

τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου: Reflections on Editorship

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[347] Several weeks after the announcements of this conference were widely distributed at my institution, I was sitting at a basketball game, when a colleague of mine from the School of Education whom I do not see regularly spotted me and rushed up, rather impulsively I thought, with the comment, “My God, Jack, am I glad to see you. I got this thing in the mail and thought you were dead!” A little startling, I felt, but nothing to fret about. As if that weren’t enough, several months later, a graduate student of ours reported a conversation with a counterpart of his from another institution as they rode from Laguardia to the site of the recent APA meetings in New York. “You’re from Buffalo?” he said. “Too bad about Peradotto.” “What do you mean?” my student asked. The reply: “Well, he died, didn’t he?” There’s more. Last month, shortly after the electronic announcement of this conference appeared on the internet, I received an e-mail message from the editors of *Synthesis*, a classical journal inspired, so the editors tell me, by *Arethusa* and published at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata in Argentina. It was congratulations, but at the same time a solicitous, tactfully worded inquiry as to whether anything ominous should be read in the announcement. Its subtext was, or maybe it was my paranoid reading, “Hello. Are you there? And if so, are you in good health?” Do you know how hard it was to resist the temptation to reply “Don’t cry for me, Argentina”?

I was beginning to see a pattern here. So I knew, I just *knew*, that when I arrived here in Athens for the conference, there’d be no name tag [348] for me! Oh, my prophetic soul. And so it was. Our host Nancy Felson-Rubin, warned me there’d be glitches, but this?

Despite all that, I am here to assure you that rumors of my demise are greatly exaggerated. Nonetheless, I must confess that this celebration has left me feeling a bit like Tom Sawyer observing his own funeral from the church gallery. And I must say that it is no small embarrassment to be the center of attention by so many far more distinguished and certainly more productive people. It can only make sense if in fact it is *Arethusa* that is being honored, not one person picked out of the many, all you foremost among them, who have made it what it is. There are many to thank for that, and it is high time I did so. With regrets that I cannot mention all who have had a part in this endeavor, let me go on to name

those who simply cannot pass unnamed. Two are not with us. **John Sullivan**, my predecessor in the editorship, who set a courageous course of action that made it easy for others more timid than he to follow; and **Agnes Mitrision**, typesetter, lay-out artist, and miraculous, all-round factotum, who during her long association with *Arethusa*, but especially in its fledgling years, provided a firm, calm center of patient competence to offset the tardiness, negligence and vacillation of authors, referees, subscribers, and editors. In the same vein, **Madeleine Kaufman**, Managing Editor for over ten years, has served with incredible consistency and weathered the same assaults on understanding and patience. She could a tale unfold of this nasty, cantankerous underbelly of scholarship that, for all our sakes, is best left untold. **Martha Malamud**, for taking on the editorship of *Arethusa*, despite her clear perception of the hard work she was in for. I cannot think of anyone I could have handed it over to with more confidence. **David Konstan**, good friend and strong supporter of the journal from the start, a guest co-editor for its special issue on *The Indo-European Roots of Classical Culture*, a frequent contributor, and a generous referee. We have called upon him, I think, more often than anyone else, and he has never refused. In fact we made him an associate editor to allay our sense of guilt for exploiting him so mercilessly. All the guest co-editors of special issues we have had; I cannot name them all, for they are many. These were the idea-people who also in many cases organized the panels or conferences that *Arethusa* fed on. **Charles Segal**, our most frequent contributor (although what classical journal could not say the same?) and strong supporter—who would ask for a stronger one? He has published ten pieces in the journal, and it is entirely appropriate that his should have been the opening presentation at this conference, for he authored the journal's very first article thirty years ago: volume 1, number 1, page 1: "Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Criticism." If ever the history of *Arethusa* is written, its author will surely see an omen of the journal's future mission there, even though at the time none of us who founded it were entirely sure where we should try to focus its mission. And **Gregory Nagy** is not far behind in the number of pieces published with us, certainly not behind at all in the quality of his contributions. The bottom line is that, with names like these appearing regularly—and the many others whom time keeps me from mentioning, how could *Arethusa* possibly fail?

We must also thank **Kerry Grant**, Dean of Arts and Letters at SUNY/Buffalo, the latest in a series of administrative officers who have vigorously supported classical studies and *Arethusa*. Our host **Nancy Felson-Rubin**, guest co-editor for our special issue on *Semiotics and Classical Studies* (1983), my favorite issue, if I may say so. We are all in her debt for conceiving and personally carrying the brunt of the effort in organizing this gathering.

We have watched the winds of innovation and renovation sweep through our profession, and we should hope that we are not immodest in thinking that *Arethusa's* thirty-year part in that was anything but small. The signs of that innovation are everywhere to see. Older journals are now far less loath to publish pieces that, thirty years ago, were hard [349] to find a forum for, except in *Arethusa*; a fact which, by the way, has already begun to make the task of competing for good copy and of editing *Arethusa* all the more difficult. Another sign of the times is the new edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, published late last year (1996), containing a host of new thematic entries undreamt of or ignored or suppressed or given short shrift in earlier editions, among them abortion, aesthetics, age classes, anthropology and the classics, ancient attitudes to art, breast-feeding even, capitalism, childbirth, contraception, closure, ethnicity, gynecology, homosexuality, labor, literary theory, Marxism and classical antiquity, orality, orientalism, race, sexuality, wages, women. *Arethusa* figures prominently in the bibliographic listings here, especially for literary theory and women's studies. *Arethusa's* two collections on women in the ancient world were the first of their kind, and I am not alone in believing that they set a standard of emulation for later studies.

But we were not bent on innovation for its own sake. Our respect for and insistence on traditional skills were always explicit, not only in our editorial mission statements but in the practice of our contributors. And it puzzles me when what critics we have fail to see that. They should look at our latest theme-centered issue put together by guest co-editors Debby Boedeker and Dave Sider, *The New Simonides* (Spring 1996), which I am proud to announce merited honorable mention in the American Association for Publishing's best special issue competition, and which earned a four-column review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, remarkable indeed, given the reconditeness of the subject.

Inasmuch as I have been for so many years close to the center of all this excitement, someone may ask me "Was it hard to give it all up?" Well, yes and no. To explain my ambivalence I must refer you to the title of these remarks of mine. Philologists, like preachers, are prone to find some pithy text that they hope will encapsulate their larger message. Some people make a lot out of names and titles. In my search for something that might strike to the marrow of what being an editor is about, I first thought to entitle, or at least to subtitle, these remarks "The Shcherbatsky Element," a term I'd found in Gary Morson's latest book,¹ where he is discussing *Anna Karenina*. I don't know how many readers of Tolstoy will remember the Shcherbatskys, but they are a family which Tolstoy creates to represent the healthy alternative to Anna's hectic and ultimately tragic

¹ Morson 1994. 72-73.

quest for a life full of excitement, high drama, and romance. The Shcherbatskys portray real life, at least as Tolstoy saw it, [350] lived in its small and ordinary moments. It is prosaic and undramatic and is lived best when it has no plot, when there is no story to tell. And it sees happiness—this is the part I like—as involving *the ability to make oneself the minor character in someone else's story*. I finally had to reject “The Shcherbatsky Element” as a symbol of my editorship, not because it is an unattainable or undesirable ideal, but because it is, at least for me, a yet unattained ideal.

So I chose instead a more classical text, one you will recognize as an infamous part of Apollo's defense of Orestes the matricide in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where he is arguing—bad biology but effective forensic pleading—that the father, the male is the true parent of a child, the female nothing more than “nurse of the new-sown embryo”: τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου:

The woman you call the mother of the child
is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,
the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
The *man* is the source of life—the one who mounts.
She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps
the shoot alive unless god hurts the roots.²

Now everyone recognizes that as terrible biology and, worse, an insult to half the human race, but I ask you: what more perfect description could you find for $\epsilon\phi$ the role of the editor? A mother so described has every right to be outraged, but it will only lead to unhappiness for an editor to think beyond those humble terms. He or she (τροφὸς, remember, is masculine or feminine) has to be a voluntary nobody, discriminating of course, and adaptable, but still a nobody—with no name tag!—an *outis*, who must be *polytropos* to be an effective *polytrophos*. Some folks think of an editor as a wielder of enormous power, the power to bind or to loose, to accept or reject, to abort or to bring to term. Getting one's kicks that way takes, I think, a funny kind of mind, one that, with any modicum of sense, would soon account the cost in drudgery too high for the return. For one thing, rejection is far more painstaking work than acceptance, when it is done with the tact we owe one another and with the hard, anonymous effort we expect our referees to share with us in suggesting ways of improvement for imperfect work. And as for acceptance, to take someone else's new-sown intellectual seed and bring it to term is ascetic and inglorious but

² *Eumenides* 658-61: Robert Fagles' translation.

wholly necessary work, and the mental competence [351] of anyone who continues to do it for very long, as I have, should be seriously doubted.

Now as much as I admire the appropriateness of this Apollonian metaphor for editorship, I must insist on its limits. Quite obviously, I would not approve its use, as in the *Oresteia*, to excuse an editor's murder. Many people would like to murder editors. As close as I ever came to winding up a murdered editor was twenty years ago, when we were putting together the special issue on *Women in the Ancient World* (1978). I received this submission entitled "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," an essay which went on to occupy a high and what now looks like a permanent place in the bibliography of Aeschylean studies, and to earn more laudatory citations in subsequent classical feminist studies than any other (with the possible exception of another much-admired *Arethusa* article, Marilyn Katz's "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western Attitude Toward Women"). Anyway, call it a bad day, call it temporary madness, call it one of those catastrophic lapses of judgment that only Homeric polytheism can properly explain, but I sent it back for revision, advising its author that I found it prolix, rambling, incoherent, and half again longer than it needed to be! What happened next I leave to your imagination. Fortunately, flowers always spring even from Froma Zeitlin's thunderstorms, *erinys* became one of our most fostering *eumenides*, and a guardian angel removed the veil from my blindness to save me from the worst mistake any editor could possibly make. In spite of all that, it is no secret that among Froma Zeitlin's intellectual legatees, and they are legion, I count myself a charter member.

There were, of course, many times when I was close to becoming killer rather than killed. One in particular I will mention. Ten years ago, we published what became one of our best-selling special issues, *Herodotus and the Invention of History* (1987). Deborah Boedeker was its guest co-editor. It was a double-issue, and so more burdensome in final editing. We bundled up the camera-ready copy, together with the cover design and, as usual, a printer color code for the cover, and sent the whole works off. The cover was to have shown the deep blue background that, thankfully, eventually did appear. But our printer transposed two digits in the color code, and what got delivered was an embarrassingly shocking pink! We call it our Easter-egg issue. We had to send the whole batch back, the only issue of the journal, unless I'm misremembering, which ever appeared late. Footnote: Debby confessed to me—can you believe it?—that she actually liked the first version! And she owns the only other copy of this priceless collector's item. We took some major risks with *Arethusa*, but a pink cover was where the line had to be drawn!

Speaking of risks, some people friendly to the mission of *Arethusa*, and even some not so friendly, have said that it required some rebelliousness to take the risks that resulted in the kind of history the journal has had. I do not think of myself as a rebel, far from it, but when I play the historian, and search for the remote cause of the trait they must be referring to, I think I find it in the most unlikely of places. Indulge me for a while as I take you on a Felliniesque, sentimental journey back to Sister Carmelita's second-grade classroom, St. Columba's school, Ottawa, Illinois, the year 1940. The assignment: to color a familiar picture of a guardian angel guiding a young child safely along a precarious cliff-edge path. It was my first introduction to *real* work—work in the most satisfying sense of the word: it was hard, it was intense, it was focused, and it was *fun*! It gave me pleasure. But there was a problem: scarlet-fever had kept me from nearly a third of the first grade, including the time when I would have been taught the acceptable, conventional iconography of angels, limiting the range of allowable colors to white and pink and perhaps, as a concession, a little light blue, but, you know, not too much. In invincible ignorance of these rules, I set myself the task of using every [352] crayon in my box and, for the angel, to give it wings as lovely as those on the most beautiful bird in my experience: which just happened to be the redwing blackbird that flourished in the sloughs and backwaters of the Fox and Illinois rivers, my childhood haunts. Almost finished, and proud of my work, I still had six unused crayons. So I added a not very realistic rainbow in the background. Yet more heterodoxy was there: I was doing all this, scandal of scandals but by then irremediable, with the devil's own left hand. Sister Carmelita's critique was devastating, quenching the fires of my artistic pride and bringing me to the edge of tears. But at that moment, Sister Andrea, the school principal, was passing in the hall and from the doorway witnessed the scene. Now Sister Andrea, stern as her name, had never been seen to smile. We called her the great stone face and averted our eyes from her beetling, untrimmed brows and mannish jaw. When she entered the room, no one moved, not even Sister Carmelita, diminutive as her name. I froze as she approached *my* desk and cast her deadly gaze on my garish rainbow and redwing blackangel. Sister Andrea crammed an eternity of expectation into a moment. And then, "I like this," she said, and for the merest fraction of a second flashed me what I still believe was a smile. Then, fixing Sister Carmelita with her gorgon glare, she added, "When it's finished, I want it pinned on my door for all the school to see." That moment still glows in memory, Sister Andrea merges with the black angel, and if I could say I have one regret on leaving the editorship of *Arethusa*, it is that, in all the twenty years I served in that post, I could not find a decent pretext to grace its cover with that dark angel, for she broods everywhere over its pages.

For those pages, I have you to thank, *you*, all of you, who conceived them and wrote them.

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