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GREECE AND ROME IN AMERICA

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Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)

Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007)

Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

The classics appear conspicuously in the pamphlet wars of the American Revolution, though in the opinion of Bernard Bailyn (written many years ago), their presence is "window-dressing" and their influence "superficial." They are "*everywhere* illustrative, not determinative, of thought" (my italics). Up the scale in influence comes Enlightenment rationalism, also "superficial" but only "at times"—that removes the foreigners, ancient and modern. Then, further up the scale are English common-law writers, "powerfully influential" though still insufficiently "determinative"; above them, a "major source," New England Puritan thought and culture; and finally, at the top, seventeenth-century British "heroes of liberty" and the "early eighteenth-century transmitters of this tradition," e.g. Commonwealth men, Bishop Hoadly.[1] Who would have thought that the bishop of Winchester weighed in the balance more heavily than Plato and Aristotle? Only once in passing does Bailyn even mention Machiavelli, to

[1] Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution: 1750–1776* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 21, 23, 24, 25–7, 29. See also Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA, 2008), 50–51.

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whom J. G. A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and Harvey C. Mansfield would grant large prominence in the development of Revolutionary thought.[2]

If Bailyn's brushing aside the classics had the advantage of throwing light on other, neglected texts, the defenders of the classical presence and impact have only grown in number with the passing decades, from John W. Eadie, Meyer Reinhold, and Robert Ferguson, to Paul A. Rahe, M. N. S. Sellers, Susan Ford Wiltshire, David J. Bederman, and Eran Shalev. In the exhaustively researched book under review Carl J. Richard brings forward the story that he began in *The Founders and the Classics* (1994) to the "long antebellum period"; he mentions Bailyn once,[3] as if there were no point in responding to the debate, which has since been summarized by E. Christian Kopff.[4] Instead, Richard saves his rhetorical energies to clear the ground for his own enterprise, limiting a trifle stingily his estimation of the scope of Winterer's books[5] and challenging Reinhold's bestowal of the epithet "golden age of the classics" upon the generation of the founders: "Much

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2 Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enlarged edn (Cambridge, MA, 1992; first published 1967), 85; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ, 1975); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978); Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York, 1981); and Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago, 1996). Most recently, David J. Bederman, *The Classical Foundations of the American Constitution: Prevailing Wisdom* (Cambridge, 2008), 15, 70–71, 146–147, has restated the significance of Machiavelli in the founders' thought.

3 Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 209. In his earlier book Richard had rejected Bailyn's judgment as uninformed, replying that "the classics supplied mixed government theory, the principal basis for the U.S. Constitution . . . [and] contributed a great deal to the founders' conception of human nature, their understanding of the nature and purpose of virtue, and their appreciation of society's essential role in its production"; "in short, the classics supplied a large portion of the founders' intellectual tools." Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 1–2, 8.

4 E. Christian Kopff, "Open Shutters on the Past: Rome and the Founders," in Gary L. Gregg II, ed., *Vital Remnants: America's Founding and the Western Tradition* (Wilmington, 1999), 71 ff.

5 Caroline Winterer's *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (2002) is "superb but brief"; it focuses "largely" upon education, and only "marginally" addresses the "interaction between the classics and democracy, the Industrial Revolution, nationalism, romanticism, the Second Great Awakening, and slavery"—in other words, it must have missed much in the period it purportedly intended to cover (ix). Also "excellent but brief" is her *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (2007), which "contains about fifty pages concerning antebellum women" (ix).

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of Reinhold's own research contradicted his conclusion" (x).[6] For Richard, the antebellum period deserves the epithet (hence the title of his book), and the Revolutionary age is silver. But surely this is unfair to Reinhold, who could point to the depth of engagement as well as the lasting achievements of the founders. To judge from the above-mentioned defenders as well as the books under review, one may conclude that the entire period, from the mid-eighteenth century to the Civil War, is a golden age of classics in America, the silver being from the Civil War to 1914, leaving the lead to us.

What Richard, Winterer, and Reinhold—and Margaret Malamud too—all share is a belief *pace* Bailyn that the classics can be not merely culturally reflective but culturally constitutive as well. Obviously many degrees of engagement lie between flowery allusion and deep absorption succeeded by social commitment. As an example of the latter, to cite Caroline Winterer, the South Carolinian Sarah Grimké became a Quaker and abolitionist in the 1830s, inspired by her readings in ancient history. When she pleaded to be allowed to study Latin and Greek with her brothers, she was told, "'You are a girl—what do you want with Latin and Greek etc. You can never use them,' accompanied sometimes by a smile, sometimes by a sneer" (176). As she thought, with the classical languages, she could aspire to be a lawyer and a "useful member of society" instead of being "cast among the butterflies of the *fashionable* world" (176, original emphasis). In *Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States* (1836) Grimké illustrated the fact that classical learning provided an education not for "ornamental accomplishment" but rather for "civic activism and reform on the national stage" (177). Degrees of engagement apply to periods as well as to persons. It would be difficult to measure statistically, yet it seems that the decades of maximum social and political tension (the Revolutionary era, the years leading up to the Civil War) elicited the most significant classical presence, as if Americans in those years were most in need of ancient wisdom, or as if they felt that they would rise to greater heights and achieve nobler ends when they felt they were under the eyes of the mighty dead.

In Richard's view, antebellum writers and artists appropriated classical sources after the manner of the founders, chiefly to convince a newly empowered audience, only they did so on the grand scale, in many more areas of human activity, and in a way that permeated the middle classes, trickled down to the masses, crossed racial and gender boundaries, and extended to the frontiers. Because they could invoke the Athenian democracy and the Roman republic, writers sensitive to egalitarianism could "make classical references before even the least educated audiences without seeming aristocratic" (41). Antebellum

[6] Richard refers to Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit, 1984).

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Americans absorbed "both models and antimodels of personal behavior, social practice, and government form"; they valued

> the classics as an indispensable training in virtue and in considering their favorite ancient authors wise old friends. They continued to display the classical obsession with alleged conspiracies against liberty. Like their parents, they derived from the classics a sense of identity and purpose that bound them together with one another and with their ancestors in a common struggle. They continued to draw from the ancient poets and political theorists a pastoralism that glorified the rural, agricultural lifestyle. They persisted in valuing the simplicity, ethics, and love of nature exhibited by classical authors. (x)

Moreover, the *anti*classical party within antebellum America even failed where *their* predecessors did: they could not dislodge the classics from their hegemony in education and culture, something that did not begin to happen until the decades following the Civil War.

After presenting the background of the classics in the ambience of urban and rural America, Richard tacks between thematics and chronology in six substantial chapters: "Democracy," the debate over "Pastoralism and Utilitarianism," "Nationalism," "Romanticism," "Christianity," and "Slavery." In each instance he builds his case by coral accretion; at some point, with the sheer weight of evidence, quantity becomes quality. Aside from monographic studies on individual authors and issues, no more effective means could convey the range of classical influence in a relatively short volume. Inevitably from time to time one wishes not for fewer examples but for more literary analysis, a testing for that depth of constitutive experience. Thus Richard comments that reviewers preferred William Munford's *Iliad* translation (1846) over Alexander Pope's as expressing "deeper feeling": at issue, "Hector's farewell to his son" in *Iliad* 6 (actually it is to Andromache, his wife). Some passages cited from each translation would have given readers a chance to draw their own conclusions. First Munford:

> No man can send me hence,
> To Pluto's hall, before the appointed time;
> And surely none of all the human race,
> Base or e'en brave, has ever shunn'd his fate;
> His fate foredoom'd when first he saw the light.

Homer's "feeling" barely forces its way through Munford's flat rhetoric, turgid rhythms, and tiresome alliteration. By contrast, Pope captures Homer's speed and nobility:

> No hostile hand can antedate my doom,
> Till fate condemns me to the silent tomb.
> Fix'd is the term to all the race of earth;
> And such the hard condition of our birth:

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No force can then resist, no flight can save,
All sink alike, the fearful and the brave.

Perhaps American nationalism slanted the reviewers' judgment against Pope. An impartial reader would have to admit that Munford's does not surpass the translation that Samuel Johnson said "no age or nation can pretend to equal."[7] Elsewhere, in an exemplary Burckhardtian *Anschauung*, Richard mentions Sam Houston's memorizing "all 500 pages of Pope's *Iliad* as a sixteen-year-old in 1809" (44).

Most studies of the classical world are highly selective, taking in only what they want to see. Richard's wide angle shows how the classics were applied all across the spectrum of political and social issues. George Bancroft, a Jacksonian Democrat on the left, heaped praise on Athenian statecraft: "though they sometimes flattered kings, [they] never eulogized the regal form of government" (47). During the Nullification Crisis of 1832–3 John C. Calhoun lauded the Achaean League in which the decentralized states preserved their independence and "only united for a few common purposes" (49). Yet the young Charles Francis Adams excoriated the Athenian democracy as the "unbridled licentiousness of a mob," which succumbed to Cleon's demagoguery and put Socrates to death, and preferred Sparta despite its anti-intellectualism (50). For J. D. B. De Bow, the New Orleans editor, Rome "in its most debauched and basest times, never sunk half so low in venality, corruption, and vulgarity as our federal government has sunk." The year after the Civil War broke out, he switched rhetorical sides: "Let the hordes of Alaric and Attila come, a degenerate race does not occupy the old Roman fields" (70). Imperial Rome no longer wins approval, the agricultural religion of Vertumnus and Pomona does. All parties agreed upon the villainy of Caesar for destroying the republic. Calhoun was Caesar to his enemies; so, too, was Jackson, who was also Alexander, Sulla, Octavius, Tiberius (the Hermitage being Jackson's Capri), Caligula, and Nero (and Cromwell and Bonaparte) (63, 66).

The Greek drive for independence against the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s only strengthened American ties to ancient Greece. Whether orators debated the expansion of federal power, states' rights, Manifest Destiny, Christianity versus paganism, or slavery, they combed the classics for paradigms with little sense of historical context. To Representative Isaac E. Holmes of South Carolina, the wicked North had become "like unto Rome": "She has subjected provinces more productive than the Egyptian or African" (70). In 1842 the poet Charles Carter Lee, Robert E. Lee's elder brother, boasted that "it appears certain [!] that a deeper interest must hereafter attach to [US] history than now belongs to that of

7 Samuel Johnson, *Life of Pope*, in Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, vol. 2 (London: Dent, 1968), 222.

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. . . Rome" (108). Calhoun argued on behalf of nationalist expansion and states' rights, pleading Roman precedents for both positions. He borrowed liberally from Polybius, Cicero, and Livy to explore the art of political compromise, mixed government, the election of tribunes, and the veto power of the plebeian assembly, all those political means by which Rome had mostly escaped the long, internecine civil wars that plagued the Greeks (79). Shortly before his death, and hoping to avoid secession and war, Calhoun proposed a dual presidency of one northerner and one southerner on the Roman consular model. Margaret Fuller, an active participant in the Roman Revolution of 1848, said that Rome had "brought some things to perfection that the world will probably never see again"; still, with regard to the Mexican War, she worried that the American eagle might imitate the "fierce Roman bird." Would the eagle be inclined "to soar toward the sky or to stoop for helpless prey" (114)? Fuller remains a shadowy presence in Richard's pages, which is regrettable given the importance of Rome in her life and writings. He would have profited from several essays in *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age*, edited by Charles Capper and Cristina Giorcelli.[8] As for the persistence of neoclassical values well into the Romantic era, the various comparisons between the ancient world and the present "reflected a widespread belief in an unchanging human nature" (72).

Despite the engrained classicism, nearly everyone preferred Christian to Greco-Roman morality by a wide margin. That in itself is predictable; what astonishes is the extremely personal nature of their anger at the conduct of classical figures (hovering as those figures did between historical presence and moral exempla), almost as if they had been betrayed—which only goes to show how much the classics meant to them. Hugh Swinton Legaré, US Attorney General under Tyler, said that there is "scarcely a great man of Greece whose biography is free from some of those dark stains which no virtues would now be thought sufficient to compensate"; out of their "deep and disgusting moral depravity," the Romans produced the "savage and strange" law of the Twelve Tables (449 BC) (159). An odd conclusion considering that the Twelve Tables are now understood as one of the origins of tort law and constitutionalism. In his *Oration on the Comparative Elements and Dutys of Grecian and American Eloquence* (1834), Thomas Grimké wrote that "the virtues of Jesus Christ [are] . . . the *very reverse* of what are called the heroic virtues of classical antiquity" (164) (my italics)—another exaggerated response, given the use of heroes and heroines as ethical figures by the medieval

[8] Charles Capper and Cristina Giorcelli, eds., *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age* (Madison, WI, 2007); some essays published in *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica: Rivista del Dipartimento di Storia moderna e contemporanea dell'Università degli studi di Roma "La Sapienza"* 1 (2001). Cf. William Stowe's review of *Margaret Fuller* in "Transatlantic Subjects," *American Literary History* 22/1 (2010), 1162.

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Church and Renaissance humanism. For Bancroft, mythology was a "pool of pollution" (165). As Richard argues, in the twilight of Enlightenment rationalism, the Second Great Awakening only heightened the claims for Christianity: "the antebellum evangelical emphasis on faith, defined as an emotional attachment to Christ, as the key to salvation, was incompatible with the cold sense of duty commonly identified with classical virtue" (154). Yet pagan morality as distilled by classical philosophy had distinguished champions, such as James Fenimore Cooper, Horace Mann, and, with more Romantic-minded historicist understanding, Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody. By this time, empirical historical study had begun to undermine neoclassical universals and was yielding such works as Barthold Georg Neibuhr's *Römische Geschichte* (1812–32), John James Blunt's *Vestiges of Ancient Manners and Customs, Discoverable in Modern Italy and Sicily* (1823), and George Dennis's *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (1848).

In the debate over slavery the classics were cited to justify every conceivable position. "Realistic" Aristotle was the "Southern spokesman" (187); "utopian," "socialist" Plato was favored by northern transcendentalists. Southerners applauded Athenian democracy because slave labor "made political equality among the citizens possible" (182). As the occasion suited, George Fitzhugh, the Virginian social theorist whose works were widely popular in the 1850s, reversed the common formulation of the South as Athens and the North as Macedonia: "May not Athenian corruption and effeminacy have grown out of the Greeleyite isms inculcated by Plato, and may not the sound and natural philosophy of Aristotle have formed the character of Alexander and his invincible Macedonians?" (191). His comment that "Slavery is now treated as a positive good, not a necessary evil" (182) seemed a rebuke to the founders from his own state. For their part, northerners appealed to Sophocles and Cicero on natural law; John Dickinson had famously referred to Antigone and the "unwritten law" in the twelfth of his *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* in 1767. *Antigone* became highly popular in the 1840s and was cited by Thoreau.[9] When Emerson exhorted Edward Everett not to support the Fugitive Slave Law (unsuccessfully, as it happened), he recalled their days at Boston Latin School: "His old Scholars cannot but ask him whether there was no sincerity in all those apostrophes to

[9] Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Comparative Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 110. Reading *Antigone* was popular at the time, but not staging it. The first Greek tragedy staged in the United States was *Oedipus Tyrannus* at Sanders Theater, Harvard, in May 1881; in the audience sat Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Julia Ward Howe, Charles Eliot Norton, Phillips Brooks, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Alexander Agassiz, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot, and Yale president Norton.

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freedom & adjurations of the dying Demosthenes: was it all claptrap?" (197). Emerson would have been well served by the historical analysis of Africans in the ancient world by another illustrious alumnus of the school, Frank M. Snowden: "It is important to emphasize that the overall, but especially the more detailed Greco-Roman, view of blacks was highly positive."[10]

While Richard does not neglect the New Englanders, his book is noteworthy for its southern and southwestern perspectives, enriched by a store of anecdotes. Three weeks after the Alamo, the citizens of Nacogdoches, Texas, passed a resolution stating that "Thermopylae is no longer without a parallel" (52); John Quincy Adams sneered at Virginian John Randolph's "scraps of Latin from the Dictionary of Quotations," to which Randolph retorted that he never met "a Yankee who knew anything about the classics" (45); Davy Crockett on a visit to Boston disapproved of Francis Chantrey's statue of Washington and commented, "They have a roman gown on him and he was an American; this ain't right" (109), anticipating Will Rogers.

Although Richard pays some attention to the arts, his book is focused upon social and historical thought. On the other hand, in a penetrating study of the "female world of classicism" from 1750 to 1900 Caroline Winterer investigates material culture and its interaction with cutural ideas. If historical studies of the past thirty years have emphasized the lower classes, hers is history from above, though from a shifted viewpoint. The number of upwardly mobile colonial women rose in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, a new elite that acquired the language and style of classicism to reconcile republican values with the new industrial consumerism. Classicism was "a way to talk about a new world of beautiful things," about politics and other civic issues, but above all "a way for women to talk about themselves" (8). Society had new venues—organs of media, salons, meetings, clubs, and tea tables—where women could gather to discuss the burning issues of the day. "What to say there? And how to say it?" Winterer, who is a fine writer, appreciates the studied ironies of attitudinizing: "In feats of steely self-control, polite people strove to appear languid and easy, restrained and learned" (14).

Four works stand out among the essential reading of classically learned women in eighteenth-century America: Charles Rollin's *Ancient History* (13 vols.); François Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*; and Pope's omnipresent translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* ("They lifted snippets of his verses into their diaries, letters, and commonplace books, and they worked his words and

[10] Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 58.

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images into their needlepoint" (30)).[11] The Calypso episode impressed so strongly because, within a patriarchal world, the goddess embodied "the scope and limits of women's possibilities for action" (37). Thus the man arrives on the paradise island, awakens Calypso's love, and must abandon her in favor of the heroic life. This sequence fits Fénelon perfectly; it does not characterize the Homeric episode. In *Odyssey* V Odysseus is "kept" on Ogygia against his will for seven years, until Hermes conveys Zeus's command to release him. This action sparks Calypso's proto-feminist diatribe on the double standard, on a par with Medea's great speech to the Chorus of women in Euripides' eponymous drama. Strangely, Winterer does not discuss either speech, and one wonders if eighteenth-century women ignored them or kept the discussion under wraps. In Fénelon, Mentor not too subtly pushes Telemachus off a cliff into the sea to break the enchantment. Women, suggests Winterer, might well have seen their private drawing rooms as versions of Calypso's cave; a fresco of her cave adorns Jackson's Hermitage.

The most significant classical icon adopted by republican women was that of the Roman matron, both wife and mother, which enabled them to fashion an ideal self-image. During the Revolution Abigail Adams styled herself Portia in letters to John, who could not bring himself to sign his name as Brutus, the tyrannicide; she could also be Andromache, Penelope, even Lucretia, depending upon mood and circumstance. Mercy Otis Warren, author of *The Sack of Rome* (1790) and wife of patriot James Warren, is both Marcia, the wife of Cato the Younger, and Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus, mother of the Gracchi, and "star in the firmament of Roman matrons" (130). As Plutarch records, when Roman women were displaying their jewels to one another and asked to see Cornelia's, she pointed to her children.

It is a pity that, when Winterer was probing the extent of women's knowledge of Latin and Greek in the eighteenth century, using the male academies as a standard of comparison, she did not have the exhaustive treatment and robust conclusions of Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* at her disposal. Kelley's book appeared only a year before Winterer's. Both would agree that elite women did not always receive an elite education. Though the rise of the female academies brought improvements in the antebellum period (more rapidly for Kelley, less so for Winterer), women remained at a disadvantage, especially with Greek, unless they made an extraordinary effort at self-culture or had an interested parent or sibling. Such was the case with Theodosia Burr, daughter of Aaron, who gave his daughter a formidable education in Latin and Greek. He also presented her with a copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a

[11] The *Iliad* was translated by himself, the *Odyssey* with the assistance of William Broome and Elijah Fenton.

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book that "took American by storm" (115). Theodosia was, in her father's words, "the metempsychosis of Madame [Anne] Dacier" (116), the French scholar and translator of Homer. With help from her brother, who had been sent to Harvard, Sarah Pierce, from a middling background in Litchfield, Connecticut, learned Latin and opened a female academy with two or three students in her dining room in 1792; it eventually had 1,400 students. "As did many other female academies after 1800, the Litchfield school offered Greek and Latin in the desultory way that was a sign of continued ambivalence toward teaching women these languages" (148).

Burr and Pierce were among those women who guided taste in the transition from Roman asceticism to Grecian luxury after 1800. If the "Grecian style" was not all that Greek, it was definitely a style. Emanating from France via London and replete with *turquerie* and other orientalizing features, its American queen was Dolley Madison. The very term "first lady," adapted from *prima donna*, arose after the fact to acknowledge her trend-setting power (111). Within a decade of her ascendency there were Grecian bookcases, Grecian robes, columnar Grecian dresses, Grecian chairs, and Grecian sofas. Winterer is at her best in the analysis of the sofa, made famous by Canova's statue of *Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix* (1808), now in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. "Nothing said 'wealth and taste' faster than a sofa" (126). Still, there is more than meets the eye. Elias Canetti interprets the leathery or velvety softness of thrones and royal chairs as a sign of victimage: sitting on the bodies of one's victims, while others stand and wait.[12] The Grecian style faded from favor by the 1830s, with the return of the ballooning skirts that recalled the eighteenth-century flounces and furbelows. In 1837 Juliana Tappan carried on a battle against the luxurious sofa as a symbol of "fashion and frivolity" when her abolitionist campaign stalled in New York: "Ladies, sitting on splendid sofas, in the midst of elegance, looked at us, as if they never before heard the word *Texas*" (175). Among her forty-two illustrations Winterer happily includes William S. Elwell's 1848 portrait of Dolley Madison, wearing the Grecian shawl and Turkish turban of nearly fifty years before, as charismatic as ever.

Winterer charts the progress of several women who in the 1820s and 1830s borrowed from classical history and literature to support Greek liberation abroad or the feminist and antislavery movements at home. Emma Willard, founder of the Troy Female Seminary in 1821, took up the cause of oppressed Greek women

[12] "Sitting always involves a downward pressure on something which is defenseless," writes Elias Canetti. This pressure is the physical manifestation of the leader, his "weight" of authority measured in degrees of oppression. An "upholstered chair is not only soft, but also obscurely gives the sitter the feeling that he is sitting on something *living*"; that is, a victim. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Continuum, 1978), 389–90.

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and with supporters established the Troy Society for the Advancement of Female Education in Greece in 1833. The "most vocal and influential American woman to condemn modern slavery through classical history" (169) was Lydia Maria Child, a New England baker's daughter who grew up on a farm and was largely self-educated. In 1828 she published her immensely popular *Frugal Housewife*, the first domestic advice book that did not take for granted the presence of servants. Informing her novels, advice books, feminist tracts, and political pamphlets was her knowledge of the ancient world. She was one of two women permitted to use the Boston Athenaeum; Winterer follows her growing concerns by examining her checkout record: William Alexander's *History of Women*, William Cowper's translation of Homer, Madeleine Scudéry's *Female Orators*, an English translation of the historian Josephus. After joining forces with William Lloyd Garrison, Child published *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, in which she praised Athens for treating its slaves well and condemned Sparta which, "in the manner of the antebellum South, trumpeted their own freedom while reducing slaves to the most abject condition" (171) (the book drew fire from close quarters in Boston; the Athenaeum revoked her borrowing privileges). This division informs later work such as her *History of the Condition of Women* (1835), the first of its kind in America, in which modern slavery and the condition of women were closely linked, and *Philothea* (1836), a novel of ideas reviewed favorably by Poe. Women like Child who played a distinguished role in the fight to end slavery were frustrated at being shut out by Congressional bodies. The Fifteenth Amendment of 1870, which gave the vote to African Americans, "left women as the only large constituency of adults to be denied the franchise, and was a mark of the continued suspicion that women's ostensibly softer and more virtuous natures would be sullied by the sordid work of politics" (194).

The tide of the "culture of classicism" stood at the flood in the middle decades of the century, then slowly subsided. What from classicism had previously been drawn in support of public concerns—education, feminism, abolitionism—now became a means for exploring the intensely private world of the self. Winterer chooses the changing fortunes of Antigone to forge a path through abundant materials. The defier of Creon's martial law prominent before the Civil War gave place to the Victorian Angel in the House, a "hyper-feminine, domestic figure, the incarnation of Victorian ideals of true womanhood" (194). Americans explained away Antigone's fiery political conscience as a temporary aberration made under duress in defense of the family. William Henry Rinehart's statue titled *Antigone Pouring a Libation over the Corpse of Her Brother Polynices* (1867–70) is no mere princess but a sublime divinity, an Artemis or even Hera. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's story "The Sacrifice of Antigone," the protagonist Dorothy Dreed, whose name is a cross between deed, dread, and dead, works as laundress and waitress to put herself through a coeducational college. Greek becomes her passion, and she

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enters a classics contest where she beats all the men. However, her exertions have ruined her health and she collapses soon afterward in a Roman *mors triumphalis*. *Antigone* would become the most frequently performed play on college campuses by 1910, when 40 percent of students were women.

Proportionately, Winterer's final chapter and a half are too short for the period that they cover (1850–1900), throwing the book slightly off balance (33 percent of the book's time frame, 13 percent of its pages). Where the Revolution and the Civil War had provided focal points for the first and second half-centuries, Winterer needed a set piece for the third one, say, the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, immigration, the Gilded Age. The perfunctory epilogue, just two paragraphs, also lacks a center of gravity. Winterer glances at Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" (1883), written to raise money for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, though the poem cannot perform what Winterer expects from it. The statue "is as much a tombstone for the vanishing world of women's classicism as she was a beacon for a new America" (207)—is *that* what Lazarus's moving poem is really about? Besides, Winterer had just said that the world of women's classicism did *not* vanish, it had moved inward. Further, the "new America" was already taking shape in the 1880s even as Lazarus was writing. This poem is no elegy.

Margaret Malamud would likely object to the tombstone metaphor. On the contrary, her study, which is the second to appear in Wiley-Blackwell's series titled Classical Receptions, reveals the vibrant presence of Roman classicism at every stage of American culture. Her well-written, well-illustrated book complements those of Richard and Winterer with little overlap. Malamud investigates "how images and narratives of Rome have been adopted and adapted right across American culture, from high-brow to low-brow, and through the course of American history" (4). Then, however, she protests too much that the representations of the Roman past "tell us little about the 'real' Rome but a lot about the prevailing attitudes and perspectives of the times when the representations were made" (4). Actually, these same representations can inform about the real Rome if one will give them a chance, just as Joyce's *Ulysses* can teach us much about Homer's *Odyssey*, or Fellini's *Satyricon* can shed light on lurid Neronian Rome. Malamud chooses moments in American history when representations of Rome were at their intensest and most productive: the Revolution, the antebellum period, but also the Gilded Age, the Depression, the Cold War, and what may be termed the postmodern period, which she illustrates by the trailblazer of themed resorts in Las Vegas, Caesars Palace (1966).

Examined in all three books under review is Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* (1833–6), a series of five paintings that present a single landscape going through the changes from savage wilderness and agrarian peace, to the heights of empire, then decline, and through destruction almost back to the natural

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condition. The series takes its title from a line of verse by Bishop Berkeley, "Westward the course of empire takes its way"; Cole had also seen Andrea Mantegna's series *Triumphs of Caesar* at Hampton Court, and had wandered and pondered in the Roman Campagna. Although there are Indians and wigwams in the first landscape, the third painting titled *The Consummation of Empire* is a Roman emperor's triumph amidst cheering crowds into a marble city that has almost completely excluded nature. Cole's mixing of American natural imagery with the architecture and culture of classical Rome conveys his warning that the cycles of history that brought down Rome could happen in America too. As Malamud summarizes Cole's import, "the popular democracy and the expansionist and commercial pursuits of the Jacksonian era seemed to signal the end of the virtuous American republic and the rise of moral corruption and tyranny" (26).

Passing from Cole's conservative allegory to the Columbian Exposition is to witness the same imagery with its negative charge turned positive. Anyone walking through its White City might well feel that *The Consummation of Empire* "had taken material form" in a celebration of "the benefits of American power and plenty" (150). Late nineteenth-century Washington, DC might have left a similar impression. As Malamud explains, in the Gilded Age the "symbolic elasticity and flexibility of the neo-Roman idiom allowed plutocrats, imperialists, and ordinary Americans to invoke the power, might, and wealth of Rome as a positive model for America even as labor movements and political reformers warned against repeating Rome's collapse" (150). Antagonistic voices included "single tax" Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* (1879), in which he criticizes the Roman aristocracy's land monopoly, and socialist Cyrus Osborne Ward in *A History of the Ancient Working People*, known as *The Ancient Lowly* (1888), in which he placed ancient slaves and modern workers into a single category. Ward's heroes were Tiberius Gracchus, Spartacus, and Jesus (104–5).

The few years that separate World War I and the Great Depression serve as a reminder of how quickly contexts alter stereotypes. Robert E. Sherwood's *The Road to Rome*, a Broadway hit in 1927 (not 1926, as in Malamud), "solves" the historical puzzle of why Hannibal failed to march on Rome when he had the opportunity. In 216 BC (not 218 BC) the young and witty Amytis, daughter of a Roman officer and an Athenian, is bored by her pompous husband (not fiancé), the Roman dictator Fabius Maximus, and scarcely recognizes that Rome is being besieged.[13] Captured by Hannibal's soldiers as she strolls absentmindedly

[13] The satire on the Roman matron Fabia, mother of Fabius Maximus, would make a fine addition to Winterer's catalogue: *Fabia*: "I have lived in Rome for seventy-three years. I have not found it monotonous." *Amytis*: "But, my dear mother, you must remember that you've never been anywhere else. I had the misfortune to be born in Athens."

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through the outskirts of Rome, she seduces the Carthaginian general with her beauty, vivacity, and common sense, convincing him that he gains nothing from warfare but death and destruction. When Hannibal astonishes Romans and Carthaginians alike by deciding to withdraw his forces to Capua, he does not take Amytis with him (as Malamud has him doing, and much as he himself would like to do): "I'm leaving Rome to an enemy that is crueller even than I am . . . I shall allow Rome to destroy itself." If the curtain line is a trifle clichéd, the play breathes the spirit of pacifist idealism; its sophisticated, debunking repartee announces a new era.

Several years later, in the depths of the Great Depression, Sherwood teamed up with George S. Kaufman to write the screenplay for Samuel Goldwyn's production of *Roman Scandals* (1933), in which Hannibal's prophecy has been nearly fulfilled. In this tonic satire Eddie (Eddie Cantor) is a kindly errand boy in West Rome, Oklahoma where a greedy banker, Warren Finley Cooper (Willard Robertson), is opening a Museum of Roman Art. During the inaugural ceremony Eddie, who knows his Roman history, corrects Cooper's mistakes and is thrown out of the museum: "Access to classical art and history is a sign of status and privilege, and separates the well-to-do from ordinary working-class people" (200). Outside Eddie joins a group of immigrants from various European backgrounds in a populist song. Expelled from the city, Eddie dreams he is back in ancient Rome where people act nobly and virtuously. Soon enough, he discovers that Emperor Valerius (Edward Arnold) is as venal and dishonest as any modern political hack, and that West Rome and ancient Rome oddly resemble each other. At last Eddie wakes up in West Rome and proceeds to expose its corrupt officials; the film ends with a "cleansed political system" in an "inclusive and pluralistic" America (201, 204).

The brilliance of the film lies in its blend of vaudeville slapstick, political satire, and ethnic humor: when the half-naked Eddie is being sold on the Roman slave market, he self-advertises, "look at these skins, imported—all the way from Russia." Malamud, who fails to recognize the difference between sentiment and sentimentality, mars her perceptive analysis with a deflating and erroneous conclusion: "the mood and message of *Roman Scandals* are close to the sentimental optimism of the films of immigrant director Frank Capra" (204). A dark undercurrent in all of Capra's films rescues them from one-sided critiques of sentimentality and "Capracorn"; the same can be said for *Roman Scandals*.[14] Malamud might have noted that Edward Arnold, the great character actor who

[14] Cf. John Paul Russo, "An Unacknowledged Masterpiece: Capra's Italian American Film," in Anna Camaiti Hostert and Anthony Julian Tamburri, eds., *Screening Ethnicity: Cinematographic Representations of Italian Americans in the United States* (Boca Raton, 2002), 291–321.

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plays Valerius, is also the rapacious tycoon in Capra's *You Can't Take It with You* (with a screenplay by Kaufman) (1938) and the fascistic newspaper publisher in one of Capra's masterpieces, *Meet John Doe* (1941).

Throughout the book Malamud sees the image of Rome as oscillating between a decadent empire and a virtuous republic, and the empire strikes back in the 1950s and early 1960s with the spear-and-sandal epics: *Quo Vadis* (1951), *The Robe* (1953), *Demetrius and the Gladiators* (1954), *The Silver Chalice* (1955), *Ben-Hur* (1959), *King of Kings* (1961), and many more. Malamud traces the origins of the film *Spartacus* from the novel of Howard Fast, who had joined the Communist Party in 1943, through the script of Fast and Dalton Trumbo, one of the "Hollywood Ten," and on to producer (and lead) Kirk Douglas, director of record Stanley Kubrick (who took up the film after Anthony Mann was let go), and Universal Studios; the ideological wrangling over the proper interpretation of "Spartacus" as a historical figure can only be understood against the backdrop of the Cold War so that, with the various sides weighing in on the issues, ultimately the film has everything except coherence. Yet the fitting conclusion to Malamud's itinerary is not *Spartacus* but Caesar—that is, Caesars Palace and its ilk, which resurrect the visions of Cole and the Columbian Exposition, not in terms of empire so much as emporium, though, as Victoria De Grazia observes, the distinction can be lost in the shuffle.[15] Malamud's perceptive commentary ranges from the gigantism of the "Forum Shops" to the absence of the tiny apostrophe in "Caesars": Jay Sarno, its owner and designer, "believed that the possessive would signify a place for only one Caesar whereas he wanted every visitor to feel sovereign" (239). Malamud is surely right to interpret the absence of the apostrophe as the creation of a mega-category of consumption on an imperial scale. Though the bibliography is already capacious, she would have profited from Giovanna Franci's important study *Dreaming of Italy: Las Vegas and the Virtual Grand Tour*.[16]

Most Americans now receive their understanding of Rome (and ancient Greece) from popular culture: "television programs, historical novels and plays, comic books and toys, advertising and computer games, and above all, film" (253). While Malamud thinks that knowledge of Rome, like that of early American history, is weaker than in the past, what her book actually proves is that knowledge of Rome, however skewered, is probably more widespread at present than at any time in American history, and because of its Hollywood bankability may well be stronger than the knowledge of American history itself. Admittedly, most of the Roman presence is reflective, not constitutive, to return to the original

[15] Cf. Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

[16] Giovanna Franci, *Dreaming of Italy: Las Vegas and the Virtual Grand Tour*, with photographs by Federico Zignani (Reno, 2005).

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terms: popular culture, when it is not rendering the ancient world in cartoon-like simplicities, is exploiting it for the purpose of supporting or condemning contemporary attitudes and issues all across the ideological spectrum. Still, to judge from the three books under review, the classical texts exerted a powerful influence on individuals at every stage of American history. "There remains a lingering anxiety," writes Malamud darkly, "that the linear and progressive historical trajectory that linked democracy, capitalism, and Christianity in a vision of a divinely guided nation may not be true and that the United States today remains susceptible to a cycle of decline and fall of the sort that Thomas Cole painted" (253). I would put it another way. What Richard, Winterer, and Malamud have demonstrated is that each chapter of American history opens with a choice, in which the classics have been a peerless repository of wisdom, solace, strength, and example.

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