they have all one  
language; ... nothing that they propose to do will  
now be impossible for them.”

And so “the confused their language and scattered them abroad  
over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.” (see  
*Gen 11:4-9*) So Babel was no more.

And then there is *Athens*, where Orestes found relief from the  
Furies. Where Athena made a trial and the verdict was read. Where  
even the Furies could be happy, in a city revered for a thousand years,  
for its “courage, refinement and wisdom.” And so the Furies became  
the Eumenides and they loved the city, and the city loved them, and the  
people of Athens watched as their city was represented on stage right  
there in the best theatre in Greece. And they loved their city even more,  
and the city loved itself.

Athens the great democratic polis, “a lover of innovation” (*History*, 21). Pericles said:

...our city as a whole is a lesson for Greece...and

Beyond all doubt we two shall know each other  
Better than you or anyone. There are  
Secret signs we know, we two. (432)

Courage, resilience, selflessness, fortitude, wisdom, passion and  
loyalty are in Penelope's words, the words which enclose this best of  
loves: ‘we know, we two’.  
The years that are gone, the time they are absent from one an-  
other, cannot be reclaimed; they are lost; it is gone. Odysseus and  
Penelope have only past, and no past. But their loss is their gain; for  
what they do have is a future together in a love that is timeless:

My lady,

What ordeals have we not endured! Here, waiting  
You had your grief, while my return dragged out –  
My hard adventures, pitting myself against  
The gods' will, and Zeus, who pinned me down  
Far from home. But now our life resumes:

‘Now our life resumes’: theirs is a love that holds still; that holds  
on; that holds; and that brings us back to them, to their permanent  
moment in time, as surely as it brings them back to one another.  
So, this Christmas, I thank you, Penelope, for giving me the gift  
of your dream, that I might one day open my eyes to the new dawn  
of a love long in the making, a love holding still; and that I might have  
the wisdom, the courage, and the determination, to weather loss; and  
a tenacious and steady heart that knows how to hold on, as yours did,  
to the things that matter, and to strengthen the things which remain. ■

What Penelope sees in her dream is what makes Odysseus 'wipe a salt tear from his cheek' when he looks in the dying eyes of his old dog, Argos, who, 'abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies', pricks up his ears when after twenty years he hears the voice of his master. Twenty geese, whose presence delighted Penelope, killed before her eyes; twenty years old Argos lay, to die in front of Odysseus: both of these tell, unsentimentally, of the twenty years, neglected, and destroyed, and lost between them.

Penelope's twenty years are not those of Odysseus; Odysseus's twenty years are not those of Penelope. They are precisely the years that they do not, and cannot, have in common. As Penelope tells Eumeus when she recalls the moment of Odysseus's departure, 'The years he spoke of are now past' (344).

It occurred to me reading the *Odyssey* this semester that the popularity and excitement of the story lies in its great adventures, and the glory of Odysseus' cunning, his suspicion, his courage, his strength, his self-mastery and his resolve; but what makes the poem last is the love that lies at its heart.

It is no ordinary love; it is not the kind that is said to be 'good for you'; it is not without tremendous risk; it is not the kind that gratifies the moment. So Odysseus cannot be satisfied in its stead even with the love and beauty and eternity of a goddess, and so he tells Calypso, as best he can, why what is in his heart cannot be budged:

My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger.

My quiet Penelope – how well I know –

Would seem a shade before your majesty,

[...]

Yet, it is true, each day

I long for home, long for the sight of home.

The love at the heart of this poem is a most unusual love, perhaps the rarest kind: it is at once deeply romantic and selfless and patient; even after all its waiting, it does not rush. It is a love that, like Penelope and Odysseus' marriage bed, cannot be moved; instead, it is content to let the world move around it; it is not based on something, but is a foundation in itself. For this reason, it is amongst the most intimate loves in the world, one that can only be understood by those bonded within it, as Penelope tells her son:

I am stunned, child.  
I cannot speak to him. I cannot question him.  
I cannot keep my eyes upon his face.  
If really he is Odysseus, truly home,

each of us presents himself as a self-sufficient individual. (*History*, 43)

Athenians, the navel powerhouse who showed off her triremes!  
Then came the Peloponnesian war.  
Democracy is good, but it has gone on too long.  
A plague on you, Athenians! What peripetia – what a reversal of fortune!

Then Pericles said

“...this was a kind of disease that defied explanation, and the cruelty with which it attacked everyone was too severe for human nature.” (*History*, 48)

Human Nature, it lays in the corners of all cities. It finds the easy way out and makes pleasure for today rather than tomorrow. It seeks violence over reason.

For Diotodus the “human condition is dominated by some great and incurable passion that impels people to danger” (*History*, 73)  
So where is the justice in the city?

Enter Socrates. He said “a city comes into being because each of us is *not* self-sufficient.” So he made a “city in speech” to find the just:

*To be educated and classified*

*To mind our own business*

*To be given a noble lie*

And when one of us wounds a finger, we will all grieve. (*Republic*, 141) We will all share in her pain.

*We will seek the happiness of the city as a whole.*

And once the city is built, reason by reason, it will decay, “not even a composition such as this will remain for all time” (*Republic*, 223)  
So it is up to you to build it up again each semester. To build the city within yourself.

The city of Boston. The city of BU. The city of Core. And the city in your discussion seminar.

Enjoy the city, but be good to it. “Keep to the upper road and practice justice and prudence” (*Republic* 303) and always, choose your hat wear carefully. ■

## ON DREAMS

Brian Jorgensen

**T**here is something in us that connects with things beyond the city. Sometimes this happens in dreams. Genesis says:

"Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! (Gen. 28:10-12).

So here is Jacob, young, ambitious, success-oriented, running away from his guilt and the nasty tricks he has played on his father and brother, indeed running for his life – his brother may well want to kill him – and running toward his future – he wants to get rich, to get respect, to find a wife – fear, honor, and self-interest. He is alone, in a nameless place, and the sun is setting. He has to stop. Maybe he has never had to make such decisions before – is this a good place to stop? Better to keep going? Necessary to stop? He has kept close to the tents. And his horizontal journey, on the ground and through life – we journey through time, from one thing to another –, is interrupted by a dream which is about as vertical as you can get. A whole other dimension, and not something Jacob could have seen by daylight. The dream-ladder, or it could be a staircase, no one knows quite what the Hebrew word means, goes a very long way up – higher than houses, treetops, higher than the towers of Babylon or any city, higher than mountains, higher than stars, maybe higher than the Divided Line? Yet it starts in a particular place, this place Jacob has come to on his guilty and ambitious and selfish journey.

And the story says, as if we were right there in the dream with Jacob, "Behold!" But not about the ladder. It almost takes the stunning or terrifying height of the ladder for granted. What it finds amazing and beautiful are the many messengers, observers, angels on errands going up and down – up from the lonely conniving relentlessly driven ego in the rocky place, through the night and beyond, and bright beings coming down, from some transcendent dimension to one particular stone of one particular place. So the dream says that this ordinary

## ON LOVE

Jennifer Formichelli

**I** think, precisely because I do not take kindly to the fact, that I found myself often this term coming back to Eliot's thought about the loss in human life:

Now it is generally observable of mankind, that in the elation of success in some course which we have set ourselves, we can be oblivious of many things which we have been obliged to resign in the accomplishment of it. We do not take kindly to the fact that, in order to gain one thing, we may have to give up something else of value. With these lost values the path of history is strewn and always will be... (OPP, p. 165)

I confess now that so unsettled was I about this matter of fact, that I spent much of the semester thinking over loss: mulling, and missing those things of value, things worthy of preservation, that had been dropped, by my hands, by others' hands, regardlessly, ignorantly, perhaps even selfishly. So strong was my longing to repair the loss I perceived about me, and so deep the craving to hold that which was dropped back in my hands, I found myself bending down to pick up the pieces; to put them back together, where they might have place and presence, and where they might never be forgotten. And it was then that Penelope spoke to me, and gave me, in the way that literature can, a comfort, the comfort of her dream; it is the dream she tells to her husband when she sees him again, for the first time, after 20 years:

Listen:

Interpret me this dream: From a water's edge  
Twenty fat geese have come to feed on grain  
Beside my house. And I delight to see them.  
But now a mountain eagle with great wings  
And crooked beak storms in to break their necks  
And strew their bodies here. Away he soars  
Into the bright sky; and I cry aloud –  
All this in dream – I wail and round me gather  
Softly braided Akhaian women mourning  
Because the eagle killed my geese.

DEAR EDITOR:

I am 8 years old.

Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.

Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.'

Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?

VIRGINIA O'HANLON.  
115 WEST NINETY-FIFTH STREET.

VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound by giving to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in allthis world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

life is connected to, in converse with, something amazing and high and alive. Ambitious tricky Jacob doesn't know the half of it.

Reading great books can be like that dream of Jacob's; books are like voluntary dreams – partially voluntary. In the middle of everyday life, with its troubles, its deadlines, its preoccupations, its self-concern, you go into the book, and something opens up, you feel that life is large, and has a vertical as well as horizontal dimension. You can't live in a book, or you shouldn't; a book can and should be an experience like Jacob's dream, and great books are, but then it is up to you to test the reality, try to understand it, deal with it. To journey on, with some memory of the dream. ■

## DEMOCRATIC MUSSINGS IN THE AMERICAN CAVE

James Wood

**A**s an American, it is difficult for me to think about anything political without relating it to my country. Much like the ancient Athenians, we Americans are quite self-obsessed. I suppose we think we're special in some way. We love to talk about our special place in history, a place of new hopes and new beginnings, about our democracy, our freedom, our destiny as the shining city on a hill, beacon to the weary and oppressed masses of the world. We also, some of us, love to criticize America, which is probably healthy, but no less a reflection of our sense of self-importance. In the spirit of our national self-obsession, then, I want to offer you a montage of my thoughts on America over the course of a semester of reading Core texts.

In the beginning it was easy. No doubt it was for you, too. Gilgamesh the tyrant. Sure, he built a stunning city and performed unforgettable heroic deeds, but he treated his people like slaves and instruments for the satisfaction of his desires. I suppose he learned a lot after causing the death of hundreds of his citizens and his own best friend, and abandoning his city in a fruitless quest for immortality. But really, would you want to bear the brunt of his extended learning experience? Great heroes, I concluded, do not make good kings. I felt rather smug about living in civilized democratic America as opposed to barbaric tyrannical Uruk.

Odysseus gave me pause, briefly. After all, he was a great hero who was also, according to Homer, a great king and father of his people. I had moments where I seriously wondered whether life under a wise and benevolent king wouldn't really be preferable to life under George Bush and Bill Clinton, not to mention all the quarreling puffed-up suits ensconced on Capitol Hill. Then again, there were plenty of petty quarrelsome types in that Assembly in Ithaka, not to mention the loathsome suitors who seized power as soon as they were able. That's the problem with good kings, I thought. They are hard to find, they don't tend to replicate themselves, and if they disappear for a while, their realms are unable to keep up their good legacy for very long. And as heroes, they are inclined to disappear, since a hero must make war. You find the same situation portrayed in stories about the crusading King Richard the Lion-hearted and the usurping Prince John. So once again, in the end, I reflected that we're really bet-

## ON WHAT'S REAL

Tom Sullivan

**I** come to teach in the Core from Philosophy. In fact, I've been teaching philosophy longer than most of you have been alive! Many times people ask me something like, "Why philosophy, Tom? What's relevant about reading a bunch of old literature about obscure problems?" I always say something like this: well, the questions philosophy deals with are ancient, and some of the ancient answers are still relevant today. That doesn't usually convince many people, but I don't stop there. One such ancient question is one we've read about: what is real? You all know Plato's answer, from his argument about the Forms. Plato said that what is most real is what lasts the longest, the Forms, which are something like concepts, or Ideas. These are the things that don't come to be and pass away, but last forever. There is a great irony in Plato that the things that are most real can't be seen or touched, but they nonetheless last longer than the things that can be seen or touched, which do come to be and pass away, such as this podium, or this building, or even you and me.

Now, how is this all relevant – especially since this usually gets a pretty disdainful response (something along the lines of "you can't bang your shin on a Form, but you sure can on my desk"). Even more important than my being a philosopher is that I'm a dad. I have four children: ages 25, 23, 12 and 9 (don't ask). The oldest, Wesley, when he was eight, was told by one of his little friends that Santa Claus didn't exist. After resisting my urge to throttle this particular child, I thought I had better find a way to deal with this. I knew one: it's a column from the New York Sun, over one hundred years ago. It contains a Platonic answer to the question, "Is there a Santa Claus?" – listen for Plato. ■



*Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote a letter to the editor of New York's Sun, and the quick response was printed as an unsigned editorial Sept. 21, 1897. The work of veteran newsman Francis Church, the Sun reprinted the column every Christmas eve until it went out of business in the 1950's. This column has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial, appearing in part or whole in dozens of languages in books, movies, and other editorials, and on posters and stamps.*

twenty years he was not where he should have been. He did not protect those he should have protected. The impulse to kill the suitors is part, I think, of a need to try, futilely, to reclaim the past. It is as if by undoing the suitors he could undo the time that is gone. It is like Athena's attempt to make Penelope accept the stranger by making him beautiful again, as he was before he left.

But this is not, of course, the end of the story. Penelope does not accept Odysseus because he is young and beautiful; she accepts him when, perhaps for the first time in the poem, he shows himself vulnerable to someone else's lies. And nearly the first thing she says is that they cannot make up the time that has been lost. The past is gone. What they can have is the future, and it is Odysseus' future wandering, that he wants to forget for just the moment, that she wants to hear. In this way also, I think, the stories that made the problem can also make the solution. As they tell their stories to each other Odysseus is not left with an identity based on his own words – both he and Penelope have instead an identity they can gain from each other.

In the Myth of Er that ends the *Republic* the very last soul to choose a life is Odysseus. Socrates tells us that cured of his love of honor he seeks the life of a private man who minds his own business. This is, of course, the definition of justice in the *Republic*. It is clearly not because Odysseus has been a man of violence that Socrates awards him this position, nor is it because he is a poet and a liar. It is, however, at least as it seems to me, because of what poetry and violence have brought Odysseus to. This is an understanding of who he is. Which may be finally the best destination that any of us, each on our own journey, may be able to reach. ■

ter off with our democracy, flawed as it is. Plus, I can't say I really care for the thought of some leader being like a "father" to me. Gives me chills, really. Way too paternalistic, authoritarian. We Americans don't care for authority too much, you know.

With Aeschylus it was easier. Here's a man who has perfectly portrayed the problems with authoritarian regimes – in gruesome, bloody detail, no less – and what was his solution to the abuses and injustices of tyrannical power? The institution of democracy! The Athenian tribunal. Kings and tyrants, whether Agamemnon or Clytaemnestra, will tend to rule in their own self-interest, but a democracy, the rule of the people, will serve the interest of the whole people. Isn't that the best way to ensure justice? And it goes without saying that democracy is the best safeguard of liberty and equality for all. So the Oresteia had me ready to proclaim Aeschylus an honorary American. My smugness, my assurance that I was living in the best possible regime, was stronger than ever.

Then I read Thucydides, and I felt like I'd been whacked over the head by a brick. Wait a minute, I thought! Here is Athens, the greatest democracy in the history of the world – before, of course, the good ole U.S. of A. – and according to Thucydides they are a bunch of war-mongering imperialists! Half the Greek world was under their thumb, paying them tribute (taxation without representation!) and all they seemed to care about was protecting and expanding their lucrative empire. Money and power. They cared little or not at all for justice. And leaving aside their foreign policy, internally their democracy often seemed no better than fickle mob rule. Pericles aside, and he was really much too authoritarian for my taste, they seemed to follow one shallow demagogue after another, and even when they resisted one of them, like Alcibiades, they behaved inconsistently, unjustly, and stupidly in their persecution of him, and so brought on their own destruction. Sure, the people governed, but the people all too often wanted the same things the tyrants did: wealth and power at the expense of others. Sparta and the oligarchic regimes were hardly any better, though they behaved more intelligently. I hated to make the comparison to my own country this time, because examples of poor leadership, injustice, demagoguery, and selfish, ill-advised foreign policy adventures came all too easily to mind. So I was forced to wonder: is democracy really any better suited than any other regime to ruling justly and wisely, seeking and preserving the greatest good for the whole people?

Finally, there was Plato, and reading Plato was the most difficult experience of all for me, as an American. He so clearly saw the problems. Good rule requires two things: wise judgment and concern for the common good. And democracy simply can't guarantee either one. Do our rulers rule on behalf of the common good, or on behalf of

the factions that support them and the power base that elected them? Are they wise? Have they given serious thought to the nature and problems of justice? Do they – and do we – think being a good politician means knowing and loving the good of one's country, or knowing how to get in office and stay there? Of course, we do care about freedom. But what does that mean to us? Here too I could not deny the power of Plato's insight: freedom requires wise governance, both in our cities and in ourselves. All too often we tend to think freedom means license to do whatever we want. The freedom to make money, to consume goods, to indulge ourselves in whatever way we see fit. How easily, then, can our love of freedom turn into a love of consumption and a hatred of law. We want the government to give us lots of good things and at the same time to stay out of our lives and keep its hands off our money. That is a recipe for personal irresponsibility, bloated government, and national debt. We devolve into self-interested factions, each voting – assuming we vote at all – for whatever will benefit ourselves and our group. What do we know about the common good? How many voters think about that? What we care about is ourselves. Equating freedom with the license to pursue and satisfy our desires ends, in our personal lives, by making us slaves to our own desires. In our politics, factionalism, greed, narrow self-interest, and lack of education makes us as vulnerable as the ancient Athenians to manipulation by demagogues. I see the risks before us: chaos and anarchy on one side, loss of freedom and tyranny on the other. How can we navigate between this Skylla and this Kharibdis?

And then I realized the answer. The answer is education. Plato saw this too. And he also saw that education must prepare citizens to understand that true freedom requires virtue and wisdom, the control of ourselves and our country by reasoned reflection, sober and prudent judgment exercised towards our common good over the long term. The way out of the myopia of our collective cave is to begin to think, in the light of what Plato, Thucydides, Aeschylus, and the rest have said, about what justice and freedom and democracy really are, and how they can be as good as they possibly can be. Isn't that reflection just what the Core is all about? I hope so. After my painful awakening from the sweet slumber of my smugness, I have been turned around and reoriented in the harsh light of the sun. I'm not sure what the sun is, any more than I am sure what we Americans should do exactly to avoid the errors of ancient Athens and avoid the twin evils of tyranny and anarchy. But I know the only way we have any chance is to seek the sun of wisdom and justice, and to try to bring that light into the shadows of our American cave. ■

affects Penelope so deeply that she asks the singer, Phemius, to “sing no more / this bitter tale that wears my heart away” (1.391–2). When Odysseus hears the harper in Phaiakia singing his own story he weeps, and Homer says he is like a woman in a conquered city, crouching over her dead husband, as the victors beat her on the back with their spears forcing her into her new world of slavery.

There is another way as well in which poetry is like violence. This is in the way it affects not the one who suffers the violence, but the one who inflicts it. In a wonderful (and short) work on the *Iliad* called *The Iliad: A Poem of Force* Simone Weil describes violence as making a person into a thing. In the process the inflictor of violence is also changed, hardened, blinded in some way to the essential sameness of humanity. This can also happen to poets. A poet, after all, is a liar. Anyone so adroit at making things appear true must come, like Dante or Shakespeare come, to wonder what truth is. Odysseus, who is so adept at telling lies about who he is finally faces the danger of having no identity at all. Odysseus' name, after all, as we are told when Eurykleia finds his scarf, means “odium and distrust” (19.480). To have a name, to have an identity, is to be a target, as Odysseus learns with the Cyclops. Better, perhaps, to allow one's identity to stay fluid, to be, as Odysseus tells the Cyclops, “Nohody”.

In other words, it does not seem to me that Homer compares Odysseus' bow to a harp in order to make the killing of the suitors seem justified. If anything, it seems to me, he does it to hint that poetry too is problematic. But while I think that Homer does not see the death of the suitors as simply what they deserved, I do not mean either that Homer is showing us that Odysseus is a criminal. Here, at least, I agree with one thing that Socrates says about poetry. It is imitation. It describes the world we live in as it is, not as how we wish that it would be. In this light I don't believe the killing of the suitors is finally about whether it was just or not. I think it is finally about why Odysseus needs to do it.

All practical considerations say, I think, that Odysseus should accept the suitors' restitution. He does not, and he cannot. I think, for a reason that Homer hints at in linking the violence to poetry. Since the disaster with the Kyklops Odysseus has learned a lesson. For three entire books while he is with the Phaiakians he does not tell them his name. When he finally does, in the same terms he told the Kyklops, he launches immediately into his story. He reclaims his identity, in other words, by also bringing the Phaiakians (and us, the readers) into that identity, by having us share his story. As we learn who Odysseus is, why he rejected immortality, what he suffered with the Kyklops he learns as well, and moves towards reclaiming his identity in Ithaka. To my mind this is also why Odysseus needs to kill the suitors. For

## POETRY AS VIOLENCE

Stephanie Nelson

For the students of section C8, whose ideas these largely are

There is something strange in Homer's description of how Odysseus strings his bow:

So the suitors spoke. But Odysseus, of the many wiles, when he had handled the great bow and looked it over each way as when a man, a harp-player, a skilled one, and a singer too stretches a cord on a new peg, easily, having fixed from either end the well-twisted line of sheep-gut so too, without haste or concern (spoude), Odysseus strung the bow. And taking it in his right hand he tried the string, and it sang out, beautifully, under his touch, like the voice of a swallow.

(21.460-70, translation mine)

We are here on the edge of the most violent book of the *Odyssey*, a book whose violence resembles that of Homer's great war-poem the *Iliad*. In fact the violence is even more terrible than that of the *Iliad* because the slaughter of the suitors, like the horrible slaughter of Agamemnon, takes place at a feast. Human beings gather to break bread as a sign of fellowship. A feast should not be a place for murder. Nor is it that Odysseus has no choice. After the first, and the most arrogant suitor, Antinoos, has been killed, just as he lifted the beautiful two-handed goblet to his lips, Eumeus acknowledges that the suitors were wrong, and promises restitution many times over. "Spare / your own people" he says (25.57-8). Odysseus does not. And it is on the edge of this that Homer compares the bow that is about to wreak this carnage as like a lyre, and Odysseus, a deeply violent man in a violent time, as like a poet.

There is a way that poetry is like violence. The fact that a bow and a lyre or harp work on essentially the same principles may have a more than coincidental significance. Both music and violence affect us; both make us suffer. The first poetry we hear about in the poem

## CASSANDRA'S BURDEN

Thornton Lockwood

For the students of section C8, whose ideas these largely are

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During a Core lecture, Professor Scully introduced us to the most intriguing line of text, at least in my opinion, which we studied this semester. Towards the end of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra – who hides in a chariot – shrieks “OTOTOI PEPOI DA” (1072); or in the “words” of our translator, Robert Fagles, “AIEEEEEE!”\* As Scully reminded us, here is that most articulate, most careful craftsman of images and phrases turning to sheer inarticulateness, noise which signifies a primordial response through its almost stuttering repetition of tau's and pi's. I would like to linger over this line – and the incredible scene of which it is a part – because it offers the character of Cassandra as a timeless, and so ever timely, model of emulation.

The context of Cassandra's shriek gives some insight into its meaning. Here we have a character whose situation is simply rock-bottom, the lowest of the lows. Cassandra is the recipient of Apollo's unrequited love, his gift of prescience, and his curse of never being able to be believed. She is, in her words, the “last ember” (1172/1174) of that city destroyed by flame. She is the daughter of King Priam – he who was sacrilegiously slaughtered at his household altar; the sister of Hector, whose corpse Achilles dragged around the walls of Troy; and the aunt of little Astynax, who was thrown to his death from the walls of Troy. She is a woman in a world in which men hold sway and of course she herself was raped by Ajax the lesser while she was seeking sanctuary in the temple of Athena. She is the war booty concubine of Agamemnon, and so his slave, but also her destiny is conjoined to his insofar as her mere presence is an affront to Clytemnestra. She is, in almost every way imaginable, a “loser” – one who has lost her city, her family, her royal status, her possibilities for love, her credibility, her freedom, and – before too long – she knows that she will lose her life.

Recognition of all that – and her subsequent entrance (both physically and as a piece of property) into the cursed house of Atreus seems good reason to shriek, especially for one with the gift of prescience. And yet, at the conclusion of her scene in the play *Agamemnon*, she explicitly notes that she does NOT cry out in fear or from having been caught; rather she cries out so that you will testify to *how* I died.

\* For the Greek text I have consulted Herbert Weir Smyth's 1926 Loeb edition.

When the queen, woman for woman, dies for me,  
and a man falls for the man who married grief.  
That's all I ask, my friends. A stranger's gift  
for one about to die.

(1315-20/1339-43)

To understand *how* Cassandra dies, we need to look a little more closely at the context of her initial shrieks.

Cassandra's shriek is in response to a speech by the chorus leader.

After Clytaemnestra –with open contempt – scolds her as a mad, recently harnessed beast who must learn to take “the cutting bridle” (χαλύβος), the chorus leader, more softly, states that

I pity her. I will be gentle.  
Come, poor thing. Leave the empty chariot –  
Of your own free will try on the yoke of Fate

(1069-71).

The image of “fate” or necessity (ἀνάγκη) as a yoke or strap (γύρος) is common in Aeschylus – one used to describe Agamemnon’s plight with respect to Iphigenia (2117-20) but also the inevitability of his death at Clytaemnestra’s hand (1524). The brilliance of the image is due in no small part to the way in which it captures the tension humans experience as creatures caught between freedom and necessity. At least according to Aeschylus’ image, it appears that although we all are allotted a definite fate or destiny, our nobility consists in how we bear that necessity, whether we chafe at the yoke or embrace it.

The character of Patrick Kenzie, played by Casey Affleck in the film *Gone Baby Gone* (a recent homage to the gothic elements of South Boston which – along with *Mystic River*, *The Departed*, and *Good Will Hunting* – are films you are required to view before you can graduate from Boston University) captures a sense of this in his monologue which opens the film. He states that (I paraphrase) “What is most important in life are the things you don’t choose – your family, your neighborhood, your religion.” Every one of you is someone’s child, and that is part of your fate or destiny – something over which you have no control. Many of you may one day have your own children and although I am disinclined to say that that fact is already written into your future, I do believe that once such a life is created, you as a parent will slip on a yoke of necessity forever after regardless of whether you want to or not, regardless of whether you abandoned that child, put that child up for adoption, or kicked that child out of house and home. You will forever be a parent, but the real question is what you will make of that necessity. Another name for those “necessities” are “du-

ties” – things you are morally obligated to do (although obviously are not physically compelled to do) whether you like it or not. Cassandra’s fate or necessity is death at the hands of Clytaemnestra – a fate she foreknows and which conceivably she could rail against or protest. And yet as I noted above, her cry is not a cry of fear or that of a freshly captured bird, soon to be slaughtered by the hunter. Rather, it is a cry of defiance, of recognition and for vengeance. Of course, the problem of the interrelation of justice and vengeance is a broader topic which the sequels to the *Agamemnon* – the *Liberation Bearers* and the *Eumenides* – still need to resolve. But like Professor Scully, I find Cassandra’s character and her embrace of her Fate THE most morally inspiring moment in the Oresteia trilogy. As one of my students has argued quite persuasively in her final paper, unlike Orestes – who acts in large part out of a fear of Apollo’s punishment – Cassandra is decidedly UNAFRAID (perhaps in part because of her own personal history, which makes this last chapter of bloodshed seem less bloody). Unlike poor Agamemnon, she does not chafe at the bridle with “wretched frenzy.” Rather, with eyes wide open, she throws off Apollo’s yoke – and the regalia that symbolize her status as one of his priestess – and embraces the yoke of necessity which she cannot escape.

In our lectures, in our sections, in our papers which struggle with this truly noble woman, we honor her request: by understanding her staccato-like cry of ΟΤΟΤΟΤΟΙ ΠΕΠΟΙ ΔΑ, we do testify to how she died. And yet, we are also left with a broader question: how will others testify to how we live? ■