

Classics: Inside Out and Upside Down

Joshua T. Katz

Author's note: what follows is a lightly revised version of the talk I delivered in November 2022 via Zoom at a four-day conference sponsored by the Academy of Athens (Greece): "The 'Future of the Past': Why Classical Studies Still Matter." I wrote about the experience in National Review,¹ and while I stand by my overall assessment, two corrections are necessary. First of all, a video of the conference has now been made publicly available,² and it turns out that I was wrong about one thing: although some participants did indeed walk out and although I received neither an introduction nor questions, there was some clapping, though not from the moderator, who was the only person I could see on my screen. I regret the error. (If you wish to watch the speech as given, it begins at 9:45:37 of the video of the third day; for some reason, my first three slides were not transmitted to the audience in Athens. You will also be able to watch all the other speeches, including those to which I allude.) And second, once my article for NR was in press, one participant at the conference did get in touch with me—with kind words, for which I was and remain most grateful.

In 2014, the main learned society of classicists in North America, the American Philological Association, changed its name to the Society for Classical Studies. The move had been a couple of years in the making and was ultimately put to a vote of the members, who approved it by a small majority.³ I voted against the motion but can't say that I cared deeply one way or the other: despite being a linguist and therefore caring more than some about the power of rhetoric, I rarely

1 Joshua T. Katz, "The Academic Memory Hole," *National Review*, November 30, 2022.

2 <http://www.academyofathens.gr/en/conferences/futureofthepast>.

3 <https://classicalstudies.org/scs-news/tabulation-name-change-referendum>: 603 in favor, 552 against, with 137 formal abstentions and thirteen blank ballots.

Joshua T. Katz is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the former Cotsen Professor in the Humanities at Princeton University, where he was on the faculty from 1998 to 2022.

believe that changing a name of an organization—or, say, a building—will have more than a cosmetic effect. Since I did and do think of myself as both a classicist and a philologist, I did not lose any sleep over the matter.

The name “American Philological Association” had stood since 1869, that is to say, was in place for 145 years. What prompted this change and the concurrent rebranding of the group’s journal, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, as the undefined acronym *TAPA*? The official reason had nothing to do with any distaste for philology. Indeed, as then-president Kathryn Gutzwiller wrote in her message to members in September 2014, “A philological focus is at the core of much scholarship on Greek and Latin texts, and we will continue to take an active role in projects . . . that represent excellent philology in the twenty-first century.”⁴ No, the cause for the switch from “Philological” to “Classical” was the sense that specialists in the Ancient Greeks and Romans needed to do a better job of explaining to the wider world what we do—and this meant ditching the *p*-word. To quote Gutzwiller again,

[W]e recognize that the term [‘philological’] is no longer widely understood and therefore can be a barrier to communication with a broader public. Especially now, when it is so important for us to advocate for the study of Classics and, indeed, of all the humanities, we must strive for clarity in the transmission of our message.

“Especially now,” said Gutzwiller in 2014, but let us acknowledge the irony: at least from an American perspective—and this is the perspective I will adopt—the world, including the world of humanistic inquiry, appears far more fragile in 2023 than it did just nine years ago. There has been a dramatic drop in college graduates with a degree in the humanities since 2012 (almost 16 percent between 2012 and 2020, and as much as 29 percent if certain fields are included),⁵

4 Preserved online at <https://www.collegeart.org/news/2014/09/08/american-philological-association-becomes-the-society-for-classical-studies/>.

5 Robert B. Townsend, Norman Bradburn, “The State of the Humanities circa 2022,” *Daedalus* 151, no. 3 (Summer 2022): 11–18, at 13; Jill Barshay, “The Number of College Graduates in the Humanities Drops

fewer students are earning professional qualifications in the humanities (the number of master's degrees peaked in 2012, the number of Ph.D.s in 2015),⁶ enrollment in humanities courses on college and university campuses continues to decrease, and we have grown depressingly used to expressions of undisguised contempt for the academy in general, and the humanities in particular, on both the left and the right.

Even when the change in name was under discussion, there was concern—justifiable, in my view—about the proposed new moniker “Society for Classical Studies” since who were we to cordon off Ancient Greek and Roman literature and culture as “the Classics”? What about Classical Chinese, Classic Maya, Classical Ethiopic (otherwise known as Ge’ez), Classical (Biblical) Hebrew, and Classical Persian? Are these not exemplars of the Classical, too? Furthermore, if your goal is to communicate with a broader public, what about Shakespeare and Hume and Austen, what about Dante, Montaigne, and Kant, all of whom produced work that are called “classics” in ordinary parlance? And what about the connection, well explored by Edith Hall, between “Classics” and “class”? This is of course a problem with names and, indeed, with words in general: changing nomenclature doesn’t usually change the world so much as transfer to another word the issue one is trying to solve. That said, another thing I haven’t been losing sleep over is that several North American departments have recently changed their name from “Department of Classics” to something more obviously descriptive (Berkeley’s “Department of Ancient Greek & Roman Studies”) or expansive (Reed’s “Department of Greek, Latin, and Ancient Mediterranean Studies”) or indicative of a particular strength (Brock’s “Department of Classics and Archaeology”). It is easy to argue that changes such as these are potentially positive, and I will be watching, as we all should, to see what effects they have, if any.

At all events, in the year 2023, concerns about the scope of the “classical” may seem almost quaint in their naïveté. Not that long ago, Gutzwiller told us that “we must strive for clarity in the transmission

for the Eighth Consecutive Year,” *The Hechinger Report*, November 22, 2021.

6 Scott Jaschik, “Humanities Graduate Education Is Shrinking,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 29, 2022.

of our message,” but one thing classicists are not doing now is transmitting a clear message, even among ourselves, never mind to prospective students, parents, employers, funding agencies, the media, and the world at large. For one thing, as everyone is surely aware, loud voices inside the academy itself have for some years been calling for burning down the field of Classics.⁷

Let me be clear about three things. One: as far as I know, no one who speaks in these terms today wants to play Fahrenheit 451 with Sophocles and Vergil; they are talking about the field of Classics today, not the ancient stuff of Classics itself. Two: Simon Goldhill in his talk earlier in the conference was certainly correct to take a long historical perspective and note that it is hardly a new thing for classicists to speak of Greek in literally fiery terms, though I don’t think Professor Goldhill would deny that the level of anger of the last few years is different from anything we have otherwise experienced in our lifetime. And three: I am aware that not everyone who speaks of burning wants, actually, to lay waste to the field, though some do. (I imagine it was the backlash to the article “If Classics Doesn’t Change, Let It Burn” that led the editors of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* silently to change the title to something anodyne: “A New Path for Classics”; see n. 7.)⁸ But I—whose harsh but defensible metaphorical use of the word “terrorist” led to my effective ostracism⁹ from academia by some of the very same people who claim “burning down Classics” is just a metaphor¹⁰—am concerned (as is at least one progressive¹¹)

7 Donna Zuckerberg, “Burn It All Down?” *Eidolon*, April 29, 2019; Abigail Streetman, “Ulowa Prof: Certain Fields of Study Should Be ‘Dismantled and Burned,’” *Campus Reform*, February 11, 2021; Johanna Hanink, “A New Path for Classics,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 11, 2021 (on the title of this last piece, see below in the text).

8 James Kierstead, “No, Classics Shouldn’t ‘Burn,’” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 23, 2021; Michael Poliakoff, “On Burning the Classics,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 23, 2021.

9 Joshua T. Katz, “A Declaration of Independence by a Princeton Professor,” *Quillette*, July 8, 2020; Joshua T. Katz, “When Blunt Speech Is Called For,” July 12, 2020, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rABB2HzRIXzOuRQJQ6hObVnkI6x3XqPIR3w55H-2gvo/edit> (the piece was solicited by *The Daily Princetonian*, whose editors refused at the last moment to publish it except as a linked Google Doc); Adam Gussow, “Of Dissent and Its Discontents: Beloved Community, the Black Justice League, and the Curious Case of Professor Joshua Katz,” *Princetonians for Free Speech*, June 10, 2022, <https://princetoniansforfreespeech.com/dissent-and-its-discontents-beloved-community-black-justice-league-and-curious-case-professor>; Joshua T. Katz, “The Culture of the Canceled,” *SAPIR 7* (Autumn 2022): 56–61.

10 “Maximus Planudes,” “Burning Classics Down,” January 24, 2021, <https://planudes.medium.com/burning-classics-down-b99e2a4d0c97>.

11 Spencer McDaniel, “The Debate about Classics Isn’t What You Probably Think It Is,” *Tales of Times Forgotten*, February 26, 2021.

about the rhetoric even when it is only half-meant: when we tell ourselves and the rest of the world that the sphere we inhabit deserves or needs to be destroyed—not reformed, but destroyed—we are suggesting that our work is beyond hope, our problems beyond repair. Think ill of Classics if you wish, but such suggestions are dreadfully overblown. They lead to the belief that classical studies, under whatever departmental name, don't matter and that the past has no good future.

There's more. Consider philology, which I and a number of other speakers these days practice proudly. Not even a decade ago, as it was changing its name, the president of the American Philological Association, herself a philologist, spoke of philology as “core . . . scholarship.” But now some of the main proponents of burning down Classics appear to be claiming that philology itself is hopelessly tainted with white supremacy. Take, for example, my former colleague and, before that, extraordinarily gifted undergraduate student Daniel Padilla Peralta, the subject of a polarizing 2021 portrait in *The New York Times Magazine* (written, I regret to say, by another outstanding former undergraduate student of mine): “He Wants to Save Classics from Whiteness,” with the subheading, “[He] thinks classicists should knock ancient Greece and Rome off their pedestal—even if that means destroying their discipline.”¹² Outside the ivory tower, what followed was incredulity, largely in the conservative press¹³ but also from classical liberals and socialists,¹⁴ while most students of the ancient world (though not quite all, thank heavens¹⁵) either applauded on social media or bit their tongue and stayed silent, sensing what might happen to them if they objected, even mildly.

12 Rachel Poser, “He Wants to Save Classics from Whiteness,” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 7, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/02/magazine/classics-greece-rome-whiteness.html> (online February 2, 2021, updated April 25, 2021).

13 Rod Dreher, “Suicide of the Humanities,” *The American Conservative*, February 3, 2021; Andrew Sullivan, “The Unbearable Whiteness of the Classics,” *The Weekly Dish*, February 5, 2021; Rich Lowry, “Are the Classics Racist?” *National Review*, February 9, 2021; [Roger Kimball,] “Canceling Classics,” *The New Criterion* 39, no. 7 (March 2021): 1–3.

14 Jerry A. Coyne, “NYT Article: Princeton Professor Calls for an End to Studying Classics because They Promote White Supremacy. Andrew Sullivan Issues a Strong Critique,” *Why Evolution is True*, February 6, 2021; Sandy English, “New York Times Racist Vandals Descend on Rome and Greece,” *World Socialist Web Site*, February 24, 2021.

15 Shadi Bartsch, “Why I Won’t Surrender the Classics to the Far Right,” *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2021; Daisy Dunn, “Don’t Cancel the Classics,” *UnHerd*, February 25, 2021; Andre M. Archie, “What Makes the Classics Worth Studying,” *National Review*, February 27, 2021.

That was two years ago. Then, in 2022, Padilla and Sasha-Mae Eccleston published an article titled “Racing the Classics: Ethos and Praxis” that speaks of philology as a “fetish.”¹⁶ (The article appeared in, of all places, the *American Journal of Philology*.) According to Eccleston and Padilla, “[t]aking shelter in the objectivizing rigor ascribed to philology allows many members of the field [of Classics] to pretend that the practice un-races its practitioners,” and they write that “the presumptive rigor of philology functioned as much more than a mode or metonym of exclusionary elitism throughout the field. Institutional gatekeepers levied it as a slur that effectively sidelined Black- or Brown-centered methodologies.”¹⁷

Exploring the rhetoric and reality of such claims—and, it must be said, their deep ties to Princeton, a university whose president the U.S. Department of Education castigated deliciously for his patently absurd claims that the institution over which he presides is systemically racist¹⁸—would be a talk or even a book of its own, but I want to push back in the space I have. Some classicists have been racists, yes, but this does not mean that Classics itself is irredeemably white-supremacist; as for philology—which can and should be practiced for and on every tradition—Eccleston and Padilla offer no basis for the inflammatory claim that it is racist, and I have been unable to imagine what evidence for this assertion would even look like. It is true that, like other scholars, philologists bring their personal histories and predilections to their work, so their art—and it is an art—cannot be wholly objective. However, philologists have the goal of objectivity, and that, to my mind, is laudable. What is not laudable is the unsupported suggestion that practitioners of a given discipline are racists, but why should those who wield such rhetoric care? When they create a firestorm that scares the daylights out of normal folk who simply

16 Sasha-Mae Eccleston, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, “Racing the Classics: Ethos and Praxis,” *American Journal of Philology* 143, no. 2 (Summer 2022): 199–218, at 202.

17 *Ibid.*, 201.

18 See the letters from Robert King to Princeton President Christopher L. Eisgruber dated September 16, 2020 (<https://www.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/documents/2020/09/Princeton-Letter-9-16-20-Signed.pdf>) and from Reed D. Rubinstein to Thomas J. Perrelli, the University’s lawyer at Jenner & Block LLP, dated January 13, 2021 (<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/correspondence/stakeholders/20210113-investigation-of-princeton-university.pdf>), as well as two pieces by Sergiu Klainerman, Princeton’s Eugene Higgins Professor of Mathematics: “Princeton University is One of the Least Racist Institutions in the World,” *Quillette*, July 27, 2020; “Princeton’s President is Wrong. The University is not Systemically Racist,” *Newsweek*, September 9, 2020.

want to do their work, they are deploying an all-too-effective play for power. This, too, is very bad for the future of classical studies and, thus, for the future of the study of the past.

Philology is tied to text, and text is tied to language. And language, it seems, is a major problem. It is of course the case that there is much more to the Ancient Greek and Roman world than language. If you don't have respect for colleagues who painstakingly excavate in the Athenian Agora or study Roman portraiture of North Africa or examine waste to learn the diet of soldiers at Hadrian's Wall or study Alice Oswald's contemporary transformations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, you are an idiot. But you are also an idiot if you don't have respect for colleagues who pay close attention to Greek and Latin and their linguistic and philological niceties. It is undeniable that studying a culture without knowing its language—or, in most cases, languages—is to ignore its core and render one especially vulnerable to the charge of having no idea what one is doing. What is happening in Classics is turning the subject inside out—and then, to add insult to injury, hurling abuse at what is now on the outside.

In the spring of 2021, my former department did something truly shocking, namely decide to allow undergraduate students to graduate with an A.B. degree in Classics from Princeton—according to *U.S. News & World Report*, the #1 college in the United States—without having taken so much as a single semester of either Latin or Ancient Greek. Let me repeat that: Classics majors with no exposure to either language over the course of four years. Despite the implications of Professor Goldhill's remarks, no one is objecting that Princeton offers, and has for many decades offered, courses in translation—and, indeed, all reasonable people will view these courses, which are on the books at every American college and university, as a good thing. No, at issue is the credentialing of someone as a classicist who has no knowledge whatsoever of the basic building blocks.

Princeton was not the first university to make a decision of this kind, but it was certainly the most prominent. Naturally, commentators on the right pounced: you won't have any trouble calling up denunciations of Princeton's action in, for example, *National Review* and *The Washington Free Beacon*, as well as in pieces in *Law & Liberty* by the

distinguished Renaissance historian and Latinist James Hankins and in *First Things* and *City Journal* by my wife, an alumna of the Princeton Classics department.¹⁹ Fortunately, *The Atlantic*, which is increasingly left-leaning but still more heterodox than most publications, let the brilliant cultural critic John McWhorter take a whack, and boy did he let Princeton have it. If you're going to read just one article on the subject, let it be McWhorter's "The Problem with Dropping Standards in the Name of Racial Equity."²⁰

Just a second: what's this about racial equity? Read the stories about what Princeton did and you will see that there was what we might in Homeric terms call "double motivation" for dropping the requirement of even the most minimal linguistic competence. One reason is pragmatic: not enough undergraduates in recent years have wanted to study Latin and Ancient Greek, or even take Classics courses in translation, and the department has been hoping that by dumbing things down, it will attract more students. We'll just have to wait a few years to see how well this works, or how poorly. The other reason, however, is sociopolitical: it turns out that one of the many effects of the death of George Floyd is the cancellation of linguistic competence on the grounds that asking a student to take even a single twelve-week language course is racist.

This is not just absurd. It is itself clearly racist. What I would really like to do is republish McWhorter's essay in full, or at least the part in which he skewers my former colleague Josh Billings for suggesting that the change would be useful for a student proficient in . . . Danish. I won't do this, but I will quote the final two paragraphs of McWhorter's screed:

The Princeton classics department's new position is tantamount to saying that Latin and Greek are too hard to require Black students to learn. But W. E. B. Du Bois, who

19 Brittany Bernstein, "Princeton Removes Greek, Latin Requirement for Classics Majors to Combat 'Systemic Racism,'" *National Review*, May 30, 2021; Jay Nordlinger, "Digging the Classics, &c.," *National Review*, June 1, 2021; Aaron Sibarium, "How Corporatization Killed Classics," *The Washington Free Beacon*, June 8, 2021; James Hankins, "Princeton and the Black Classical Tradition," *Law & Liberty*, July 15, 2021; Solveig Gold, "Princeton and the Erosion of Expertise," *First Things*, June 10, 2021; Solveig Lucia Gold, "Rebuilding the Classics," *City Journal*, December 16, 2022.

20 John McWhorter, "The Problem with Dropping Standards in the Name of Racial Equity," *The Atlantic*, June 7, 2021.

taught both Latin and Greek for a spell, would have been shocked to discover that a more enlightened America should have excused him from learning the classical languages because his Blackness made him “vibrant” enough without going to the trouble of mastering something new.

When students get a degree in classics, they should know Latin or Greek. Even if they are Black. Note how offensive that *even* is. But the Princeton classics department’s decision forces me to phrase it that way. How is it anti-racist to exempt Black students from challenges?

And, for good measure, I’ll throw in this from a follow-up piece that McWhorter published on his Substack: “I revile decisions like these when they are made with black people in mind.”²¹

The elephant in the room: although it is my former colleagues in Classics who seem to be saying that people who aren’t white can’t be expected to learn Latin or Greek and although it is a few hundred of my former colleagues who signed the now-infamous “Faculty Letter” of July 4, 2020 to the Princeton administration, in which they made demands that were in blatant violation of Civil Rights law,²² many of them have spent the last few years demonizing me as the outrageous model of the racist classicist for having had the temerity to pen the dissent that led to what I have already described as my ostracism.²³ The allegation is ridiculous; it is turning things upside down for the sake, again, of a power play. I am not a racist, and while it is staggering that I actually need to say this, if you read the hard-hitting series of articles in *Tablet* by Sergiu Klainerman (see n. 18) about what Princeton’s administration did to me, officially and unapologetically, you’ll see why I do.²⁴ Neither, however, am I a proponent of

21 John McWhorter, “Revisiting Classics at Princeton: Exempting Black Kids from Challenge Is Lousy Antiracism,” *It Bears Mentioning*, June 10, 2021, <https://johnmcwhorter.substack.com/p/revisiting-classics-at-princeton>.

22 https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPmfeDKBi25_7rUTKkhZ3cyMICQicp05Re-VaeBpEdYUCkylA/viewform.

23 Katz, “A Declaration of Independence” (n. 9).

24 <https://www.tabletmag.com/contributors/sergiu-klainerman>: three articles by Klainerman alone (“Princeton’s Mixed-up President Discards Free Speech and Demonizes Its Defenders,” April 11, 2022; “At Princeton, One Small Step for Free Speech, One Giant Leap for Censorship,” May 5, 2022; “Eisgruber’s Emails,” August 10, 2022), plus one by him and four other Princeton professors (“Academic

antiracism, that awful, currently fashionable term for neo-racism, an actually racist framework (“woke racism,” McWhorter calls it²⁵) espoused by so many at Princeton and by classicists across the United States and the United Kingdom. I can’t get into all this now, except to continue to acknowledge freely that I have plenty of human failings.²⁶ But I do need to do something I don’t approve of, namely engage in the currently fashionable practice of virtue signaling. Because I need everyone to understand where my comments about Classics and about philology are coming from.

Six points. Point one: I started Greek as a second-semester sophomore in college and took my first formal course in Latin (which I had taught myself as a child) only in graduate school. So do not tell me that it is impossible to start one or both of these languages late and succeed—as, indeed, plenty of Princeton undergraduates did in my nearly twenty-five years on the faculty, a fact in which my colleagues and I used to take great pride. Point two: given what I just said, you will not be surprised that I came to Classics as an outsider. All my degrees are in Linguistics. When I was hired by Princeton, I quickly saw how much I did not know. I had to bring myself up to speed. So, again, don’t tell me that I don’t know what it means to work hard to succeed. Point three: by choice, I taught beginning Greek and Latin more often and, frankly, more successfully than any other tenured or tenure-track member of the department, a couple of whose more prominent and vocally antiracist members would not agree to teach any lower-level courses because doing so took too much time and was beneath their dignity. So, yet again, don’t tell me that I don’t know about the challenges and joys of introducing students to these languages.

Point four: it is true that I care about what is conventionally called Western civilization—an imperfect yet useful label—but I care a lot about other languages, literatures, cultures, and peoples, too. One of my first linguistic loves was Native American languages: Kumeyaay, Navajo, Cherokee, and more. My first publication was on indigenous

Administrators Are Strangling Our Universities,” September 19, 2022).

25 John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion has Betrayed Black America* (New York: Portfolio / Penguin, 2021).

26 Joshua T. Katz, “My Confessions,” *First Things* 316 (October 2021): 9–11.

languages of the American Southwest. So don't tell me that I'm a white supremacist. Point five: I strongly believe that departments of Classics should encourage students to learn languages—both ancient and modern—other than Latin and Greek. How exactly work in these languages should be balanced against the two traditional ones is a subject for discussion on which reasonable people may disagree, but since I was the only member of my former department who routinely wrote articles about and taught over a dozen other languages from India to Ireland and from Siberia to San Diego, it is galling to me that anyone would think that I of all people am trying to constrain the field. And point six: other philologists have sometimes been annoyed with me for pointing out that my main academic specialty, comparative philology, also known as historical/comparative linguistics, is, for all its rigor, an art as well as a science and that it rests on a theory that, while standing the test of time robustly, is not fundamentally unlike some newer and putatively less scientific approaches to language that are more conventionally called “theory.” I believe there is good scholarship and bad scholarship, but never have I believed or claimed that my philological tribe's scholarship is always good (often it isn't) or that the scholarship of other tribes is never good (often it is). So do not tell me that I think what I do is what everyone should be doing.

I began my talk by saying that I lost no sleep over the name change of the American Philological Association to the Society for Classical Studies, which was first discussed in 2012 and effected in 2014. But perhaps I should have lost sleep. While I would not argue that there is a direct line from this change to the idea that philology perpetuates white supremacy or to the discarding of a requirement that a certified classicist possess just a basic knowledge of Latin or Ancient Greek, there is a “red thread.” The decade since 2012 is exactly the period in which Americans—and, in our wake, others across the world as well—have lost our collective mind and sense of civic responsibility in favor of corrosive identity politics. Unfortunately but unsurprisingly, classicists have been swept up in this,²⁷ as have

27 See, e.g., Victor Davis Hanson, “Classical Patricide,” *The New Criterion* 40, no. 1 (September 2021): 14–26.

academics more generally: as the country goes, so goes academia—and, increasingly, the other way around (“we all live on campus now” is Andrew Sullivan’s pithy phrase²⁸), for students of fringe ideas in elite classrooms have grown up and are taking over all our cultural institutions. No one has diagnosed and attempted to remedy the problems of these years better than Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, above all in their important bestseller *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*.²⁹

What is to be done? We cannot immediately fix the world’s problems with Classics, but we can do our part to end the coddling. The first step is to recommit ourselves to the study of Greek and Latin. But there have to be reasons why we should do this, and it’s time for those of us who care to articulate them. My articulation comes in a little piece titled “Why Compare Greek and Latin?” that I published last year in the online journal *Antigone*—a venue that, by the way, I recommend to everyone from neophytes to grizzled professors for spreading reliable information about the ancient world with a sense of wonder and joy.³⁰ (Disclosure of bias: my wife is on the *Antigone* “team.”) It is a short distance from the question “why compare Greek and Latin?” to “why study Greek and Latin together?” which is in turn only a short distance to “what makes traditional classics worth doing?” I gave three answers: first, Greek and Latin share a linguistic and cultural patrimony in the distant past; second, Greek and Latin were spoken at the same time in the wider Mediterranean world; and third, there was a tradition in the literary culture of the one of translating, adapting, and alluding to material in the other.

Different people will naturally rank their interest in these facts differently, as well as point out other facts that interest them, but the trio stands, I think, as a strong justification for the traditional understanding of Classics. Yes, there are other languages that share the patrimony of Greek and Latin, but these two dominated a large

28 Andrew Sullivan, “We All Live on Campus Now,” *New York*, February 9, 2018.

29 Greg Lukianoff, Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

30 Joshua T. Katz, “Why Compare Greek and Latin?” *Antigone*, April 7, 2022, <https://antigonejournal.com/2022/04/livius-andronicus-greek-latin/>.

geographical region for a long period of time; yes, there were plenty of other languages spoken around the Mediterranean, but (again) Greek and Latin dominated; and, in any event, the rendering of Greek material *alla Romana* was undeniably very special.

That's my quick defense of Classics. Beyond this, we need to recommit ourselves to philology—to philology in the widest sense, I mean, rather than to classical philology specifically. In these days of Twitter, sound bites, and attention deficit, it is a truism that people tend to skim and hop from short text to short text rather than read deeply and slowly—and if prior to the talks of Nuccio Ordine, Therese Fuhrer, and Georgios Giannakis these last two days you didn't remember Nietzsche's idea, you certainly know it now: that philology, which in the 1886 Preface to the second edition of his *Dawn* (*Morgenröthe*) the philosopher-cum-philologist beautifully compared to the art of goldsmithing, is, in the formulation of Calvert Watkins, "the art of reading slowly."³¹ Watkins, who was my greatest teacher, added movingly that this is "the definition of philology that my teacher Roman Jakobson gave (who got it from his teacher, who got it from his)." I can only hope that my own students' students will still have philologically minded students to whom to pass on both the sentiment and the practice.

Here's the thing: philology should not be a *recherché* pursuit. In the United States these days—and I note a tie-in here with Paul Cartledge's talk right before mine—there is perhaps no issue that works people up more than the status of the Constitution and the rulings of the Supreme Court. Sometimes obscure in sense, sometimes infuriating in effect, these and certain other texts are the bedrock of our society. As I wrote in an essay published a year ago in *SAPIR*, not to read and not to engage with them is to give up on responsible citizenship.³² And yet it is abundantly clear that many who weigh in on the issues of the day, especially in 140 or 280 inflammatory characters, have only secondhand knowledge of what they actually say, often from a single media source: they do not consult the documents

31 Nietzsche's words may be found conveniently at http://nietzsche.holtof.com/reader/friedrich-nietzsche/daybreak/aphorism-5-quote_50935128c.html#; for Watkins, see his "What Is Philology?" *Comparative Literature Studies* 27, no. 1 (1990): 21–25, at 25.

32 Joshua T. Katz, "The Case for Secular American Yeshivas," *SAPIR* 4 (Winter 2022): 68–73.

themselves, not to say take the time to read them carefully so as to assess the arguments and range of opinions as dispassionately as possible. This is bad news, and close readers of all stripes, including classicists, should speak out against it and model good examples of doing otherwise. This is not to prescribe one mode of reading: read as a feminist, if you will, or read as a Foucauldian, as a linguist, as a decolonizer, as an originalist. For that matter, read (as I have done) as a “pataphilologist.”³³ But read slowly and acknowledge your lens—and acknowledge the existence and at least potential validity of other lenses.

A sign of the dire situation in which Classics finds itself: in her January 2022 valedictory address as president of the Society for Classical Studies, published this past fall in *TAPA*, Shelley P. Haley states that Princeton’s “revised requirements for an undergraduate [Classics] major,” which include the dropping of any language requirement, “provide a roadmap for an inclusive approach to the study of the ancient world nationally and globally.”³⁴ Indeed, the main purpose of Haley’s remarks is to extol the many small liberal arts colleges that beat Princeton to the punch in “develop[ing] their programs along these lines as much as a decade or more ago,” and she calls it “disconcerting” that “the Princeton department needed to justify their internal revisions to their undergraduate curriculum” after “angst and anxiety among outsiders ran high.” Alas, her comments do not come as a surprise since she—the dedicatee of Eccleston and Padilla’s article cited above (n. 16)—is someone who “stress[es] that our study of the ancient world is skewed due to an epistemological framework of white supremacy and patriarchy” and speaks of “grappl[ing] with [our] white supremacist, patriarchal, and colonizing history.”³⁵

Haley continues: “The shifting demographics of the United States and the ‘arc of the moral universe’ demand that we strive to make our curricula and our classrooms more diverse.”³⁶ Perhaps. But if we

33 Michael D. Gordin, Joshua T. Katz, “The Walker and the Wake: Analysis of Non-intrinsic Philological Isolates,” in *Pataphilology: An Irreader*, ed. Sean Gurd and Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei (n.p.: Punctum Books, 2018), 61–92, and the other chapters in this volume.

34 Shelley P. Haley, “Sites of Salvation; Classics and Small Liberal Arts Colleges,” *TAPA* 152, no. 2 (Autumn 2022): 285–94, at 288.

35 *Ibid.*, variously 287, 288, and 289.

36 *Ibid.*, 287.

do this at the expense of linguistic and philological expertise—at the expense of caring whether our students are capable of truly reading texts, even in English, never mind in Latin and Ancient Greek—our cavalier attitude toward both past and present will unquestionably lead to the intellectual shortchanging of future generations.

Though Haley of course does not mention it, there is one strong reason for optimism: the ongoing and likely continuing exit from unionized K–12 public education, or what James Hankins calls “Edexit.”³⁷ Colleges and universities that dumb things down are going against one of the most remarkable recent shifts in quotidian American life, namely the distaste, especially since the arrival of Covid, that parents are showing for rank-and-file public schools. It is difficult to be happy about the collapse of our system of public education, but at the same time it is a sign of civic vitality that so many people are voting with their feet: exploring, founding, fostering, and advocating serious alternatives that do not break the bank. In addition to widespread interest in homeschooling—especially among black families, where the percentage of homeschooling households went up from 3.3 percent to 16.1 percent between 2019 and 2021 (!)³⁸—there has been a sharp rise in enrollment in charter schools, many of them classical schools.

To be sure, a significant number of classical schools are classical Christian schools rather than charter schools, but I like to think that ever more non-believers will see why they should build secular institutions and homeschooling curricula on the same basic model, which emphasizes “the three Rs,” the liberal arts, and linguistic and philological precision—including, often, in Latin. A jewel in the classical education pantheon is Anika Prather. The founder of the classical Christian Living Water School in Old Town Alexandria, VA, and an outspoken supporter of the importance of classical studies and Great Books for the black community, Prather is, most recently, the author, with Angel Adams Parham, of *The Black Intellectual Tradition: Reading Freedom in Classical Literature*, which I commend to everyone.³⁹ The

37 James Hankins, “Edexit: We Shouldn’t Let the Education Crisis Go to Waste,” *Law & Liberty*, November 1, 2021.

38 <https://www.time4learning.com/homeschool/homeschoolstatistics.shtml>; *ibid.*

39 Angel Adams Parham, Anika Prather, *The Black Intellectual Tradition: Reading Freedom in Classical*

bottom line is this: unless they or their parents are blinded by the prestige, well-educated students at schools like Prather's are unlikely to choose to continue their studies at elite institutions that show scorn for Plato and Seneca. And this means that the day may not be far off when the president of the Society for Classical Studies sings a rather different tune.

I began with the American Philological Association and have ended up in America again, with the Constitution, *TAPA*, and the classical education movement. This is appropriate in part because my job in my new position at a think tank in Washington, D.C., the American Enterprise Institute, is to worry about things other than the aorist passive subjunctive. But I am not making nationalistic claims. The implications of my remarks are broad and, while things have indubitably gone drastically wrong in the United States in the past decade, by no means uniquely American. I hope we can come together to agree that Classics is worth saving, whatever name we wish to give our discipline and our departments and whatever wider ambit we may wish for it to have; to agree that Latin and Greek are worth knowing and worth encouraging others to know; and to agree that, in every language, slow reading—philology—is a boon. In short, we owe the dark past a bright future.

Literature (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2022); also Anika Prather, "The Classics Are an Instrument of Freedom for Black People," *National Review*, February 20, 2022; Christopher Perrin, Anika Prather, "The Post-COVID Classical-education Boom," *National Review*, September 22, 2021.