

CHSSJ Fall 2009 Summary



The fall 2009 Classical Humanities Lecture Series was a great success. I wish to thank our longstanding and new members for their care and generosity, the invited speakers for their brilliant scholarship and spirit of dialogue, and the Stockton faculty and students who were able to attend. Each group in their specific capacity contributed to a vibrant sense of community. The three lectures packed the G-208 seminar room to capacity. Extra chairs were borrowed from the student lounge and very little of the treats and beverages remained at the end. While this counts as a sign of a healthy spectrum, the lectures created the prism for our enlightenment.

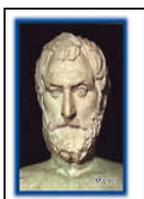
The fall 2009 CHSSJ Lecture Series consisted of three lectures. The first was delivered by our very own Prof. Fred Mench, Professor of Classics, Emeritus, from Stockton College, on Saturday, September 26th. The theme of investigation was "The Pygmalion Theme from Ovid to *Lars and the Real Girl*, or In Whose Image: Pygmalion and Galatea, Then & Now". The second lecture was delivered by Joshua Delpech-Ramey, Visiting Assistant Professor, Rowan University, on Saturday, October 24th. The theme was "Rumor Has It: Plato's Other Politics of Truth". The third lecture was delivered by Rebecca S. Goldner, Doctoral Candidate (ABD), Villanova University, on Saturday, November 21st. The theme of investigation was "'A Woman's Game to Me' On Sarah Ruden's new translation of Vergil's Epic".

What follows are my reflections on the themes and presentations from the fall 2009 Classical Humanities Lecture Series. Consider these as visions and thoughts taken from my notes, and above all as a tribute to each of the speakers. I will identify the lectures as: Pygmalion (Mench), Plato (Delpech-Ramey), and Virgil (Goldner).



From Pygmalion to Virgil, with Plato in the middle: from the gaze, to translation as expectancy, to the apocalyptic (calling aside) of both an immemorial rumored past and sign-posts of a future emerging from our fabled pedagogies. The stories from Ovid, Plato, and Virgil sketch a fair picture of our cultural workshop. Teach us; we are enchanted children. Education is Pygmalionesque where the teacher and the taught become indistinguishable text and metatext. We are in love with the aura; we call forth ghosts, and in this justice arrives as the legendary and languorous creation of authority. We are the sculptors of the very ideals that move us (Pygmalion) and fall for their anatomy, the politics of bone and flesh in the play of the everyday. Behind this gaze we slowly discover our perspectives, we read in authors what authors us (Virgil); these are lines from our own experience and the conflicting demands, or our anguish and joys in the perpetual creation and healthy tension between reader and writer. We re-author aura. There, in that chasm we are wrought, charmed (Plato) prophets of metamorphoses. Surrounding us in this enchanted workshop everything begins a dance of creation, not one caress fails to awaken rock, not one sigh betrays the breath of life taken from print and paper, not a single memory holds itself back from recapitulating the avalanche of authorial intent; or at least it is rumored. And so is the legend we add to our maps.

To tell the truth (Plato) we always stand devoted to the relation of translation (Virgil), and when we observe failings and flaws, set to work like diligent sculptors, recreating and asking even for it to speak; a Buonarroti turn (Pygmalion). As Nisus asked: "Di addunt hunc ardorem mentibus? an sua dira cupido fit Deus cuique" (do the gods add this ardent desire to our minds or does one's own ardent desire become a god to each?) (Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book Nine, 175). The lines drawn from the three lectures leave us swaying between these possibilities, though I would agree with the latter. Though there was no pre-set theme for the fall 2009 CHSSJ Lecture Series an attentive spectator present at all three lectures could not make sport of the lesson that is left for us to carry on, a veritable calling out, and 'calling aside' (*apocoleo*) of the transformative powers of encultured bodies. We are in the flesh what ideals make; we are read as our stories in creative repetitions of the past where voices mix: author, translator, theorist; and faced with these sounding tones we seek to project what is beyond representation, what perhaps might meet us up ahead, but realize that that too is a mark on the textual canvas of created meaning, even if only read as Braille/brail.



Mench, Delpech-Ramey, and Goldner allowed us to savor so much of what makes us tick. **From Ovid** there is the excitement of loving one's work and of working through an unmentioned, deeply libidinal, and ever present agalmatophilia in the examples of the Pygmalionesque gives us pause. Where, we might ask, would the theorist emerge of these varied and multi-media examples of the fear of once sated flesh, and of the wild hopes of an uncarved block? What, in the examples of the Ovidian inspired theme, tells us of the laws and legends that the artists within must carry out?

Behind the gaze the artist too is caught in something that veils itself in being shown. Are we able to read the philology of emotions while the course in question, our very education, is what races through our veins? What Mephistophelean pen may write this ritual? It is culture that becomes the quarry from which each of these questions find figures in the block; for culture is nothing more than Pygmalionesque. **To Plato** then, and perhaps more, to Plato's figures, where the charms are many, chains of charms, scenarios, meetings, characters, and the references weaved into each dialogue as if made for counting one's blessing that there is indeed something, many sums of things as rumor would have it, rather than nothing. The plenitude of what is worth hoping for is truly apocalyptic, and in asking for how Plato's Socrates (or Socrates as prismatic figure) finds his way through this plenum is how we may trace fables that will continue

to enchant. Authority is lent to the explorers, part blind, part passionate, seers and masters of “brail”, of those ropes that pass through the pulleys of culture while the ship of state allows a life to prepare for furling. Justice arrives as the constellation of fables that drive us to discover, to settle, and to map out in reverse what projected the voyage. Slowly but surely the “I” becomes the *Wii*. Our stories are holographic Galateas, canvas set behind us as we paint our way, arms stretched back, blindly from the future. **And Virgil?** A universe of what falls between war and love, of poem as reflection and voices, of finding one’s will in a dialogue with the text, of tests of devotion, patience, and passion in translation. For this, Virgil’s epic pushed as far as an example of rumored bibliomancy, *sortes virgilianae*, is within reach, and seen in how translator (and reader) engaged in the rhythm and realm of what is so human, leaves nothing behind, nor forsakes their own experience, made all the more beautiful for being carved from the veins of conflicting demands. To work with these veins, and yet create a harmonious whole, is to create what is alive. This is what the three lectures inspired and allows us to accomplish through the spirit of the classical humanities

Prof. Lucio Angelo Privitello, Ph.D. CHSSJ President. November 29th, 2009.

