

Late Antiquity: Before and After [1]

(A [response to this address](#) from Steven Willett is also available)

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' . . . regarder, c'est-à-dire oublier les noms des choses que l'on voit.' [2]

1. Dante on the APA

I am in the third circle, of eternal,
hateful rain, cold and leaden,
changeless in its monotony.
Heavy hailstones, filthy water, and snow
pour down through gloomy air.
The ground it falls on reeks. [3]

I cannot read these words from the sixth canto of the *Inferno*, where Cerberus torments the gluttons, without feeling anew the sensations of my first experience of the annual meetings of the American Philological Association. In Washington, D.C., in 1975, the grave and reverend elders of our tribe were warm and dry, ensconced in their rooms and suites in the Hilton, while the placement service offices were reached across six lanes of traffic in the smaller, fustier Sheraton. The downtrodden of the earth, for that's what we knew we were, were condemned to slogging back and forth across that street, in what I recall as endless Dante-esque precipitation, to see whether our numbers appeared on the blackboard of the placement office. I was one of the more intellectually challenged candidates that year and so did not realize that I was expected to erase my number when I collected a message. My number, accordingly, was always there when I went to look, always miraculously in the same place, but the hopes thus raised were not always met with a promising invitation.

Interviews then were much like interviews today, though sometimes more casually done and often taking place in cramped and discomfiting hotel bedrooms. I have remembered in after years one particular conversation with a distinguished senior scholar, on a sofa in the lobby of the Sheraton. It quickly became obvious that the position in question was not right for me nor I for it, and my interlocutor was refreshingly candid and direct. He spoke of my strengths and weaknesses in a way that both sobered my self-absorption but at the same time -- by his candor and kindness -- left me thinking that I might indeed have a future in this profession. I have thought of that conversation with gratitude many times over the years, and so it was a particular pleasure in the fall of 2003 to see that my interviewer had been awarded the National Humanities Medal and it is a pleasure now to have an opportunity to thank publicly and to salute Professor Frank Snowden.

The meetings that year were carried out according to a program printed over 10 pages comprising the titles and authors of 86 papers for public reading. [4] (Today, by comparison, the number of such papers approaches 400, though the meetings are still limited to three calendar days.) Of those 86 papers, 10 were to be delivered by

individuals whose names indicated that they were female, while a small number of names were epicene or ambiguous: so perhaps 1 of 8 papers owned female authorship. Where now we have almost half the program filled with special seminars, subgroups, and the like, in those days a single program slot, 1:30 p.m. on the second day, was set aside for a total of ten such groups to meet (mainly without published programs). One hint of things in the air and to come was the appearance then of a "Panel of Views of Sexuality and Gender Differentiation in Antiquity, sponsored by the Women's Classical Caucus," but there was no cross-dressing on the program in those days nor (to the best of recollection) among the attendees.

I saw those meetings through the eyes of someone with a keen interest in the state and fate of post-classical studies among the Greco-Latin philologists, an interest that has persisted. In the course of the APA's history, there have been till now a handful of presidents, for example, who were mainly or wholly identified with post-classical (but only Latin) studies: E.K. Rand was president in 1923, two years before he helped found the Medieval Academy of America, and I know only three other individuals since to have held elective office in both societies. B.L. Ullman served as APA president in 1935, Harry Caplan in 1955, Herbert Bloch in 1969, and Harry Louis Levy in 1974. The presidents since 1974 have not included any individuals working mainly or wholly in post-classical subjects, though election of a president with a last name under the alphabetical sway of a glottal consonant (Koenen, Kaster, Konstan, and Gaisser) is often a marker of at least some significant scholarly interest transgressing the traditional chronological boundaries.

In the mid-1970s, the scholarly domain now known and praised widely as 'late antiquity' was mainly *terra incognita* to the APA. I never saw in those days a position announcement that spoke of late antiquity as a preferred specialty. Those few of us who wanted to find such a place knew to look for positions in "medieval Latin", which did occur from time to time. In 1980, indeed, five such positions were announced, to much amazement. But this meant that one was being hired into a slightly eccentric position in the department, sometimes looked upon askance by colleagues wishing they had another line in the classical periods. When I interviewed in 1980 for the position I eventually took at the University of Pennsylvania, the critical interview question was "But can you teach a service course in medieval Latin for students of medieval literature on a regular basis?" and since I knew that the correct answer to any interview question of the form "Can you teach X?" is "dear me, yes, I've been dreaming of nothing less for years," that was what became of me. For years at Penn I taught such courses, to small and dwindling audiences as fewer literature students in other departments found it necessary, alas, to spend appreciable time on Latin.

In those days, there was one regular session at the APA meetings that transgressed the chronological boundaries, but it was members-only, for the dozen or two attendees from the North American Patristics Society. I remember that room from the first meeting as one that was very nearly 100% male in attendance and indeed males sporting a larger number of clerical collars than one would see in ten years' attendance at our meetings nowadays. In 1980, NAPS had gone off to start its own regular meeting, now held

annually in May in Chicago, and it now flourishes with modest overlap in membership with APA, grows contentious betimes worrying whether 'patristics' is the right word for the society's name (just as we fret about 'philological'), and publishes one of the most interesting new scholarly journals of recent years, *The Journal of Early Christian Studies*. [5] In the same period, the Byzantine Studies Association was beginning its long series of annual meetings, moving from one campus to another, but has never had any association with the APA.

APA meetings in the 1970s comprised program sessions of extremely heterogeneous material, but there was as hint of things to come a single session on the 1975 program devoted to late antique topics. Of the five speakers, one has left classics and runs a museum in South Carolina; two are still in the same academic positions they held then but have not published in the field to my knowledge; one has vanished from even the Sauron-like all-seeing eye of Google; and the fifth was myself, now on my eighth academic employer and hoping to keep a job for a few years. Two of the papers were historiographical, two were literary, and one epigraphic. I remember the room as cavernous, dark, and empty. When I finished my remarks on 'The Date of Cassiodorus' *Gothic History*' a heavy silence settled until the session chair, past president Harry Louis Levy (just then translating Lucian, having recently published with the APA the commentary on one of Claudian's invectives that he had made the subject of his dissertation forty years earlier, Levy had for many years been a dean at CUNY), asked why it was that one heard nowadays only of Jordanes and not Jornandes. Mommsen's edition with the corrected spelling had appeared in 1882.

2. Disciplines in motion [6]

I suppose generations of graduate students had found and read to each other from under the table the iconoclastic judgments preferring later to classical Latin in J.K. Huysmans's *Against the Grain* [7]: "Among other authors, the gentle Virgil, he whom school ushers name the Swan of Mantua, presumably because he was *not* born in that city, appeared to him as one of the most terrible of pedants, one of the most dismal twaddlers Antiquity ever produced: . . . his Aristaeus blubbering over bees, his Aeneas, that weak-kneed, fluent persona who stalks, like a shadow figure at a show, with wooden gestures behind the ill-fitted and badly oiled screen of the poem, set him beside himself with exasperation." The supreme maturity of the Latin language Huysmans's character judges to have been reached by Petronius, but his real affection is reserved for the 'poets of decadence' through the sixth century. Few would share his enthusiasms in that way (though it is worth asking why), but some of us were just edging out of the closet to ask where our certainties had come from.

Though Alois Riegl's work on art history [8] had brought the category of *die Spätantike* into play, the emergence of 'late antiquity' into the light of Anglophone scholarship had begun seriously in the 1950s. [9] Three founding fathers had the greatest influence, though there were subordinate players. Arnaldo Momigliano and Ronald Syme, between the 1950s and the late 1960s, had done serious and provocative work themselves and began encouraging their most promising students to do likewise. In the same period,

A.H.M. Jones was writing his magisterial *The Later Roman Empire* in three volumes (waggishly called "The Jones Report on the State of the Roman Empire") and founding the project that became *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, but the enthusiasm was much slower catching on in Cambridge than in Oxford. Of no less importance was the contribution of Frank L. Cross, who founded the quadrennial Oxford Patristic Congress in 1951, which would eventually bring 600 scholars of all European nations to Oxford for a week of extraordinarily rich discussion. Late antiquity had played a part in Anglican consciousness from the 19th century Oxford movement forward, and it happened that the young Dean of Christ Church in the 1960s, Henry Chadwick, was himself emerging as a leading scholar and thinker within that community and he and his colleagues in the theology faculty were generous and inclusive impresarios in those days; the fifteenth congress in that series will take place in 2007.

An outwardly lesser figure of some influence in this period was the legendary Chips-like Oxford classics don C.E. Stevens (aka "Tom Brown Stevens" for his ruddy traditionalism). Author of a monograph on Sidonius Apollinaris in the 1930s, he was famous for his indefatigable tutorial schedule at Oxford and was said to have had one term's improbably full roster of obligations bronzed as a memento. I have heard two distinguished scholars tell in literally identical words how he took them aside and told them that they should devote themselves to late antiquity. One says he inferred that because Stevens was a scholar of minor weight, he should ignore the advice and he is now well known for scholarship on impeccably classical canon authors; the other says he took the advice on the spot, and he is now one of the most prolific and highly regarded members of our own association.

In this increasingly volatile mix of scholarly impulses, the decisive spark seems to have been struck in 1957/58 with a series of lectures sponsored by Momigliano at the Warburg Institute and later published under the title *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963). In particular, Mark Vessey has suggested that it was Henri Marrou's talk on Synesius that struck that spark in the mind of a young fellow of All Souls attending the series regularly, Peter Brown. [10] Brown was just finding his feet as a scholar, and would meditate such grand projects as a Braudelian history of the Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Justinian. [11] He settled, as is well known, on the life and work of Augustine and his biography [12] was the kind of transforming book that remakes its subject and brings the subject to a much wider audience. But Brown's decisive intervention came with a less apparently ambitious book, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971), which appeared as a semi-textbook, semi-popularization in an illustrated series edited by Geoffrey Barraclough (who Brown thinks may have suggested the title). In the same year, Brown published an epochal article, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," [13] which has had a long influence. It is the rare scholar who publishes three such shaping works before his thirty-fifth birthday that each is the object of its own extended retrospective discussion at seminars a quarter century later. [14]

Brown's work both exemplified and instigated the revolution in studies that flourished from those years onward. There has been remarkable work in military, political,

economic, and social history, but Brown's contribution has been to make cultural history, emphatically including religious experience, the axis of interpretation. The center of Anglophone activity was mainly British and mainly Oxford in the seventies, shifting away both to other British universities and to the U.S. by the eighties. The efflorescence of important scholarship by scholars like Timothy Barnes, Alan Cameron, Elizabeth Clark, John Matthews, Philip Rousseau (all of whom work in U.S. and Canadian universities) was accompanied by a secondary outburst of publication of materials useful in teaching. Many others remain in Britain and have flourished, notably Averil Cameron, now Master of Keble College, Oxford, [15] and Robert Markus, who has been a particularly influential bridge between British and American scholars and a revered mentor for many. [16] Others who might not have attracted attention as students of late antiquity or who have even rather avoided the label have participated in the common effort, notably Ramsay MacMullen, whose work bears the marks of a sturdy independence of mind and impatience with cant deriving from his New England forebears. Many of us taught Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* as a textbook in the 70s until we could almost recite it by heart for want of anything else suitable, but eventually other surveys (notably those by Averil Cameron [17]) appeared and alongside them especially the series "Translated Texts for Historians" inspired by the late Margaret Gibson has brought into classroom use nearly forty titles to date, ranging broadly in date and culture (notably including Syriac texts, hitherto known to the non-specialist mainly by rumor and guidebook). Imagine if you were trying to teach Vergil in translation but had no translations of Lucretius or Catullus and of Horace only the *Odes* to let your students read: that is how it was until the late 1980s for late antiquity in the Anglophone world. [18] Next generations of scholars have taken their explorations in many directions, particularly including explorations of gender and sexuality, as in Maud Gleason's *Making Men* (Princeton 1995), Gillian Clark's *Women in Late Antiquity* (London 1993), Susanna Elm's *Virgins of God* (Oxford 1994), and Virginia Burrus' "*Begotten, Not Made*": *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford 2000). These studies are regularly praised, but they have not yet markedly changed the way scholars writing of other subjects in late antiquity conceive the men and women whom they describe.

So: we have lived now through a long generation of 'late antique renaissance'. I have set for myself the task in this talk of trying to say concisely what difference that exciting and diverse body of scholarly works has made both for the field as narrowly constructed and for the wider field of 'classics' itself. [19]

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Formally, the story of late antiquity in the last decades resembles that of other periods and cultures. Where we inherited what looked like fundamentally sound narratives, built up laboriously and even heroically over time but still requiring supplementation and correction, narratives deploying characters whose identities could be grasped unambiguously, what we have come away with is a new appreciation for the way in which this period especially has been interpreted through constructions of narrative and constructions of identity that are at sharp variance with what we know about the people to whom they apply. Moreover, the constructions that have been in long use are often ones

that go back to the late antique period itself. Hence when we accept them, we essentially connive with one party or another of that period to tell a story their way about people seen through their eyes.

The late antiquity that I know best is the period that has loomed largest in the scholarly debates of the last generation, roughly from Diocletian and the tetrarchy to Heraclius and the first defeats suffered at Islamic hands. In that period, we now see first and foremost a series of contests among self-justifying contemporary narratives, many of which have had their appeal into our own day.

Chief among those narratives is the invention of classical antiquity itself. Roman dominance had long been marked culturally by acceptance of the authority of Greek texts and with the prestige of Greek culture supereminent, but by the fourth century, with the rise of a new class of arriviste aristocrats (the creation of Constantine) and with the loss of widespread facility with Greek in the Latin provinces of the empire, a new narrative was needed. Mark Vessey has written persuasively of the critical role of Jerome in creating that past, but he was one among many. [20] The revival of 'classical Latin' texts and authors (Juvenal, for example, and Tacitus) in this period and the elaboration of school texts and school curricula (e.g., the writings of Donatus and the so-called *quadriga Messii* – Cicero, Sallust, Terence, and Vergil) gave first coherent shape to the reading lists that still survive in graduate departments of classics. The Nicomachi who read and copied Livy (known from the subscriptions to his manuscripts [21]) were acting a new classicizing role, as were Augustine and his students and family when they retired to a country villa outside Milan in the winter of 386-87 and began enacting their own version of Ciceronian dialogues from Tusculum – even to the point of having scribes take down everything they said in shorthand for Augustine to publish as a display of his fidelity to Cicero and to his newfound philosophical ideas. That self-conscious enactment of the past persisted well into the sixth century and was probably only finally ended when the brutal efforts of Justinian to re-establish 'The Roman Empire' in the west led, naturally enough, to its eradication. The *next* new class had few pretensions. [22]

We should not belittle the seriousness of the enterprise these writers were engaged upon. Seen in their native habitat, they resemble nothing so much as the American scholars of the mid-twentieth century, like F.O. Matthiessen, who discovered and in many ways invented 'American literature' as a canon and ideal for study, enjoyment, and education. Macrobius in the *Saturnalia* musters up his threadbare learning (borrowing from Aulus Gellius and others in ways we would never let our students get away with) to create a portrait of his elders and betters of the previous generation naturally enacting their own Ciceronian dialogue -- a calque, if so I may call it, on the *De republica* of Cicero, though at the same time perhaps a veiled reply to Augustine's own attempt to appropriate the Platonic-Ciceronian lineage in his *De civitate Dei*. In so doing, he is saying something important to himself and to his contemporaries about who and what they were precisely by attaching themselves to that particular past in that particular way. He confirmed the legend of his elders of the last generation, just at the moment when the slight air of disrepute that clung to Symmachus, Praetextatus, and Nicomachus Flavianus – 'pagans' in the eyes of right-thinking fifth century Romans – had been officially cleared away. [23]

The philosopher Boethius and his father-in-law Symmachus were the natural and very Christian, but very Roman, heirs of that exercise in self-creation, and it was their Christianity (or rather the form of their Christianity) that eventually did them in. [24]

There was plenty of competition in the narrative business in these days. Christians of every stripe had found story-telling the way to make their new age, high-tech (because text-based) religion prevail. They created a canon of texts out of the most improbable mix of materials, perhaps only completing that exercise in the fourth century. [25] That canon implied a narrative that generations of exegetes would elaborate, make explicit, and embroider. In one direction, it was fleshed out by the creation of narrative 'world histories' by Eusebius and various translators and imitators, histories that underlie every other western version down to H.G. Wells and Will Durant with their succession of empires and civilizations from Mesopotamia to Egypt to Greece to Rome, and so forth. But at the local level, there was intense rivalry to bring the scriptural story home. Tales of the desert fathers from the Greek east came west and were met by counter-narratives like those of Supicius Severus, advancing the claim that local saints, *here*, in the west, could be just as marvelous as those in the east, their lives just as reflective of the biblical narratives as those of Anthony or Pachomius. [26] Two hundred years later, pope Gregory the first would write *Dialogues* that made exactly the same point: the New Testament was being re-lived every day in the Italy of his time. [27]

The 'papacy' was created as a kind of avatar of Roman religious authority [28] chiefly in the fifth and sixth centuries and spawned its own authorized narrative, the *Liber Pontificalis*, in which each pope had his own biography, added fresh when he died, to legitimate the line back to Peter. Competition among claimants to the papacy expressed itself in production of competing versions of the pontifical book as early as the sixth century: to control the narrative helped to control the facts on the ground. This practice had been coming into view since the fourth century, when the so-called "Codex-Calendar of 354" included both images of the traditional gods, a calendar of their feasts, and a list of bishops of Rome back to Peter. [29] Similar premature interest in the bishops of Rome had emerged in the first Christian novel, an account written in Greek perhaps in the third century, but Latinized to a wide readership in the late fourth century. The pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* purport to tell the story of the first pope Clement, who met and knew Peter while still in the east and eventually succeeded him in Rome. The account hasn't a prayer of being true, but it was as influential as only a historical novel can be in shaping consciousness and reassuring the uncertain.

Modern narratives of this period have long been in the thrall of these Christian accounts more than any other. That Gibbon depended as heavily as he did on the Jansenist Tillemont and the Roman cardinal Baronius assured that the fundamental story of Christian orthodoxy, its rise and triumph, would persist from late antiquity into the most skeptical of modern writers until an astonishing late date. The fracturing of that story began to gather momentum in Walter Bauer's *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Earliest Christianity*, [30] but even skeptical writers – and virtually all of the devout ones – for decades after still spoke of "Christianity" and not "Christianities" and blithely assumed that it was possible to apply litmus tests to differentiate brands of Christianity from one

another (and usually to privilege one or two lines as normative) and equally to differentiate Christianity from other religious movements of the time. That confidence has been collapsing steadily over the last decades and is now most dramatic in recent work suggesting that Christianity and Judaism were far more closely intertwined and took their mature and eventually separate shapes in a long process of dialogue, disputation, and rivalry. [31]

To remember that we long accepted too uncritically self-serving stories about 'Christians' should remind us that we have even more culpably been suckers for stories about 'pagans'. That conceptual category makes sense only as a Christian theological term for a subset of the enemies of any particular group of Christians. No person to whom the word might be attached would have understood or accepted its usefulness until at least decades after whatever 'conflict between paganism and Christianity' might have existed was decisively over. [32] The persistence of the word in scholarly discourse, now burnished with the charm of fashionable disrepute, when its only function is to agglomerate the incomparable in a truly Borgesian taxonomy is itself a sign of the often hidden but still fiercely present contestation over the place of Christianity in modern society that runs behind the scenes in discussions of early Christian history.

The other set of narratives heavily dependent on a construction of identity that has come under increased scrutiny is the set that tells us of 'barbarians' and their adventures in the Roman world. In the work of Walter Goffart and Herwig Wolfram and others, [33] the last two decades have seen an intense debate over 'ethnogenesis' and 'ethnogenesis' – the ways in which heterogeneous groups of people came together and accepted, or at least used, the identity of a national name (like 'Visigoth' or 'Vandal') to accompany their wanderings. The most recent and very exciting such investigation is Florin Curta's work on *The Making of the Slavs*, which continues these explorations into the early medieval history of the Balkans and the emergence of a people that never existed until 'Romans' decided they did. [34] One reason we believe in these 'tribes' and their generations-long *Völkerwanderungen* – we all know the maps with the large colored arrows meandering across central Europe and pointed eventually at the Mediterranean shores – is that we have accepted the self-serving narratives of the early generations themselves. Jordanes, of whom I spoke earlier *and* 28 years ago, was at pains in his *Getica* to reflect and focus the work of Cassiodorus setting out to make Gothic history Roman by showing that the Goths had a long and recognized place in the history of Europe. We always knew that the techniques of narration were flawed and the evidence risible, but that did not keep us (until very recently) from believing what Jordanes said when he described the origin of the Goths in southern Scandinavia, which he described as the *vagina gentium* and which I primly Englished a generation ago as the 'womb of nations'. [35]

What we now understand we could have learned from Cavafy or Coetzee, [36] that 'barbarians' can be a kind of solution to a society's misunderstandings of itself and its world. I have found terrible poignancy and power in the classroom the last two years in bringing to students the contemporary accounts of the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, as nearly exact a parallel to the experience of 9/11 as could be imagined. 'Barbarian' invaders who had given full warning of their hostility and intent seized and sacked the

city for three days. The shock felt through the Romanized world is proverbial – and deserves scrutiny. [\[37\]](#)

And I was stunned and stupefied, so much so that I couldn't think about anything else day and night. I felt as if I were being held hostage myself and couldn't even open my mouth until I knew for sure what had happened. Hanging there, caught between hope and despair, I was torturing myself with the thought of what others were suffering. But after the brightest light of all the lands was extinguished -- after the head of the whole Roman empire was lopped off -- to speak truly, after the whole world had perished in a single city: I fell silent and was humbled, and I kept my silence and my sorrow was renewed. My heart grew warm within me and fire blazed up in my thoughts. [\[38\]](#)

That is Jerome reacting in far-off Bethlehem, and we read his words as though they were written in September of 2001, not of 410. But Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, the calmest and most thoughtful response to those events, resolutely refuses to focus on the 'enemy' or the 'barbarian' and takes instead a long view. Few would share his theology of history today, but he is a salubrious example of the benefits of thing in larger and longer terms. [\[39\]](#)

Augustine's own disciple, Orosius – one might almost say his henchman, for all that Orosius never understood a tithe of what Augustine was saying – propagates influentially the unsubtler view. After a stylized and defensive account of the sack of Rome (concentrating on an elderly and pious virgin who was rescued by a compassionate barbarian), he comes to tell a story about how a few years later in fashionable Bethlehem, he met a senior statesman who boasted of meeting the Visigothic king Athaulf at Narbonne. Athaulf had sworn, so it was reported, that he had always dreamt of wiping out the very name of Rome and turning the Roman realm into a Gothic one, making 'Romania' into 'Gothia'. [\[40\]](#) But Athaulf, in this story, had learnt the blessings of law ('sine quibus respublica non est respublica') and seen the inability of Goths to conform themselves to law, and so he devoted himself instead to seeking glory as the restorer of the Roman name, since he could not be the revolutionary he wanted to be. I do not believe that story for a minute, but I want to emphasize the frame as well as the story: Bethlehem as site, a distinguished narrator, and a surprisingly pious 'barbarian' as subject who, it turns out, understands the conflict in exactly the same way as his opponents do. The fifth century would continue to shape and be shaped by such constructed views of barbarism. In the long run, when Rome proved unable to prosecute its hostility to successful conclusion – that is, proved unable to establish its preferred narrative by force of arms --, the choice to demonize the other proved disastrous.

One last identity, one last player in these narratives, needs to be made explicit to complete this inevitably superficial list: Rome itself. The remaking of the idea of Rome itself, like the reshaping of the city itself, [\[41\]](#) was an essential part of the mental history of these times. Every alternate construction of Christian, pagan, or barbarian depended, consciously and unconsciously, on an underlying continuity of Rome itself. Whatever the city of Rome was, whatever the chain of events that led from 753 BCE to the age of Constantine or of Alaric, the 'Rome function' was a powerful ideological force that had

grown, without anyone being fully aware of it, beyond the city and community that had given rise to it.

The irony, of course, is that there were other barbarians around the empire of whom the Romans did not speak, barbarians they shared with Persia, who would indeed live Athaulf's dream and whose own laboriously constructed (and highly derivative) identity is with us still, contesting with other heirs of Rome like ourselves for control of the narrative. [42]

In their ways, each of those narratives and identities I have explored here are familiar to us – too familiar. The last thing to be said about what happened in late antiquity is that the heirs of those particular constructions, seduced by the power of their imaginations, believed they lived in the world they described and so were led to overreach, with fatal consequences for their own intentions. Justinian sought to restore his vision of the Roman empire and to evict the barbarians from their western thrones in Africa, Italy, and Spain. [43] He succeeded only in destabilizing those societies, damaging their physical fabric, and weakening his own ability to respond to threats in Balkan and Syrian directions. Justinian's invasion of Italy brought an end to the political cohesiveness of that peninsula that the Romans had laboriously achieved six hundred years earlier, and cohesiveness of political and social experience in that peninsula has proved elusive to this day – unless the Italian power blackout of 2003 represents at last a uniformly 'national' Italian experience! By the time Justinian died, his court was a veritable Kremlin of intrigue and suspicion [44] and his forces fatally overextended. Heraclius a generation later was successful in his military activities beyond the wildest dreams of Justinian, but was in the end a failure because he could not anticipate the Islamic challenge accurately and he had not the resources left to address it. The Roman empire did not, it is conventional to say, decline and fall: it persisted in Constantinople till 1453. But what was there, outwardly Roman and continuous with what had gone before, was increasingly incoherent and unable to match its sense of self to its reality because it knew too clearly what it was and what it had been. The identity and the narrative that it had constructed for itself proved finally inadequate to the task at hand. [45] They never found an Augustus who could help them imagine a future sufficiently robust yet clothe it in dress sufficiently traditional to persuade them that it really was the same, good, old Rome -- and then carry off the imposture militarily.

The tasks remaining for late antique scholarship are still breathtaking. If we lose faith in received narratives and if we aren't sure just who the people are, we will have the opportunity to see a world with fewer boundaries and more places, fewer peoples and more people. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, in *The Corrupting Sea: a Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford 2000), in an immense volume that promises a second, pick up at least some of what the young Peter Brown might have imagined in his Braudelian take on Justinian's Mediterranean and carry off their explorations with bravura effect. Their picture of that world resists generalization fiercely as they seek to do justice to as many local variations and time-based idiosyncrasies as the dimensions of an oversize printed book and the patience and concentration of their readers will allow.

That diversification, complexification, and enrichment of our picture of late antiquity can only continue. [46]

One other development of the last decades has had important effect on our understanding of the late antique world: the coming to respectability and even to prominence of late antique material culture. No longer the days when the Byzantine and late antique layers were impatiently drilled through by archaeologists seeking the good stuff. Now there have been important digs that are exclusively late antique and important reworkings of our narratives in light of the material finds. [47] The move to study of *Realien* has been accompanied by shifts east and north. Some of this is a matter of opportunity (Algeria remains effectively off limits to archaeologists, for example, for all that already fifty years ago W.H.C. Frend expressed regret that explorations interrupted by World War II had not yet been resumed), but some is also a natural shift of interest away from traditional foci to places where imperial and other cultures mingled and mixed.

There has been no "Jones Report" on the Roman empire since Jones, and there may not be another soon, for we think in very different terms now. Peter Brown has been a leader in several lines of such thinking over these years, from his work on holy men (mainly in the east) to his work on the bodies of holy men and women [48] to his remarkably subtle and successful *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* [49] and its treatment of the ways the 'bishop' was created as a social and political force. His recent work on what he reveals to be the highly constructed notion of 'poverty' in Christianity throws bright light on topics long left unexamined, but he has also produced the magisterial synthesis of *The Rise of Western Christendom*, published in 1996, then reissued in 2003 [50] substantially expanded in the main by much more detailed documentation and reference to the contemporary scholarly literature. It is effectively a textbook for the novice and a handbook for the senior scholar. [51]

We come at the turn of a century, a too-handy time for retrospectives, to a place where we now have a better perspective on who we are ourselves as interpreters of these lost worlds and better questions to ask of those worlds. To take only two palmary examples, J.G.A. Pocock is now concluding a distinguished career with three volumes (so far) of his work *Barbarism and Religion*, [52] which rereads Gibbon much less as honest or dishonest, able or inept historian of Rome and much more as a figure in the cultures of his own time. De-naturalizing the narratives to which Gibbon gave his *imprimatur* is an essential step to seeing other narratives, other possibilities. At the same time, at the meetings of the American Philological Association where this talk was first delivered, the Association's highest honor for scholarly achievement, the Goodwin Award, was given to a young scholar's first book, to Clifford Ando's *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, [53] which poses (as the Association's judges observed) not the question of how Rome fell but how it lasted so long – what was the glue that held it together. In an odd way, we are finally internalizing the contributions of classical physics to human self-understanding in realizing that entropy is easy and failure has many sources of encouragement, but that the miracle of community and respect is what requires understanding.

3. 'Classics' and Late Antiquity

Scholarship has consequences. Investigation explodes errors constantly and reveals truths that must be allowed to change the way we think and act. I have pursued this account of the scholarly achievement of the last generation of students of late antiquity because I believe it has direct relevance to the concerns of *ex professo* classicists, that is, of members of the American Philological Association. I will begin with a blunt assertion.

The traditional construction of 'classics' as a domain of study depends on a narrative. We are not like philosophers or theologians or economists, who have a body of subject matter and a set of techniques; or like biologists or chemists or physicists, who divided their tasks by the scale of the natural phenomena they studied; or like historians or political scientists, who have a potentially unlimited domain of inquiry but a collection of disciplines and practices. We share features of self-definition with each of those groups, but our work has been critically defined, for at least the last two hundred years, by a story. [54] We all know the story and use it and refer to it every day, and everyone else knows the story. The chain bookstores use the story to arrange their shelves, and we depend on it when we try to explain to strangers what we do. It's a good story: Greeks, then Romans, then the Middle Ages – and somebody else is responsible for the Middle Ages. We build our departmental staffing around the narrative, making sure to be strong in 'central' periods and figures, because we know all too surely where the margins and borders are. As a border-straddler whose undergraduate degree was in classics but whose Ph.D. is in Medieval Studies and who spends at least some of his time engaged with colleagues in the Medieval Academy, I can report that the story has one colossal problem today. Any sense of 'middleness', of before-and-after succession, that could be applied to the "middle ages" has long since disappeared. Medievalists are used to working in a wide variety of departments, to quarreling endlessly over where the boundaries may be between their subject and others', and to rejoicing in a plurality of kinds of collegiality. The annual street riot that lays waste to the city of Kalamazoo [55] every May is the expression of a catholic, inclusive, and ambitious notion of medieval studies that thrives almost more because the underlying categorization that binds those scholars together remains undiscussed and has become a convenient fable divorced from reality.

Our own part of the narrative is in not much better shape, but our institutional structures support it. How many of us have courses on the books in "Greek History" (which usually means Bronze Age to Alexander, with perhaps a quick tailpiece about Hellenistic history) and "Roman History" (which means Italian prehistory and goes down to some date between Augustus and Justinian, on the assumption that events in second century CE Asia Minor are best recounted as episodes in the political history of a people from the Tiber Valley most of a thousand years earlier). In accepting this particular story, of course, we are in connivance with the Romans and their notion of empire. They saw themselves as worthy successors, not as interlopers, and though they never imposed their language on the more prosperous and populous half of their domains, they had no difficulty imagining them lords of all they surveyed, from Hadrian's Wall to the Euphrates and beyond. [56]

A resident of Ephesus or Antioch or Gaza might have had a different and more nuanced perspective. Libanius certainly did. The Greek world was particularly full of perfectly respectable denizens whose relationship to any putative Romanness was at best remote, [57] and the important stretches of empire that spoke more Syriac or Coptic than Greek had their own ways of coming to grips with Rome.

The message from late antique scholarship to the classical disciplines today is that the old story won't work any longer. For the reasons I have outlined in my survey of the scholarly achievements of the last generation, the elements that need to be in place in order for 'Rome' to vanish and be replaced by entropy or an alternative have disappeared. It is not so much that Rome did not fall (though it is remarkable the ink spilt over the last century to determine how, why, and whether that cataclysm happened) as it is that the Rome people imagined had been transformed into something else. To think it 'fell' was to wake up to the realization that the old idea and the old story simply couldn't work any longer. [58] Dealing with the failure of that traditional narrative to sustain itself will be a central task, I believe, for classicists as well as late antiquers of the next generation.

In dealing with it, we must acknowledge what I call the Cassiodoran risk. Cassiodorus is variously represented and misrepresented in scholarly literature, [59] sometimes as the man who preserved the classics by taking them to the cloister, sometimes as the man who taught the medieval monk to copy manuscripts. Neither picture is correct. The risk I associate with him is that of overconfidence in the preservation of a heritage. He did not put appreciable time and energy into collecting, copying, or preserving manuscripts of classical authors (except a few so utilitarian as to attract his attention, such as grammarians and writers on agriculture), and he ignored them because he was quite sure that the still-surviving public schools and 'universities' of the Roman world would look after them perfectly well. Secular studies were not in doubt, he thought, but the Christian studies to which he was giving increasing attention seemed to need his intellectual and financial 'venture capital', so to speak. That taking-for-granted can lead directly to perilous neglect, a risk we would do well to avoid.

To think of the intellectual program of 'classics' and how it might change, then we need to keep three things in mind.

First: the traditional narrative will and should persist, even as we withdraw our allegiance from it.

It will persist in first and most important measure because of the large measure of truth that it does contain. The reading of history that it proposes is plausible and offers one powerful construction of events. It reflects ideological, political, and military ambitions of the time, it was believed by many of the contemporaries, and it helped shape the world. Successful empires are ones that make up a plausible story and get lots of people to believe it – even or rather especially when it is palpably untrue. And plenty of people still believe it and argue for it with great energy and resourcefulness. A narrative so powerful will always deserve to be taught, even if it must then be untaught.

The traditional narrative will persist as well because of us. We are so deeply embedded in it, our research tools so depend on it, and the existing scholarly literature so assumes it that we could not simply kick this ladder away. To be sure, a next generation of scholarly resources that we can only now just imagine might be able to repackage the old in some new ways that cross boundaries, but for now, we live in a world heavily constructed by older ideas. [\[60\]](#)

It will persist, finally, because it has persisted. The story as we receive it has not only shaped our views but those of nearly every period from then till now. The notion of the 'classic' that shaped the emergence of tastes and styles may be factitious in its genesis but is indubitably real in its effect. To forget the story altogether would leave us mute and baffled in the presence of English Augustan literature, for example, and unable to read Kipling or Churchill with a ready sense of their mental landscape.

That is where we must not make the Cassiodoran mistake or the conventionalist one. It is a truth universally acknowledged that the young nowadays (whenever nowadays happens to be) are less well-read and less well-instructed in the achievements of the past than their elders were. The line of least resistance leads to teaching them about golden and silver ages, to be sure, and so it will take patience to teach and unteach the old stories at once, but it must be done.

Second: As we make our message new and as we stand apart from the traditional narratives, we run real risks of competition from the representatives of an audience that doesn't want to let go of the familiar. If you look at our bookstores for the volumes that appear on display tables and even best-seller lists that represent the ancient world in one way or another, you find a dispiriting pattern. Leaving aside the utter trash (we don't see as many ancient astronauts as we used to, and I suppose that's progress), there are still the helpless but fluent amateurs. I mentioned already the Byzantine history firmly rooted in the eighteenth century. More visibly, Thomas Cahill has explained to us how *The Irish Saved Civilization*. This is a subject where I am at least a little better than an amateur and I have to say, with all due respect to my ancestors, thank you, no, we didn't save it. But Cahill tells a good story, drawing on some venerable sources. He praises the work of Brown and Chadwick in late antique studies, but allows that he has more often been drawn to quote, because it provides greater detail, from the work of Sir Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (London 1899). Dill was the Cahill of his time, fluent, behind the times, and catering to a public that, like Professor Tolkien's hobbits, liked to hear stories it already knew. Thus Cahill:

It is instructive to observe how little the general shape of historical interpretation has changed since Dill's time [not true: jo'd] and how much contemporary historians remain in his debt [even less true: jo'd]. [\[61\]](#)

In other words, obsolete sentimentalism from a hundred years ago is perfectly acceptable. Scholarship since has gotten us, by implication, nowhere. Cahill is now inviting us to go *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea*. Elsewhere on the best-seller lists not long ago, Anthony Everitt's biography of Cicero sought to rehabilitate the Roman statesman as wise

forerunner of our own mixed constitution. The book contains no adequate explanation of how a Cicero so wise could spend so much time on the edge of the cliff, and eventually fall off, but as the professional reviewers kindly (too kindly?) suggested in the broadsheet reviews, Everitt got to his story by dint of ignoring much of what is known about the last years of the Roman Republic. Now this past fall, and to me this is the crowning indignity, Charles Freeman, who has written popularizations of the ancient world for Oxford Press, publishes *The Closing of the Western Mind* with a prestigious New York publisher. The gravamen of the book is to resurrect the hoariest of versions of the received story – dark ages brought on by conversion to Christianity and all. The book shows no familiarity with primary sources or with current scholarship and seems much a matter of cut and paste. I take some comfort that the voluntary reviewers on amazon.com seem to be widely divergent and the negative reviewers say some very intelligent things. [62]

There will always be storytellers ready to tell the old tales and attack us as obscurantist, ideological, or worse when our long frequentation of the primary sources and the scholarly debates brings us out to conclusions that are unfamiliar or unpalatable. More of us need to find ways to make accounting for the ancient past in ways that the undeniably eager audiences who prowl the big bookstores will respond to.

In the end, the opportunity that offers itself to us is too important and too powerful to neglect. The deepest unease I have about our traditional story is the way in which it has led us into connivance with Rome and its empire. It has *mattered* whether Rome declined and fell or not for reasons that go beyond simple human compassion for the people who lived and either prospered or suffered in the course of large movements in public affairs. We root for the Romans – or we root against them, and both are inappropriate. We let our sentiments be shaped by the people we study far too easily. The deep engagement we have with questions of whether Rome declined and fell has put a long series of fruitless detours in front of us, for all that it has been instructive to follow Pirenne or Piganiol or Jones through a tabulation of the virtues and defects of the Romans, or for all that it has been embarrassing and comical to hear Richard Nixon's voice on White House tapes explain that homosexuality undermined Roman society. 'To see what has become self-evident as something that was not originally self-evident is the task of all historical reflection' [63] – and of course one thinks immediately of some of the most venturesome and instructive of scholarly works, such as Erich Gruen's *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, that sets out with a program very much like Blumenberg's, to see what was happening without assuming that civil war, Caesar, and more civil war lay ahead.

What we can begin to see if we think in this way is that the true secret of empire was not the one Tacitus thought divulged in 69 C.E. – that emperors could be manufactured somewhere other than at Rome. [64] Deeper still was the realization that the 'Rome function' – the centralizing, connecting, animating force of a widely distributed society – could be created and performed elsewhere as well: *posse Romas alibi quam Romae fieri*, one might parody. A second and a third Rome in Constantinople and Moscow could be envisioned by the most literal-minded, and it is worth remembering that *Rum* persists to this day as a word in Arabic not for the first Rome but for the second and its citizens. But Charlemagne could seize Rome literally and figuratively for himself and transfer empire

in an entirely different direction, where it would linger north of the Alps until finally put out of its misery in 1806 by Napoleon. More cannily, other figures could relocate the function ideologically or socially rather than geographically. Pope Gregory the first, serving from 590 to 604, left behind the records of his administration in such abundance that we can reconstruct the shape of his bureaucracy, and then suddenly realize that every office of his church had its exact correspondent in the bureaucracy of the late Roman imperial court. When he begins to negotiate with military commanders to defend Italian cities against the Lombards and begins to exercise law-making authority at a distance over bishops in Gaul, Illyricum, and Africa, he has found what later popes would exploit and turn first into ideology and then eventually, by use of convenient documents like the Donation of Constantine, into history itself. Such transition turns into parody at some point, of course: one can just accept that the United States government places its seat on Capitol Hill without giggling, [65] but to find another Capitol Hill in Seattle is to realize that the trope has lost its power.

One other opportunity opens intellectually. I cited above the important books of Millar and Bowersock on the ancient history of the Roman frontier with Arabia. If we can recognize and be sufficiently detached in recognizing the 'Rome function' in the ancient world, then I think we are only half a step away from seeing the most powerful and influential transfer of the 'Rome function' seen to date – into the hands of 'barbarians' who practiced their 'religion' on the eastern rather than the western marches of empire. The Islamic caliphate is so intensely the un-Rome that it deserves more respect than it gets as the most successful and the longest-lived of the successors of Rome, not for having overthrown Rome (the military successes of Islamic and Turkish forces over most of a thousand years were only marginally important in the demise of Byzantium) but for having founded and promoted a social structure that notionally and really integrates religion and society indifferently over vast spaces of land and eventually imposes cultural hegemony as well. Julius Caesar would have understood the caliph business and thrived at it.

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I have spoken designedly till now in terms of our intellectual mission and business of the opportunities and responsibilities that I believe lie before us. Let me say a few things now about the practicalities.

Modern academic institutions show every sign of gladly forgetting whatever is old and whatever is foreign. No academic leader can say such a thing and all will confute it, but the movement in our institutions is unmistakable. The present trumps the past, English trumps all foreign languages, and American trumps British. My own institution, I like to think, is more broadminded than most [66] but you can still feel the gravitational pull. History departments are reluctant to send many troops into the pre-Renaissance western world any more, while departments of modern languages and literatures are variously conflicted about their medieval, to say nothing of early medieval pasts. Around us, moreover, are often other smaller and more beleaguered departments or parts of departments worried about other parts of the ancient past: a department of near eastern or

Semitic studies, for example. My quite Roman recommendation to classical colleagues is simple imperialism. If there is no institutional center of gravity for pre-modern studies in your institution, then seize that center and take advantage of it. The collapse of our narrative is good news in that regard, for it does not leave us as confined by space and time as we have been.

Instead we should be practicing leveraged buyouts, so to speak, on all our neighbors. Late antique, Byzantine, and medieval western cultural studies can all profit from the sort of transdisciplinary connectedness that our old interdisciplinary ideal of *Altertumswissenschaft* brings, and students of the several religions of the book, realizing belatedly that they need each other to understand themselves, need our textual and historical disciplines to do their jobs properly. In practical terms, such imperialism can be justified simply as extending the boundaries of 'classics' to embrace the whole of the Greek and Latin literary and cultural traditions.

On another boundary, I strongly believe that we should be similarly building links and where necessary incorporating or merging with all who study the ancient near eastern, European, and African past. Our failure to do that over the last generations is what left us in the comically embarrassing position of getting the Martin Bernal that we deserved. [67] We were as a profession flabbergasted by his willful, passionate, and glibly argued vision, and we were too slow in reacting. It was only when a few heroic figures from our midst began to press what was then too easily described as a combat [68] that we managed to make the acknowledgements that deserved to be made (and that seemed to us to be self-evident) and the rebuttals that needed to be made (and that seemed scarcely less self-evident). We had simply not been in place as a profession to stand up for what we knew, because we had allowed ourselves to be painted into a box smaller than we deserved.

I believe we need a larger box to be our best selves as scholars, as teachers, and withal as 'public intellectuals', if that is how we must describe the scholar who makes a wider audience aware of what we can contribute. The larger box lets us forget about boundaries and borders and make our way in the ancient and modern worlds curiously, patiently, with an eye ever for the detail, never missing a leaf but still attending to the forest. When I think of the scholars who have been models for my own work, I realize that I incorporate both the obvious and professional guides (I still cannot get over what it must have been like to be Theodor Mommsen, [69] I must admit, or for that matter, though his life was cut short, Ludwig Traube) but also figures of a more raffish and heterogeneous nature. When I read the books of Patrick Leigh Fermor, one part of me is afoot with him in Romania or the deep Mani, but another part is admiring his ability to explore a past that is present in every byway and village and that links a bridge or a building to savagery or beauty of a millennium past. When I read Rilke as he discovers Cézanne's painting (and wish he could have visited the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia and tried to make something of it), I am moved mainly by the *work* of seeing, and feel the same when I try to make sense with my limited education and patience of Nabokov working with his butterflies -- or his prose. Something of my own best moments as scholar is evoked by such models, and I return to them regularly.

What they and the best scholars I read have in common is not ideas that happen to be right but a craft, a collection of *artes et disciplinae* that explode error and give rise to new understanding. To speak of our narratives and our conceptions of the past is, in the end, to speak at a level of generality that does not satisfy. Too many of our 'culture wars' are fought out at exactly this level and have the dyspeptic effect of the old "tastes great – less filling" beer commercials. Whatever such themes and motifs we settle upon and choose to defend will prove to be not much longer-lived than we are and it is to our credit that we do not now teach our students the historical views of Mommsen or Grote as though they were ours. But we continue to live as grateful heirs in the palaces of learning constructed by them and their like, and by lesser mortals like ourselves as well. To confute or disregard old stories and to toy with new ones does not invalidate the craft we have inherited or spare us the responsibility of passing it along to the young. What we can and should do is seek as well new and better techniques and the renovation of old ones.

To that end, I will spend a few words describing one specific task I see before us. The craft of biography is deeply rooted in our professional tradition and certainly in our culture. A recent critical fashion has attended to 'life-writing' and discussion flourishes, but in a curiously hermetic mode. That is, those who study and think about the craft agree in advance that the production of biography is a worthy activity and that the critical questions are how to perform that task better. The genre will not find compelling theory until it attracts the attention of compelling skeptics. We classicists better than most know the origins and development of this genre, and I have myself spent a fair amount of time tracking the strategies and tactics of one of the most resourceful of autobiographers. [70] What should we make of this genre? Are we entirely sure that the reconstructive tracking of individual lives is a good, or a preferred, way to do history? Do we have a repertoire of critical techniques to enable us to assess and evaluate biographies to tell the better from the less good? To recognize the rhetorical strategies? To factor out the arbitrary 'perhaps' and 'cannot rule out' and 'may imagine' that add artificial flesh to fragmentary bones? Do we understand the psychological assumptions about the human being and its constituent parts (like the 'soul') that we make and that ancient authors make well enough to discount the ones that are not able to be substantiated? Can we participate in the very specific constructions of identity and narrative that go into biography without losing our objectivity, without being suckered in to telling a story that we should not tell?

To ask those questions is to suggest a refinement of a received craft and a search for different ways to report and recall the lives of those who have gone before us. My own work concentrates now on doing this for Augustine. Augustine has succeeded as the subject of autobiography and biography by imposing on his readers for many generations a clear, persuasive, and dramatically incomplete account of his own life. Modern biographies of Augustine generally turn over the first 40% or so of their pages to recounting the story that Augustine told, with polemical intent and great artistry, in his *Confessions* and even often turn over their pages describing what he presents as his moment of conversion in a garden in Milan to Augustine himself, with extensive quotation replacing critical narrative. Augustine's account is entirely controlled by

Augustine's mature religious and political project, which was to overthrow the native form of Christianity in Africa and seize control in the name of a form more compatible with Christianity elsewhere in Roman capitals. His successful attack on the 'Donatists' is the stuff of history, but in conventional scholarship he has always been allowed to represent himself as the 'Catholic' or normative Christian in opposition to the schismatics. [71] Following the work of, among others, Brent Shaw, I find myself now writing a chapter entitled 'Augustine the Caecilianist' – making the effort to portray him as he undeniably *was* for the majority of his African co-religionists, that is, the representative of a minority sect on the make. One day in the 410s, Augustine found himself in an African town far from Carthage and Hippo for church business and encountered by chance the deposed Donatist bishop of the town. Seeing a chance for a dramatic reconciliation, Augustine pressed his former rival to come into church with him, but there he found him mute and immovable. The view of Augustine that could, even after the Roman government itself had backed him to the hilt, resist Augustine with stony and self-possessed silence: that view has been missing. Only by seeing Augustine the Caecilianist and Augustine the Catholic side by side can we begin to grasp enough of the man to let us get beyond subservience to his narratives. To do this requires that we master all the traditional techniques, then subject the techniques and strategies of biography to fresh scrutiny and refinement, making the tools new and making new tools before we can go further.

Such work is exhilarating. We never escape from the traditions that shape us, of course, for more than a little while. Each generation will remake its tools and then make new creations with them. We will imagine again the people and places and institutions of the past and tell stories about them. I do believe that scholarship learns as it goes, if only by remembering the errors that have been left behind, and that each generation tells better stories than the last – but also, in consequence, each generation has an obligation to tear down the old in order to build the new.

To live up to those responsibilities is specially necessary in an age when the real question facing our profession and those of our fellow humanists is the very sustainability of humanistic modes of interpretation and argument. To practice old crafts on old materials puts us in peril in a time of new challenges to the financing of American higher education. Do our tools suffice to tell any stories about the past that will claim the attention of our contemporaries? To assure them a chance of success, we must continue to refine, to innovate, and to practice the use of those tools, ever on the watch for new opportunities. If we succeed, then charming narratives of youth and inexperience may still be heard in these meetings, among generations a little wiser, in a profession a little more humane.

Let me end with a story from the fifth and sixth centuries. When I first saw the minor classic Clint Eastwood film *Pale Rider* almost twenty years ago, I thought he must have had Eugippius' *Life of Saint Severinus* in mind. In both stories, a mysterious stranger dressed in black rides into a troubled frontier town – Wyoming by the look of one, Noricum by the text of the other. He rallies the cowering but virtuous natives to defend their property and their lives and he carries the day. Severinus is a more or less

conventional holy man of that time, while Eastwood's gunslinger turns out to have a clerical collar in his luggage and we know him only as "The Preacher". The film version, naturally, has a happier ending than the book, for we know that when Severinus died, the community to which he ministered grew fearful again. This was the age of Odovacer and Theoderic in Italy, not bad times as far as Italy went, but Noricum had never achieved the level of self-sustenance as society or economy that could preserve it in times of trouble. So Eugippius, who would write Severinus' story, was a leader of the movement that took the holy man's body and headed south, over the Alps, then down the Aemilian, Flaminian, and Appian ways, eventually to Naples, where they settled at the Castellum Lucullanum. This was an epicenter of a curious society in sixth century Italy, for the short-term emperor Romulus (whom we have been taught to call Augustulus and whose deposition in 476 provides a fitting date for the most conventional narrative of the fall of Rome) [72] had gone into retirement there.

While living there, Eugippius, become the abbot of the monastic community that venerated Severinus' name and very likely his body, wrote the life of the holy man, wrote a rule for monks, and settled into a remarkably ambitious scholarly program. He oversaw the copying of the works of Augustine, not as a mechanical task but an editorial one. Where we find in medieval manuscripts of Augustine's more ambitious works a series of 'chapter headings' either prefixed to the manuscript or distributed through it in the style of a modern printed book, it is very likely that the analytical work goes back to Eugippius. Similarly, he presided over the creation of the first anthology of Augustine's writings, the *Excerpta sancti Augustini* that fill 1000 pages in the only near-critical modern edition. Until Michael Gorman began excavating the evidence for Eugippius' work with the most exacting palaeographical and codicological techniques twenty-five years ago, [73] we had little sense of Eugippius' range, character, and achievement. Now he appears much more naturally side by side his younger contemporary Cassiodorus, who comes across today as a little less serious and intense than Eugippius, sitting, perhaps, [74] by the *vivaria* or fishponds on his estate-monastery, considering the freedom that the fish there thought they had and the power of that illusion to animate their lives, and drawing from that sight a conclusion about the fishpond freedom of humankind – a less subtle and demanding way of reaching conclusions not dissimilar to those of Augustine on free will and determinism. [75]

What I think I see in Eugippius and Cassiodorus, alongside a not unusual mix of delusions, prejudices, and misbeliefs, is withal a reliance on the crafts of words: of making craftful books and preserving and reading old ones well. Both had come to their philology, if so I may call it, from active lives on the frontiers of their world and both had become less engaged. But they are among the few people of that period whose work lives to this time. It would be easy to overstate the accomplishment of such work and we should neither overstate nor minimize what we think we do either.

The cultivation of habits of skeptical and rigorous interpretation of the cultural signs of the past has broad utility, for ourselves and for our students. To cultivate and transmit those habits well is to win for ourselves and our students a way to see the world from outside the terrors and intoxications of the dizzying present moment we inhabit.

Proponents of empires usually have Augustus or Constantine in mind, not Justinian. We need to remember them all. If we do, we may be able to resist the temptation, nearly everpresent in our public discourse, to see our own time as struggling only to thwart, ineffectively and simplistically, a prospective triumph of barbarism and religion.

[1] Presidential Address delivered at the 135th Meetings of the American Philological Association in San Francisco CA, 4 January 2004. I am grateful to many colleagues for comments and suggestions after, and especially to Prof. J. Ebbeler for detailed annotation. This printed version resembles the spoken as Cicero's manuscripts resembled what he said in Senate or forum.

[2] Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres*, ed. J. Hytier (Paris 1960), 2.1239-40. This phrase is widely quoted in English, most visibly as the title of a wonderful book by Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees* (New York 1983), about contemporary artist Robert Irwin (written some years before the latter designed the gardens for the new Getty Center). My thanks to Professor Denis Pelli of NYU for tracking down the original citation.

[3] *Inferno* 6.7-12 (trans. J. and R. Hollander):

Io sono al terzo cerchio, de la piova
eterna, maladetta, fredda e greve:
regola e qualità mai non l'è nova.
Grandine grossa, acqua tina e neve
per l'aere tenebroso si riversa;
pute la terra che questo riceve.

[4] 20 of 25 articles in *TAPA* 105(1975) and 22 of 23 in *TAPA* 106(1976) had male authors.

[5] *JECS* started life in much greater obscurity as *The Second Century*, published in Abilene TX from 1981-92, when it was taken over, renamed, and continued in the new form, which quickly became more prominent.

[6] For a parallel account of the last generation of late antique studies, see Averil Cameron, "The 'long' late antiquity: a late twentieth-century model," in T.P. Wiseman, ed., *Classics in Progress* (London 2002) 165-91; for a counter-assessment, see W. Treadgold, "Taking Sources on Their Own Terms and on Ours: Peter Brown's Late Antiquity," *Antiquità Tardive* 2(1994) 153-59.

[7] Title of the English translation of *À Rebours* published by Havelock Ellis, sexologist of his generation (New York 1931); quotation here from pp. 108-9.

[8] *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie* (Vienna 1901-23).

[9] There are parallel stories in other countries. It will suffice to observe only that of the generation of the 50s noted here, Santo Mazzarino in Italy and Pierre Courcelle and Henri Marrou in France had similar iconic roles. In Germany, there is less hero cult of those times, but Joseph Vogt not only did important work but inspired the shelf-bending *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin 1972-).

[10] Mark Vessey, 'The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of "Late Antiquity": From H.-I. Marrou's Saint Augustine (1938) to Peter Brown's Holy Man (1983),' *J ECS* 6.3 (1998) 377-411

[11] P. Brown, "Arnaldo Dante Momigliano 1908-1987," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 [1988], 405-42.

[12] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London and Berkeley 1967; repr. with additions 2000).

[13] *Journal of Roman Studies* 61(1971) 80-101.

[14] For *The World of Late Antiquity*, see the special issue of *Symbolae Osloenses* 72(1997), with a memoir by Brown and discussions by other leading scholars; for "Holy Man," see *J ECS* 6.3(1998), again with a Brown memoir and half a dozen related articles; for the biography, Brown added an substantial ruminative, one might even say confessional, epilogue to the 2000 reprinting of his biography, while the papers are not yet published from the "Reconsiderations" conference held at Villanova University in December 2003. See also Brown's "A Life of Learning", the Haskins Lecture for the American Council of Learned Societies for 2003: <http://www.acls.org/op55.htm>.

[15] Averil Cameron's many-sided work will have lasting impact, perhaps most noticeably through the two volumes of the new edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* she has edited, institutionally canonizing a narrative that goes now to 600 CE.

[16] Markus's *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990) is the kind of book that detonates slowly and with wide impact. It has been more often *re-read* by late antique scholars than almost any other work I cite.

[17] *The Later Roman Empire, 284-430* (Cambridge MA 1993) and *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, 395-600* (London 1993).

[18] Byzantinists are still there for the most part.

[19] I will annotate this account with reference to the standard works of the last generation on which I draw, to document the argument and to give flesh to the assertions above concerning the importance and variety of the work that has been done.

[20] Vessey, in an unpublished article, writes acutely of Jerome's role in reorienting 'literary history' to a narrative of authors-and-their-works, against earlier forms (e.g., Quintilian) that recounted the past in terms of genres. The Quintilianic mode used the past frankly as a source of models for performance in the genres, while the Hieronymian mode shares more fully in the ambitions and ambiguities of literary history as we know and doubt it to be.

[21] J.E.G. Zetzel, *Late Textual Criticism in Antiquity* (New York 1981).

[22] T.S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: imperial administration and aristocratic power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554-800* (London 1984).

[23] On Macrobius and his position in these times, the classic article that had wide repercussions is Alan Cameron, 'The Date and Identity of Macrobius,' *JRS* 56(1966) 25-38; on the rehabilitation of the 'pagan' worthies, see Charles W. Hedrick, *History and Silence: Purge and Rehabilitation of Memory in Late Antiquity* (Austin 2000).

[24] H. Chadwick, *Boethius: the consolations of music, logic, theology, and philosophy* (Oxford 1981).

[25] G. Hahneman, *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon* (Oxford 1992)

[26] C. Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer* (Oxford 1983).

[27] F. Clark, *Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues* (Leiden 1987) and *The "Gregorian" dialogues and the origins of Benedictine monasticism* (Leiden 2003), has fought hard to argue, and made some headway in doing so, that these dialogues evoke 'Gregory' who is already himself a seventh-century construction and that the pope did not write them himself. Gregory remains a figure of immense complexity and a source of still unexploited richness: see Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley 1988) and Robert Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge 1997).

[28] It used to be said that pope Leo I in the fifth century had been the first to take up the title of *pontifex maximus* (still claimed by the present officeholder), and it would be intriguing to see that as a conscious religious transfer of charisma, but in fact the evidence for Leo's use of the title is late and feeble and the issue must be left open.

[29] M. Salzman, *On Roman Time: the codex-calendar of 354 and the rhythms of urban life in late antiquity* (Berkeley 1990).

[30] English trans. under that title 1971, but originally in German in 1934.

[31] Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton 2001); A. Becker and A. Reed, ed., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen 2003) – see especially the articles by P. Fredriksen, D. Boyarin, and R. Kraft. Boyarin's work as an interpreter of Judaism, Christianity, and the history of their influence on ideas of sexuality has been wide-ranging and deeply influential over the last decade particularly. Also important is K.L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge MA 2003).

[32] On the word, see my '*Paganus*,' *Classical Folia* ; on the events of this period, the most effective rewriting of traditional accounts has been that of Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven 1984) and *Christianity and paganism in the fourth to eighth centuries* (New Haven 1997). No one disputes that the 'triumph' of Christianity was defined in a specific social register of official statements and practices, while traditional practices and beliefs persisted in myriad ways. Enthusiasts are often tempted to tell that story, but to supplement MacMullen with evidence rather than enthusiasm, see Ken Dowden, *European Paganism: the Realities of Cult from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London 2000).

[33] W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans A.D. 418-584: Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton 1980); H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley 1988) and *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples* (Berkeley 1997).

[34] F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs* (Cambridge 2001).

[35] Jordanes *Getica* 4 (ed. Mommsen, 1882).

[36] Cavafy's famous poem is Englished "Waiting for the Barbarians" and gave a title to Coetzee's novel.

[37] See the traditionalist reading in P. Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques* (rev. ed. Paris 1964).

[38] Jerome *On Ezechiel* 1.praef. (my translation).

[39] For the 'presidential panel' staged one day before this presidential address was given, I invited as keynote speaker Stewart Brand, co-chair of the board of directors of the Long Now Foundation. His presentation on the discipline and value of thinking in longer historical terms is available on the APA website, <http://www.apaclassics.org>.

[40] Orosius 7.40-43.

[41] Memorably displayed by R. Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton 1980; reissued 2000).

[42] On the pervasive and persistent ancient underpinnings of later history in this part of the world, Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East* (Cambridge MA 1993) and G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge MA 1983) and especially his *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor 1990), are immensely rewarding. W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge 1992), gets beyond cliché to understanding the contingencies that led to Islamic success..

[43] Justinian remains too large a figure for any single study in our time to capture. Berthold Rubin began to pursue him but was derailed by contemporary political developments: *Das Zeitalter Justinians* (Berlin 1960-95).

[44] Averil Cameron's edition of Corippus' *In laudem Iustini minoris* (London 1976) seemed eerily prescient of the transitions that would take place in Moscow with the deaths of Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko in the decade to follow.

[45] The books that the general reader might fall upon to approach Byzantine history are singularly out of date and unhelpful in the main. Vasiliev's and Ostrogorsky's histories, still in print and magisterial in their day, are pre-World War II in their roots and scholarship, while the widely available volumes of John Julius Norwich are, in the words of one trenchant contemporary observer, firmly grounded in the scholarship of Gibbon. The best current narrative account is the very cautious and traditional one of Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford 1997) or in ¼ the compass, *A Concise History of Byzantium* (New York 2001); but the revolution beneath the surface of post-classical Greek studies has yet to produce a widely accessible book. Margaret Alexiou's work, particularly *After antiquity : Greek language, myth, and metaphor* (Ithaca 2002), repays the patient reader abundantly.

[46] For example, look at the more recent titles in the enormously influential series *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* edited by Peter Brown for the University of California Press since 1981: the topics range from Merovingian archaeology to Byzantine angelology to the fortunes of a saint caught between Byzantium and Persia.

[47] See notably the work of Richard Hodges, in the multi-volume excavation reports *San Vincenzo al Volturno* (London 1993-), more accessible in *Light in Dark Ages: the Rise and Fall of San Vincenzo al Volturno* (London 1997), and his venturesome preliminary synthesis with David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne & the Origins of Europe* (Ithaca 1983). But work both local and synthetic continues apace: see recently J. Banaji, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and Aristocratic Dominance* (Oxford 2001).

[48] P. Brown, *Body and Society* (New York 1988).

[49] Madison WI 1992.

[50] Oxford 2003.

[51] Brown also collaborated with Glen Bowersock and Oleg Grabar to edit the encyclopedic volume *Late Antiquity: a Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge MA 1999), from which an impressive series of survey essays by the most distinguished contemporary scholars has been extricated as *Interpreting Late Antiquity* (Cambridge MA 2001). This collection brings together the most authoritative and complete view of the current state of scholarship and interpretation across a wide range of subjects.

[52] Cambridge 1999-.

[53] Berkeley 2000.

[54] The APA began, as many know, with a more synoptic view of its philological endeavors, ranging from Sanskrit to modern European languages to native American languages. Already from its first decade, the concentration on 'classics' was clear, and the formation of the Modern Language Association particularly in 1883 gave many of our philological colleagues a different natural home. By 1900 the narrowing to 'classics' was nearly complete, though papers on Sanskrit would appear in *TAPA* until the 1920s. (For the early history, see L. R. Shero, "The American Philological Association: An Historical Sketch," *TAPA* 94[1963] xff.)

[55] The International Congress on Medieval Studies will meet for the 39th time in Kalamazoo in May 2004. I refrain from suggesting that the distinguished philologists of this association could ever go so far as to emulate the terpsichorean excesses of that festival.

[56] Albrecht Dihle's *Greek and Latin literature of the Roman Empire : from Augustus to Justinian* (London 1994; Ger. original Munich 1989) tries to dress a different and more balanced view than the one we are accustomed to.

[57] One difficulty is nomenclature. I use 'late antiquity' throughout as a convenient and conventional term, but it is remarkable that there is no term in use for the period 200-700 C.E. in the Mediterranean world that is not in some way derivative: late antiquity, sub-Roman, later Roman, early medieval, early Byzantine, post- or pre- something What would this period be if it had its own name?

[58] Roger Wright's account of Latin in *Late Latin and Early Romance* (Liverpool 1982) tells a parallel story of long habituation to slow but radical change followed by a more or less sudden realization, in the age of Charlemagne, that whatever it was being spoken in Gaul, it wasn't Latin any more and hadn't been for a very long time.

[59] My own *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley 1979) is the last full-length monograph (and it is sobering to see clear untruths stated and then chapter and verse in my own book, saying the opposite, cited in the accompanying footnotes as though in support), but there has been work abundant, not least by the virtuoso paleographer Fabio Troncarelli – see his *Vivarium : i libri, il destino* (Turnhout 1998) in particular. S.J.B. Barnish translated most of the *Variae* in "Translated Texts for Historians" and J.W. Halporn has a version of the

Institutiones (the first accurate translation in English, to be accompanied by an introduction by Mark Vessey) forthcoming in the same series.

[60] Consider the state of prosopography. Just within the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1971-92), there was considerable discussion about where the interior chronological boundaries between the three volumes should fall: 395, for example, conveniently aligns with the death of Theodosius, but awkwardly falls in the middle of the epistolary careers of Augustine, Jerome, and Symmachus, so some of the people they report are in volume 1, some in volume 2; similarly 527 matches the accession of Justinian but falls in the middle of Cassiodorus' *Variae*. But what if there could be a single interface that brought together not only all three volumes of *PLRE* but also the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* and the new *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*? The user of *that* tool might begin to forget about the importance of transitional dates and learn to navigate more transparently between realms now commonly cut off from one another.

[61] T. Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (New York 1995) 222.

[62] There are, of course, many worthy popularizers. Steven Saylor's crime fictions, starting with *Roman Blood* (in the series "Roma sub Rosa" – at least 9 titles so far), are informed, witty, and provocative, and well represent the university where he took his master's degree in classics. They succeed not least because they question, reshape, and experiment with the characters and narratives of the conventionalists.

[63] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge MA 1983) 594.

[64] *hist.* 4.1.

[65] In former east Berlin last year, I had the experience of first analyzing my own discomfort with the old and new architecture by voicing disdain for its scale and pomposity -- then blushing to recall that I live in Washington DC, whose effect on non-Americans I am ill-equipped to imagine.

[66] Owing, I like to credit, to the vision of a Wilsonian Jesuit who, in 1919, a year when isolationism was an easy and obvious course, persuaded his Jesuit brethren to agree to open a 'School of Foreign Service' which has become, through generations of inspired leadership, a powerful force of gravity reminding our institution of its and our nation's place in a society coterminous not with our national borders but our planetary stratosphere.

[67] M. Bernal, *Black Athena* (New Brunswick 1987-).

[68] M. Lefkowitz, G. Rogers, edd., *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill 1996); M. Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa* (New York 1997).

[69] Not entirely a bowl of cherries, to be sure: see the codicil to his will in *Past and Present* 1(1952) 71, "External accidents placed me among historians and classical scholars, although my training, and also, I suppose, my talent, was not sufficient for these two disciplines."

[70] The making of biographies has been indeed a trademark tool of the Anglophone late antique renaissance, in conscious or unconscious emulation of Brown's *Augustine*: certainly true of my own *Cassiodorus*.

[71] Even in the notably philo-Donatist and successful work of W.H.C. Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford 1951), and in Frend's work since.

[72] That date for the 'fall' was a very political choice made by near-contemporaries to make their own point: see Momigliano, 'La caduta senza rumore di un impero nel 476 d.C.,' *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, 3 (1973) 397-418.

[73] The groundbreaking articles were 'The Oldest Manuscripts of St. Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*', *Revue Bénédictine* 90(1980) 7-49, and 'The Manuscript Tradition of Eugippius' *Excerpta ex operibus sancti Augustini*," *Revue bénédictine* 92 (1982) 7-32, 229-265.

[74] See above on the dangers of 'perhaps' in biographical narrative.

[75] Cassiodorus *Institutiones* 1.29.1, fecimus enim illic iuuante domino grata receptacula, ubi sub claustro fideli uagetur piscium multitudo, ita consentaneum montium speluncis ut nullatenus se sentiat captum, cui libertas est et escas sumere et per solitas se cauernas abscondere.