

# MÉAI NUCESQUE

A Newsletter for Classics at the University of Dallas

## Grace Starry West Memorial & Fr. Placid Scholarship

It is not often—among the piles of papers, translations, and recitations—that we classics students get to take the time to reflect on the history of our department. This of course is slightly ironic, seeing as we are the students most dedicated to the diligent, slow process of becoming intimate with the ancient west. This semester afforded us the refreshing opportunity to pause and look back upon our own history on two occasions. First, we had the memorial for the long-respected and well-loved Grace Starry West. The first professor hired to the department by Fr. Placid (of whom we will speak more later) she faithfully mentored countless classics students over more than thirty years. To celebrate her remarkable life and career, the entire university was invited to attend several events in her memory. A display of her publications was set up in the library, and, on Oct. 24, after memorials by Dr. Davies, Dr. Sweet, and the modern languages' Dr. Wilhelmsen, UD grad and Assistant Professor of Classics at U Chicago Dr. Emily Austin gave a talk titled "The Other Iliad: Narrative Reversals and the Human Condition." Only a few weeks later, we had yet another opportunity to gather for both celebration and memorial. An anonymous alumna from the Classics Department endowed us with a new scholarship in the memory of our department's founder, Fr. Placid. One of the Hungarian Cistercians to escape the Iron Curtain and flee to Dallas, he was a master of languages, both classical and modern. One of the many stories about Fr. Placid shared by Dr. Sweet that night—after an opening speech by President Hibbs recalling his own tutelage under Fr. Placid—claimed that as the Russians descended upon Hungary, Fr. Placid taught himself Russian in a mere six weeks, and, until his own escape, was a teacher of Russian while also maintaining the classical tradition in secret. After both President Hibbs and Dr. Sweet had concluded their memorials, Abbot Peter Verhalen from the Cistercian Abbey crowned the event with his own recollections of the remarkable character, skill, and devotion of Fr. Placid. Such a remarkable gift could not fail to spark an occasion of celebration and remembrance among the Classics faculty and students. Such a celebration—so full of cheer and good tales—reminds one that an occasion of feasting, song, and storytelling is, according to Odysseus, the most beautiful of times.

## Classics Departmental News

**Congratulations** to our new Eta Sigma Phi members, who were inducted on November 7: Samuel Korb, Patrick Andrews, Sam Skinner, Rose Dougherty, Diego Brand, Emma Callahan, and Quinn Kelsch.



*Dr. Sweet delivers his speech at the celebration for the new Fr. Placid Scholarship.*

## Karl Maurer Translation Contest: *The Georgics : IV 464 - 506*

*By Dr. Teresa Danze*

This passage occurs near the very end of Vergil's second work, the *Georgics*, a poem that Dr. Maurer himself was translating in the final years of his life. This didactic epic in four books delights in the farmer's labors, aiming to teach his patron, Maecenas, such things as when to till the soil and how to keep bees. Tucked within this purported endeavor, however, are beautiful metaphors and mythical allusions that tempt the reader to recall the stories and activities associated with poetry's ultimate aim – pleasure in times of leisure. In the passage chosen for this year's Karl Maurer Translation contest, a passage often called an "epyllion", a little epic, we hear the tragic story of the musical enchanter, Orpheus, and his beloved wife, Eurydice. This narrative explains to Aristaeus why his bees have died and elucidates for Maecenas the origins of a (fantastical) method of spontaneously generating bees from the carcass of a bull. A bittersweet tale, it little resembles the remainder of the poem in its subject matter, but it taps into themes of love and loss found in glimpses throughout the work. Bonam fortunam, discipuli et discipulae!

# Alumna Spotlight

Abigail Palmer lives in St. Helena, CA with her husband, John, and three children. In addition writing and teaching, she assists John in the operation of their supplement and health food store, Nature Select Foods.



## A Career in Classics: More Than Imagined

*By Abigail Palmer, Guest Contributor*

I graduated from UD with a degree in Classics in 2001, almost twenty years ago! Since that time I've worked in the discipline of Classics in more ways than I could have anticipated. At the time of graduation, I was comfortable with the idea of being a teacher, and I think that many Classics students decide that this career path would be a good one for them. Providentially, I've not only been given teaching opportunities over the years, but the chance to write, translate and help develop language web tools. I am thankful for my career in Classics, and for UD and the Classics department there for giving me a great foundation.

I began to teach Latin, Greek, and ancient history and literature at the high school level in 2001. Even after those first few years of teaching, which are challenging, I realized that I really did enjoy teaching these subjects! I've continued to teach Latin, history and Greek to a variety of age groups over the years, though I did take a break from teaching to go to graduate school.

After receiving my Masters in Classical Philology from Fordham, I was asked to help develop curriculum for Kolbe Academy's high school Ancient Greek and Roman history courses. This was another rewarding experience, as I was given the opportunity to create supplementary materials for the ancient primary sources that Kolbe used for history and literature (because it can be a bit hard to get through Thucydides on your own when you are a freshman in high school). I've gone on to then teach these courses online for Kolbe Academy, and it is wonderful to see students use and benefit from these materials.

As I was teaching and writing I decided to start writing on my own. Sometimes, when writing about modern topics, I've found inspiration in Classical texts. That's one of the benefits of the Classics: it gives the reader very old perspectives on age-old ideas, and in our age of amnesia and distraction, these perspectives become new and refreshing. In addition, our own times can become wearying, and we are too close to its problems. A Classical text can be a refuge from the news cycle, and put our problems in perspective. So, there's my advice for surviving the coming election year.

As I've taught and written, I've also translated a bit. I've lived and worked in the Napa valley for most of my adult life. Ovid Vineyards is one of the wineries in here that takes its inspiration from the Classical world. Its founders not only admire the works of the ancient Roman poet, but are significant supporters of Classical language study, archaeology and education. They asked me if I could translate quotations from Ovid regarding wine, food, love, friendship, farming and nature. So I combed his texts for these references and translated them. It was a project I wished would not end, and I enjoyed seeing these quotes on the labels of Ovid Vineyard wine!

As I look back at all that I have been able to accomplish and the rewarding career I've had in Classics, I have to give a great deal of credit to UD and the Classics department. The standards of the professors I worked with were high, and while I groaned at the time, their efforts and requirements turned us into scholars. I will always remember talking about irregular Greek verbs with another student in graduate school. He was trying to remember one of the principal parts, and lamented that he didn't know it. I told him that I had a professor (you can guess who) who made us memorize all of the most common irregular verb principal parts. I still had them tucked away in my brain. He said, "I wish someone had made me do that." And while not every Classics student goes on to use those irregular verbs, we all benefit from the perseverance, adaptability and intellectual challenge that Classical language studies demand of us.

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**Some further links for this issue:**

**Grace Starry West Memorial:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJNs2glkOXA>

**Fr. Placid Scholarship:**

<https://udallas.edu/news/2019/anonymous-donor-endows-classics-scholarship>