

# H U M A N I T A S

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## Letter from the OCC President

Dear Colleagues,

I write to remind you that Xavier University will host the 2006 Ohio Classical Conference meeting, which is scheduled for October 27–28, 2006. Please note that this year's conference schedule is somewhat different: the meeting will take place all day Friday and Saturday and there are no Thursday afternoon activities. Dr. Daniel Garrison (Northwestern University) has agreed to be the speaker for the Vergilian luncheon on Friday afternoon and Dr. Gareth Schmeling (University of Florida) will be the banquet speaker on Saturday night.

The Ohio Classical Conference invites submission of abstracts of papers to be given at its annual meeting. While we will consider submissions on any area of classical antiquity, the emphasis of this year's meeting will be archaeology. Papers and presentations dealing with art, sculpture, painting, and literature would be greatly appreciated.

If you intend to present a paper, please let me know by May 15th and supply me with an electronic copy of an abstract (max. 250 words) including name, institution, and title of paper. Papers should be no more than 15 minutes long (PowerPoint and a slide projector will be available). There will be time available for discussion after each paper. Also, if you intend to come along to the meeting and do not want

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to present a paper but have a theme that you think warrants general discussion or questions concerning your teaching or research, please email me about it.

The Vernon Manor Hotel has offered a rate of \$74.00 (standard single[s]) and \$84.00 (double queen[s]); these prices do not include local occupancy or state taxes. The registration form for the conference will be on the Ohio Classical Conference website ([www.xavier.edu/classics/occ](http://www.xavier.edu/classics/occ)) by the end of May 2006.

I look forward to seeing you in Cincinnati!

Sincerely yours,

Edmund P. Cueva

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## Letter from the Editor

Dear Colleagues:

This issue of *Humanitas* includes some of the papers presented at the Ohio Classical Conference meeting in October 2005 at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware: Judith Dann's "The Myth of Opheltes and the Liminality of Infants" and Rich Elias' "I am Spartacus: The Politics of a Legend."

We also have included applications for several OCC awards: the Self-Organized Travel Scholarship and the College Classics Award. Please consider applying for these awards yourself or encourage your friends and colleagues to do so. Also, please consider submitting an entry for the OCC T-Shirt Design Contest—details are available at the end of the issue!

Please also consider submitting a short piece for our occasional feature, "In The Trenches." We are eager to publish reflections of our lives

and careers as teachers of Greek, Latin, and classical studies.

Deadlines for material for the next two issues are August 1 and December 1. Please submit material of interest from the media, articles you have written, and papers you have delivered to:

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Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,  
Neil Bernstein  
Editor, *Humanitas*

# The Myth of Opheltes and the Liminality of Infants

▪ *Judith Dann, Columbus State Community College, jdann@csc.edu*

Imagine, if you will, throngs of people gathered from all over Greece. Camp fires burning, singing, dancing, and the ever present buzz about the impending athletic contests. This is the yearly panhellenic gathering for the Nemean games. At the center of all the festivities is a hero shrine to a very small boy, whose death prompted the institution of the funeral games in his memory. This is the foundation myth for one of the four sites where panhellenic competition was held. In this paper, I propose to offer one analysis of the myth of this small boy, Opheltes. My analysis seeks to explain the fact that a small baby's death merited panhellenic attention and to illuminate the perception of the infant condition.

Opheltes, whose name means "bringer of increase," was the infant son of the king of Nemea. He was being carried by his nurse, Hypsipyle, when the two were approached by the seven commanders traveling from Argos to Thebes. The Seven against Thebes, as they are known, were a group of commanders gathered by Oedipus' son Polyneices to offer him help in reclaiming his rightful place on the throne of Thebes. They were to lay siege to the city if necessary. On their journey to Thebes they encountered the area around Nemea, at that time consumed with drought. When they met up with Hypsipyle and her infant charge, the Seven asked her if she knew where there might be some water and if she could lead them to it.

Hypsipyle set the baby down in the grass next to a dried-up spring so she could guide the men. In her absence, a snake that was near this particular spring approached the baby and killed him. When Hypsipyle and the seven commanders returned and saw the death scene, they buried the child, renamed him Archemoros, meaning "beginner of doom," and instituted funeral games in his honor.

The first known mention of the story is a 6th century BC version in Pindar, and the story is retold with surprisingly little variation until the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD.<sup>1</sup> Hypsipyle is consistently named as the nurse of the small child, and it is because of her temporary abandonment of him on the ground that he was then killed. In all instances, it was the search for water by the Seven against Thebes that drew Hypsipyle away from her charge. The child is always set down in a bed of foliage near a stream. In the handful of variations of the myth, there is no disagreement about *how* the infant was killed; in all instances a snake was the culprit. The only variation in the story is the identity of the biological parents of the child. While it is inconsequential to the plot *who* the parents were, what does matter is that a nurse, not a parent, was negligent in her duties. The age of the boy is never specifically revealed. He is described as *nepios* and *paidion*. We know from the context of the story that he must be an infant because Hypsipyle was carrying him,

and it was his vulnerability on the ground that precipitated his death. Only Hyginus offers a specific age of five years for the child. This seems to be an implausible variation, however, because at this age Opheltes would not have been so helpless and could presumably have walked away from the impending danger.

The elements of the Opheltes story that are significant to explain its place in such a public venue and that define one of the characteristics of infancy are the child's death and the dual name of the boy. He is at once Opheltes ("bringer of increase") and Archemoros ("beginner of doom"). The polarity of characteristics implied by these names might symbolize a liminal quality commonly found in other marginal beings that is here being associated with human infants.

The death of an infant would be seen as running counter to the procreative efforts of a family and state, and its loss would be felt by many for various social reasons. The mythic/heroic death of Opheltes focuses precisely on this tragedy and the resulting actions of the adult world. The significance of this issue, by virtue of its position at this panhellenic competition,

has then been extended in some sense from the personal realm to the attention of the state.

One of the main points of the myth is the fact that this small boy goes from being a cared-for heir to the throne of Nemea to an unfortunate victim of the venom of a snake, which ominously foreshadows the impending doom of the traveling commanders of the Seven against Thebes. We are, in a sense, bearing witness to the transition from the literal meanings of his names, Opheltes to Archemoros. The two conflicting implications of the child's existence are seen as a simultaneous condition because the names are used interchangeably. Both of these names, therefore, reflect the condition of the child. The tension witnessed between these two states reflects the tension seen in all children as to their potential blessings and disasters.

Any social group or entity—family, state, nation, species, etc.—identifies itself by a set of characteristics, or taxa, unique unto itself. Each member of the group possesses these taxa and therefore, conforms to the group identity and is then recognized by such. A group may identify itself by characteristics such as clothing styles

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## DO YOU BELONG TO CAMWS?

The Classical Association of the Middle West and South (CAMWS) is an organization of university, college, secondary, and elementary teachers of Latin, Greek, and classical antiquity. CAMWS publishes the quarterly *Classical Journal*, issues a Newsletter three times a year, and holds an annual conference in the spring. Institutional memberships are also available. For information, please see the CAMWS website at <http://www.camws.org/>.

or colors, behavior, language, shared rituals, or physical traits. It is by these very characteristics that members of the group are able to identify one another. Inherent in the process of self-identification is the recognition of an “other” or one who is *not* a member of the said group and one who, therefore, will not exhibit the same characteristics. The recognition of these differences establishes the boundaries of the group. Those outside the group do not share in the common identifiable taxa and are, therefore, “other.” Those inside the group share these characteristics and are, therefore, part of the accepted group identity. (See Stewart 1991, for example, on the taxonomic use of identity and difference in the intervillage relationships on the island of Naxos.) The need for humans to demarcate what is identifiable to the community establishes patterns for normalcy and consistency in that community and also immediately identifies outsiders who may pose a potential threat. This “line drawn in the sand” can become unclear, however, if a particular individual embodies characteristics of each. The person would, in fact, straddle the “line drawn in the sand,” being simultaneously inside and outside the community. This “liminal” figure (from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold or doorway) exists on the “threshold” of community identification.

Physically, infants exhibit an “otherness.” While they can be identified as human, they are characteristically opposite from their adult counterparts. The terminology for infancy itself reveals this ambiguity. A common term used for an infant is *nepios*, literally meaning “no speech” (also reflected in the Latin *infans* meaning “unable to speak”), which draws a

comparison to an adult ability that the child does not yet possess. One of the taxonomic identifications of humans is the ability to speak. While the child is indeed a human, it clearly lacks the characteristic and so does not yet completely belong to this taxonomic group (Small 1997: 141). Another variation of the term for infant is *ho nepous*. In this case a baby is being called “the footless one,” and it is obviously referring to the adult characteristic of walking, of which the newly born are clearly incapable. So, two of the most common terms used to describe this age group highlight the very characteristics of the child that keeps him or her from fully identifying with even members of its own family, therefore emphasizing its state of otherness and liminality.

Mark Golden, a leading scholar in childhood studies, argues that children, especially newborns, exhibit an “otherness” that separates them from the rest of humankind. Their traits include soft skin, lack of intelligence, lack of strength, inability to walk, requirement of special tools for their care such as bottles, potty stools, cradles, walkers, and the need for swaddling clothes. They are “physically weak, morally incompetent, mentally incapable” and were seen as “moister and hotter” than adults, which caused them to be angrier and greedier (Golden 1990: 5; Wiedemann 1989: 22–3). Children do not conform to the identifiable characteristics of the adult community. They are human-like but have not the bodily proportions of an adult; they have legs yet cannot walk, hands yet cannot effectively hold things, a voice but one that is unintelligible. Children were seen as being more akin to animals than adult humans, and that accentuates their

liminal existence, spanning the bridge between species. Socrates refused to admit that the relationships among children and those among wild beasts were actually “friendships.” In Plato’s *Cleitophon* (409 D–E), he is seen as contemplating “the friendships of children and those of wild beasts, which we call by this name. [Socrates] refused to admit—when questioned upon the point—that they were friendships.” When a comparison was made of children’s need for supervision with the need of sheep to have a herdsman, Plato explains why children stand out among the animals: “And of all wild creatures, the child is the most intractable ... for insofar as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is as yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly, and most insolent creature” (*Laws* 808 D–E).

In another instance, infants are compared to the marginal, in this case drunkards. Aristotle explains that since the upper parts of infants are so full of food, they cannot even turn their necks for five months. He compares this condensation of moisture to the same that is experienced by the very drunk (*On Sleeping and Waking* 457a). A philosophical explanation of why man walks bipedally is that his proportions are in harmony and so allows for an erect posture. All other creatures have excessive weight at the top that “hampers motion of the intellect and general sense” and causes the body to lurch forward onto all fours. This is known as “dwarfism” where the bigger proportion is at the top and small where the weight is supported. According to Aristotle (*Part. An.* 4.686a–b), infancy is the reverse of adulthood: “the upper portion is large and the lower is small and that is why infants cannot walk but crawl about, and at the

very beginning cannot even crawl, but remain where they are. In other words, all children are dwarfs.” It follows, then, that infants do not have harmony in their proportions.

An infant, as we see, is in a prolonged state of marginality. It is alive, but it is not yet an accepted person. It is a human being, yet at this stage it does not resemble a grown adult. Logically, one might wish to establish at what point this liminality begins and at what point it ends, but even the boundaries of this liminality are ambiguous and significant. Terms used to designate infants do not refer simply to parturient children (or those that are born). For example, *to embruon* refers to the embryo or fetus in the womb and *to brephos* also means the unborn child in the womb. Interestingly, both of these terms as well as the adjective *nepios* are also used to denote infants that are still suckling. *O tokos* indicates offspring as well as a child in the fetal stage (Garland 1990: 12–14). There is, then, no distinction in the Greek vocabulary for a pre-parturient and a parturient child. The terrifyingly liminal event of birth marks the halfway point for the being who is unborn and not yet alive and then is a parturient child who is not yet a person. A tombstone inscription for a small boy expressly recalls this marginal status that marks the passage of children into life: “For their little boy was carried off from the very threshold of life” (*nam puer hoc parvus vitaeq(ue) e limine raptus*, *CIL* 8.8567.3; Shore 1997: 64–65). This “liminal” state can provoke anxiety in the community that is faced with this and, as we will see, can leave the liminal person in an extremely vulnerable state.

These terms also reflect another characteristic of the liminality of infants. Whereas adults are defined by their specific gender, an infant is seen as genderless. *To embruon* and *to brephos* are neuter nouns, assigning no gender to the infant they describe. This philological example is reflected also in the medical literature. A Hippocratic treatise explains that passages in children's bodies are too narrow to allow the agitation of the fluids which will differentiate the sexes among adults (*Genit.* 2, vii.472.16–474.4). Aristotle also recognized the lack of gender. He acknowledged that conception was complete at gender differentiation, but full development of the sexual organs did not occur until puberty (*Gen. An.* 737b; *Gen. An.* 728b22–32; Dean-Jones 1994: 44–47). Full development of functional sexual organs differentiates the genders and so, Aristotelian theory implies, that a pre-pubescent child is essentially genderless. If gender is one of the most basic defining characteristics of humankind and a child lacks even that association, the infant would most surely be seen as marginal in status. Puberty is the passage that finally draws the child into the world of adults.

So, infancy can be seen as a prolonged state of liminality on several levels. The tragic killing in the myth also exemplifies another element of the infant condition brought on by their very liminality, namely, their extreme vulnerability. With the coming of a child, there is the joy at the birth for the “increase” it brings to the *oikos* and also hope for family continuance (at least for a male child). Opheltēs was the son of the king of Nemea and would have been expected to carry on the royal line and the power of the throne. He was being well cared for, with a nurse

employed to watch over him constantly. Yet, as the story shows, these hopes can be dashed by an unexpected and tragic event. Just as Opheltēs' mother and father, who lost their begotten and future heir, experienced the sudden death of their son, it is a metaphor any parent understands as they live in constant fear that some unfortunate mishap might rob them of their children.

Not only do the parents experience the joy of birth, but the extended community as well. The *oikos* is a “living organism” where one who is childless “is visibly dying.” So, the birth of a child expresses the very life blood of the *oikos* and demonstrates its viability. But yet the individual *oikos* is still not the only one affected by the birth. Society as a whole, which is a grouping of many *oikoi*, also experiences joy and hope at the coming of a new potential citizen or member of the community.

When Plato discussed the fate of the soul after death in the *Republic*, he recounted the Myth of Er, a Pamphylian who had journeyed to the life beyond and returned to the living to describe the rewards and punishments that awaited. Er had described in the cycle of reincarnation that the soul either enjoys the rewards for having lived a sinless life or it experienced the wretched torments in payment for living a foul one. Plato then makes a break in the recitation of the myth to summarize the lot of children. “Concerning infants who die at birth or live but a short time he had more to say, not worthy of mention” (*Pl. Resp.* 10.613c). Although Plato does not inform us exactly what it was he had to say on the topic, what is indicative is that these children were located in a spiritually marginal place after death. Since Er is recounting the plight

of both sinners and good people, specifically describing where they go after death, the special reference to infants indicates that they are not counted among these two groups and therefore, must go some place entirely different. They are not among the group to take the stairs up to heaven, nor are they part of the group that, as sinners, descend under the earth. They must reside in yet a different place in the afterlife. Their liminality in life translated into actual and perpetual liminality in death. It is also relevant to consider that whatever it was that allowed the other souls to continue on the journey of death, infants clearly lacked. There is no mention at all of infants in the Underworld of Homer's *Odyssey*. However, in Vergil's later work, infant souls were the first thing heard over the River Styx and were followed by other marginal souls or those of the untimely dead (*aoroi*), such as the falsely condemned, suicides, and suicides of lovers.

In our key myth, the presence of Opheltes and his nurse Hypsipyle during the search for water and his subsequent death had far-reaching implications for the Seven against Thebes and reflects the significance of children to society in general. When Polyneices and his companions met up with Opheltes and his nurse, there was a glimmer of hope that relief might come to their parched throats. Here Opheltes symbolizes hope and prosperity, hence his name "bringer of increase." However, soon thereafter, his death marked the first of a long string of deaths in an ill-fated expedition. Amphiaraos, one of the Seven, saw the baby's death as a prophetic warning to the Argives that their expedition would ultimately fail. It is here the boy earns his name Archemoros, "beginner of doom."

Ill fortune for a state is elsewhere represented in children. Herodotus mentions that a state's imminent disaster will be foretold in the deaths of the children. He clearly states that "great evils" are preceded by warnings communicated through the well-being of the children. One hundred Chian (youths) were sent to Delphi, and ninety-eight of them contracted an illness and died. Only two of them returned home. Then a school room roof collapsed during school hours, killing one hundred nineteen children. Soon, the Chians were engaged in a naval battle with Histiaeus in which they were totally defeated. Herodotus comments that "God showed them these signs; thereafter, the sea fight broke upon them and brought the city to its knees" (Hdt. 6.27).

In mythology, the births of certain individuals that pose potential danger to the family or state are accompanied by omens or other warnings. The threat is seen even at birth. Oedipus was born with an omen that he would literally kill his father, necessitating his mutilation and exposure. Cyrus was born accompanying a dream of Astyages, his grandfather, that a vine shading all of Asia emanated from his daughter's loins. Interpreters concluded that to signify the child would take Astyages' throne. Cyrus, too, was sent to be exposed in an attempt to avert the usurpation about to be caused by the infant (Hdt. 1.108). The birth of Paris foretold even greater disaster. His mother, Hecuba, dreamt she gave birth to a firebrand and so the child was exposed. Having been rescued from exposure and later grown, his identity was revealed—Cassandra prophesied that he would be the destruction of Troy. Here, the whole city groans under the birth of this particular

infant. Also, Plutarch tells us that among many portents surrounding the conception and birth of Alexander, the most ominous was that the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus burned at the same time Alexander the Great was born. This was thought to signal the destruction of Asia (Plut. *Alex.* 3.3–4).

Mythologically, the danger of a newborn can be seen on a grandiose scale. So, the family of the newborn may not always be the recipient of the danger but the child's impact on the world at least is sometimes thought to be signaled at its birth. Similarly, Opheltes also served as an indicator of both future fortune and misfortune alike due to his infant condition.

These ancient panhellenic religious festivals and athletic contests were held every year at various sanctuaries in honor of particular gods. The purpose of these events was not only to worship, honor, and entertain the gods but also to perform a very important sociological purpose: the yearly gathering of panhellenic societies in a reaffirmation of solidarity and peace. Excavations at Nemea have located what is believed to be a *heroon*, or hero shrine, to Opheltes. Votive figures and burnt offerings were found in the Heroon, which indicate popular cultic activity (Miller 1988, 1990), so the message in the story of Opheltes must have been significant. I have tried to establish that the myth of Opheltes represents a very real, perceived trait of the infant condition to which the participants at the Olympic contests could personally relate. Infancy is a period of liminality and as such, care needed to be made to protect these fragile creatures. It also shows the appropriate connection to social and state

interests, justifying its popularity, and shows the need to recognize the fate of such a small little boy.

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### Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> See Pindar, *Nemean* hypoth. 2, 3, 4; Aeschylus, *fr.* 261; Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 3.6.4; Statius, *Theb.* 5.499–7.104; Hyginus, *Fab.* 74; Pausanias 2.15.2–3. See also Miller 1988, 1990.

# I am Spartacus: The Politics of a Legend

▪ *Rich Elias, Ohio Wesleyan University, rlelias@owu.edu*

Although *Spartacus* was a box office hit and an Academy Award winner, the screenwriter and the director were not happy with it. *Spartacus*, released in 1960, followed a string of successful sword-and-sandals epics, such as *Quo Vadis*, *The Robe*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *Ben-Hur*. It rivaled them in length and beat them in production cost: \$12 million, a record for that time. Hollywood in the 1950s was still trying to win back an audience lost to television. “Cinemascope” entered the vocabulary as studios tried to woo viewers from the small screen back to the big one.

The studio system, strong throughout the 1920s to the 1940s, had not only lost much of the audience for their films, but had also lost control of movie theaters (in 1948) and, more importantly, its actors. Taking a cue from United Artists, organized decades earlier, top actors set up as producers, picking their own projects and pitching them to studios. Enter Kirk Douglas.

Born Issur Danielovitch, son of a Russian Jewish immigrant, Douglas had appeared in about 34 films before *Spartacus*. In 1957, he starred in the first film he produced, *Paths of Glory*, directed by a newcomer named Stanley Kubrick. Kubrick later became a Hollywood legend, after leaving Hollywood to spend the rest of his life in England. In 1957, though, he had directed only three movies when Douglas chose him to helm what was just about the only

antiwar film of the decade, a World War I tale about craven French generals who execute a few of their own soldiers to frighten the rest of the army into action.

For his next major production, Douglas turned to a popular but controversial 1951 novel, *Spartacus*, by Howard Fast. *Spartacus* was Fast’s eleventh book in a writing career that began when he was in his teens. Like many writers who came of age before World War II, Fast was drawn to the Communist Party, which he joined and served to his cost until he recanted in the late 1950s. Fast spent a year in prison in 1950 after refusing to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the height of the McCarthy witch-hunt. But his writing career was in trouble before then. Publishers who had made money from bestsellers like *Freedom Road* or *Citizen Tom Paine* refused to print his new novels. The movie industry had already purged itself of Reds and Communist sympathizers who, like Fast, refused to name names. The “Hollywood Ten,” all of them successful screenwriters, were blacklisted, and publishers might be the next target. Authors like Fast found themselves talking to closed doors.

In response, Fast published *Spartacus* and his next few novels himself. The story of the Thracian slave who led a revolt against Rome sold well and got generally favorable

reviews except from, of all people, Fast's fellow Communists. They were unhappy that Spartacus, a proletarian hero if ever there was one, lost. Even Fast could not change history. And his historical inventions turned Reds purple, notably in the ending in which Spartacus' wife Varinia is given her freedom by the corrupt and cynical Gracchus. "What is intended here?" wrote *The Daily Worker*. "Is this Goethe's idealistic vision of the Eternal Woman, leading us all, oppressor and oppressed, upward and on?"

The reviewer might have been on better ground if he had said that *Spartacus* is just a bad novel. Fast breaks up the storyline, weaving back and forth in time and using multiple narrators, all of them Roman. Maybe it is true that history is written by the victors, but novels do not have to be. One result is that Spartacus, the main character, is almost missing from Fast's novel. Everybody talks about him, and Fast invents for Spartacus a few long exhortations to his slave army about freedom, shared ownership of property, and the equality of the sexes. But Varinia and others keep repeating that the Spartacus they knew was a simple man. By refusing to characterize Spartacus in depth, Fast was trying to position him as an Everyman who responded (albeit prematurely) to what Marxists call historical necessity. The moment, not the man, matters. The Rome that Fast describes was corrupt, vicious, and led by rapists and sexual switch hitters. The Republic would soon fall into tyranny, but Rome itself would not fall. Not yet.

Maybe Fast's Marxist leanings prevented him from centering his novel on a hero, but

Hollywood needs heroes, and Kirk Douglas looked buff in *The Vikings*, released in 1958. Douglas asked Fast to write a screenplay, but it was "a disaster, unusable," as Douglas says in his memoirs. In his first bold move, Douglas hired Dalton Trumbo to write the script for *Spartacus*. Trumbo, one of the Hollywood Ten, hadn't put his name on a script since the blacklist. (As *The Front*, released in 1976, starring Woody Allen shows, Trumbo and others used an alias or a front man to peddle scripts during these dark times.) Douglas broke the blacklist by putting Trumbo's name on screen again. Trumbo repaid him by grouching, after the picture was finished, that *Spartacus* had everything it needed "except a good story." Disputes flared between Trumbo and Douglas. Some turned on how "political" the movie could or should be. But I think Trumbo was really complaining about Fast's novel which, among other problems, never describes the death of Spartacus. Once more, this was a deliberate move by Fast to stress his hero's legacy rather than the man himself. The screenplay owes little to the novel, although Fast in a 1990 memoir speaks of "my film *Spartacus*."

Douglas hired Anthony Mann to direct the movie, at Universal's insistence. Mann was a Hollywood hack, but he knew how to helm an action picture. The box office success of *Strategic Air Command* (1955), a paean to General Curtis Lemay, gave him the right political credentials to balance the leftists. Two weeks into production, Mann was fired. Douglas was not happy with him, and neither was Universal. Douglas picked Kubrick, over the studio's objections, because Douglas thought he could control him. He was wrong. The production

history records endless squabbles between the two, and it was Kubrick's miserable experience with *Spartacus* that made him decide to move to England permanently.

Casting was another problem. Laurence Olivier was enthusiastic, Charles Laughton was cajoled into the project, but finding an actress to play Varinia was a problem. Douglas turned to an attractive, unknown German actress (a blonde, like the Varinia in Fast's book), but she could not act. He turned next to Jean Simmons, although her accent spoiled the contrast that Douglas sought between corrupt Romans with British accents versus freedom-seeking slaves who all sound like Yanks. The final cut trimmed about 20 minutes from the film, mainly to keep it to a length exhibitors would not complain about, but some cuts were made to satisfy Production Code censors. These notably included a scene in which Crassus (Laurence Olivier) tries to woo Antoninus (Tony Curtis) via oblique references to his mixed taste for "snails and oysters."

So what is the movie about? My take is that the movie "naturalizes" for a mass audience values and ideals that, if presented straight, might have seemed subversive in the 1950s. First, unlike Fast's novel, the movie deliberately likens Spartacus to Jesus. The opening voiceover says the story takes place before the coming of Christianity, encouraging us to regard Spartacus as a man of sorrows surrounded by tears, like Jesus. The crucifixion scene at the end (again,

*not* in Fast's novel) confirms this through visual parallels to Renaissance paintings of Jesus' agony on the cross. Since earlier sword-and-sandals epics centered on Christian themes (the novel *Ben-Hur*, the basis of the 1959 film, is subtitled *A Tale of the Christ*), the imposed religious framework make Spartacus' vaunts about freedom from slavery and equality seem like precursors of the Sermon on the Mount rather than echoes of *The Communist Manifesto*.

More interesting, however, are changes that accommodate gender roles to 1950s social conformism. Fast invented Varinia as Spartacus' mate, a female slave who, like other women in the gladiator school, are occasionally passed out to the fighters for some R&R. One character describes her as "a German bitch, but good to look at if you like the yellow hair and the blue eyes." Spartacus gets her because no Roman had been able to rape her without getting beaten up in the attempt. She's called, in a 1950s word, a "wildcat." Compare Fast's Amazon to the petite brunette Jean Simmons in the movie. As in the book, Spartacus in the film respects her feelings by refusing to take her when she is put into his cell. Unlike the book, the movie builds a romantic subplot from this. Fast's Varinia, on the other hand, emerges as a champion of women's rights, a citizen of the slave army who fights along with the men. Varinia in the movie, although no virgin when she finally surrenders

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The Committee for the Promotion of Latin of CAMWS regularly makes awards to help support a variety of projects. For information, see: <http://department.monm.edu/classics/CPL/Grants/CPLFundingProcedure.htm>

to her lover, settles into a domestic relationship in which husband knows best.

If Fast's assertion of women's rights seems advanced for his times, his use of homosexuality is tendentiously 1950s. Crassus has sex with a young male client on their trip to Capua. This is no big deal, par for the course, as the younger man says in a chapter describing how powerful Romans expected sexual favors from younger men whose careers they advanced. Gracchus is presented as a lower class "ward heeler" who connived his way to senatorial rank. He's too busy scheming to bother with women except for whores he buys in the marketplace. Fast thus equates Roman corruption with sexual exploitation, in contrast to the equal opportunity slave army in which sexual coercion is forbidden by decree.

The movie omits Gracchus' background. For all we know, he could have been born a patrician. Charles Laughton's plummy British accent sounds, to American ears, very upper class. He says, however, that he fills his house with gorgeous female servants, making him the envy of his friends. A sly allusion to Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion, perhaps? His sexual exploitation of women isn't foregrounded; he is a sybarite who flaunts his interest in playmate servants. Since the fat Laughton hardly looks like a playboy, his sexuality seems comic, less odious than that of the Gracchus in the novel.

Crassus, however, is a different animal. Laurence Olivier stage-acts the part with touches of eye makeup that signal bisexuality. Where Fast's Crassus uses sex as an assertion of personal power, Crassus is merely carnal in

the movie's "snails and oysters" scene. Taking a cue from the audience's assumed prejudices, the movie implicitly reconstructs its political values in terms of a reconstituted masculinity versus the sexual depravity of the Romans. The key here is Antoninus, played by Tony Curtis, whose Brooklyn accent provides moments of unintentional humor. Fast has no such character. The part was created for Curtis, who needed one more picture to complete a contractual obligation to Universal. Antoninus is a singer, a reciter of poetry, whose job is to entertain at banquets. Crassus picks him for his household because he is attracted to him physically. After Crassus comes on to Antoninus in the expunged snails and oyster scene, the slave flees to join Spartacus' army. But when new recruits are asked to state their skills, Antoninus is jeered when he says he is only a singer. That's all he knows how to do. Spartacus quiets the laughter by saying that poets are important too, as their words will outlive all the slaves.

We never do hear Antoninus reciting Homer, but we do see him training for battle. The association of poetry and homosexuality is rejected, but poetry itself is redeemed. Great wars should stir great epics about them. Similarly, Varinia recovers her virtue through domesticity. In structural terms, the movie finds a place for the sissy and the whore by linking them to a new order of values inchoate in Spartacus' vision of freedom. But it accomplishes this by turning Antoninus into yet another hyper-masculine hero and Varinia into Mrs. Spartacus.

The movie accommodates the prejudices of its times in other ways. In Fast's novel, the Roman woman who orders single combat

at the gladiator camp selects a Jew and an “Ethiopian,” a black man, Drago (played by Woody Strode in the movie). She then asks the Jew to drop his loincloth so she can inspect his circumcision. There is no Jewish gladiator in the movie. Instead, two Roman women ask Drago to drop his drawers and titter at what they see. In terms of the film’s drama, this makes more sense than the book’s David. Drago’s humiliation helps motivate his decision to fly in a murderous rage at his captors rather than kill Spartacus in the ring. Politically, substituting a black man for a Jew would echo the nascent civil rights movement of the period and also eliminate the “Jew equals Red” association that might arise from a film based on a novel by a Jewish author, filmed by a Jewish director, and starring a Jewish actor. A joke about a black man’s penis was more acceptable.

Fast’s Spartacus forms his slave army to overthrow Rome. Douglas’s Spartacus wants slaves to return to their homeland. Only after his army is squeezed between two converging legions does he head north toward Rome. Again, this makes more sense than the book, although it raises the question of how Spartacus, a slave and the son of a slave, acquired his savvy in military tactics. Turning Spartacus into a hero seeking to lead freed slaves to their homeland likens him to Moses, last seen on screen in DeMille’s *Ten Commandments* (1956) and indirectly to the Israeli heroes of Leon Uris’ bestseller *Exodus*, the film of which was released the same year as *Spartacus*.

*Spartacus* has been called “the thinking man’s epic.” It certainly is more thoughtful and provides more to think about than other

purple peplum flicks of its era. Oddly enough, the movie was criticized by the far left and adopted (or co-opted) by conservatives for its “enduring statement about the value of individual freedom.” Fast, who recanted Communism in a 1957 book *The Naked God*, provided press materials that encouraged critics to see the movie that way. Interestingly, the author’s 1990 memoir devotes many pages to *Spartacus*, novel and film, but never mentions Trumbo in connection with it. Although Fast’s confrontation with the House Committee on Un-American Activities led him to prison and Trumbo’s to the blacklist, the screenwriter managed to get in one dig at his persecutors. Senators in a bathhouse fume about the loss of six cohorts of Roman soldiers to an army of slaves. One of them sputters, “We should call for an investigation!” The Senate Committee on Un-Roman Activities perhaps?

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APPLICATION FOR THE OCC 2007  
SELF-ORGANIZED TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP  
FOR TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS OF CLASSICS

This scholarship in the amount of \$2,000.00 was created for teachers who are up to the challenge of arranging and conducting their own tours with their students. The teacher receives \$1,000.00 and five designated students will divide the other \$1,000.00. A travel agent may only be used for booking plane tickets. No organized tour company may be used (such as ACIS or CHA). Teachers are expected to book other reservations (e.g., coach, train, or hotels).

ELIGIBILITY:

- \* Teacher must be a member of OCC for at least three years. Teacher (and students, where possible) must be willing to make a presentation at the 2007 OCC meeting.
- \* OCC Members who have already received the scholarship are only eligible *to re-apply after a three-year period (e.g., a member who received the scholarship in 2003 is eligible again in the summer of 2006).*

APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

1. Submit formal application (may be obtained from OCC website, the OJCL website, or from Chair)
2. Submit statement of **purpose and philosophy** of your intended approach to the tour (one page minimum: typed and doubled-spaced)
3. Include a likely **itinerary** and list of **major sites** to be included for the students (include at least ten and how you expect to introduce them).
4. Detail the responsibilities which will be given (both in preparation and during travel) **to the participating students.**
5. Submit a letter of support from a school administrator or board sanctioning your foreign travel with students from your school.

DEADLINE:

Please note: Beginning next year (2006–2007), to facilitate arrangements, all applications for Summer 2007 travel must be received **by Nov. 15, 2007** to extend the planning time for the teacher and students.

NOTIFICATION:

For **Summer 2007** travel (for the 2006–2007) school year, the applicants will be notified **BY JAN. 1, 2007.**

Direct all inquiries and applications to:

Amy J. Sawan, Chair  
The Ohio Classical Conference Scholarship Committee  
Medina Senior High School  
777 E. Union St.  
Medina, OH 44256  
(330) 725-9236 • Home: (330) 867-5633  
E-mail: [LIAMOT@aol.com](mailto:LIAMOT@aol.com) or [sawana@mcsoh.org](mailto:sawana@mcsoh.org)

APPLICATION FOR THE OCC Summer 2007  
SELF-ORGANIZED TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP  
FOR TEACHERS WITH STUDENTS OF CLASSICS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PRIOR TRAVEL EXPERIENCE (LIST COUNTRIES OR REGIONS): \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF TRIPS TAKEN WITH YOUR STUDENTS BEFORE THIS: \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT TOUR COMPANIES HAVE YOU USED IN THE PAST? \_\_\_\_\_

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE THIS WILL BE A BETTER ALTERNATIVE?

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HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN TEACHING CLASSICS? \_\_\_\_\_

CURRENT TEACHING POSITION: \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS OR FAX NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECTS/LEVEL CURRENTLY TEACHING: \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH OF TIME AT YOUR CURRENT SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Ohio Classical Conference  
College Classics Award 2005–2006**

The OCC College Classics Award recognizes and promotes academic excellence in Ohio higher education classics programs, regardless of their size. Although the award is made for the program as a whole, the intent is also to recognize the contributions of the individual professor(s) to the program in its local environment, the region, and the nation. The primary criteria for selection are the quality of the curriculum in the classics and the academic opportunities for the students within that curriculum.

The classics program selected for the award will receive the following:

- A permanent plaque for the college to display
- A modest stipend to be used by the classics department
- Recognition in local newspapers and state classics publications

**Eligibility:**

The applicant will have held membership in the Ohio Classical Conference for at least three years prior to the year for which the application is made. In addition, the applicant will have had at least three years of experience with his or her college's classics program. In the case of programs with more than one faculty, the preceding rules apply to the principal applicant alone; however, if the additional faculty are not members of the Ohio Classical Conference, they must join at the time of application.

**Materials to be Submitted** (one set, not to exceed 30 pages):

1. A completed application form, including a list of professors and their courses.
2. A description of the curriculum, including requirements for a major or minor in a classical field and/or the requirements for an honors degree.
3. A letter from the Dean or President in which the classics program is described.
4. Three to five letters of recommendation from current majors or recent graduates.
5. A list of graduates going on in classics (e.g., graduate school or high school teaching).
6. Examples of any public recognition.
7. Community awareness efforts (lectures, films, or plays).
8. A list of each professor's publications for the last three years.
9. A description of student opportunity to travel either to Europe or to relevant museums in North America.
10. A sample copy of two examinations, preferably one from a Greek course and one from a Latin course.

Materials should be sent to: Gwen Compton-Engle, Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Cultures, John Carroll University, 20700 N. Park Blvd., University Heights, OH 44118. **Postmark Deadline: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

The award committee, composed of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President (Gwen Compton-Engle), one college professor (Rachel Sternberg, Case Western University), and one high school teacher (Janice Vitullo, The Laurel School), will review all applications. The decision of the committee will be announced at the October meeting of the Ohio Classical Conference.

**Ohio Classical Conference  
College Classics Award 2005–06  
Application Form**

Name of principal applicant and address of institution:

Name of the Dean of the college or President of the university:

Total number of students in the college and number of majors and minors in classical degree programs:

Name of each professor in the classics department:

**Curriculum:** Please list each course taught in 2005–06 with a brief description of the course, 2005–06 enrollment figures, and the professor's name. Attach additional sheet(s) as necessary.

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

Course:	Enrollment:	Professor:
Brief Description:		

# Ohio Classical Conference Annual Latin Week: T-Shirt Design Contest

**For students enrolled in Latin, Greek, or Classics courses**

**Purpose:** Students are challenged to create an original T-shirt design that educates their school and community about the importance and relevance of Latin, Greek, and/or Classics.

**Participation:** Students may participate in **one** of four divisions, as follows: Middle School (grades 5–8); High School, Level I (grades 9–10); High School, Level II (grades 11–12); Computer generated (open to all levels).

**Requirements:** In order for the judge to consider a design, students must meet the following criteria:

1. Designs must be 8 ½" x 11". There is no limitation on the colors that can be used (as the t-shirts for the winners will be printed with color copy transfers on white t-shirts).
2. Designs must be original.
3. Designs (**except lettering**) must be hand-drawn. Computer graphics (see category #4 above) will be considered separately.
4. Four copies of each design must be submitted, each with a copy of the Application Form. Teachers can make copies of the Application Form as needed. Students should place their names and school information on the Application Form, **not on the design itself**. Please attach the Application Form to the design.
5. Only five different designs may be submitted by a school in any single division.
6. The teacher of the competing school must be a member of the Ohio Classical Conference.
7. All designs become property of the Ohio Classical Conference and will not be returned.

## **Criteria for Judging:**

1. VISUAL IMPACT: Does the design have visual impact? Is it neat and well presented? Is the design appropriate for a t-shirt?
2. VERBAL IMPACT: Does the message promote the Classics? Is the wording correct, appealing, and memorable? Were Latin or Greek words used correctly?
3. CREATIVITY: Is the design original? Did the student show imagination?

**Prizes:** First and second place winners in each category will win t-shirts with their designs. The first place winner will also receive a monetary award.

First prize:           3 t-shirts with design of the winner + monetary awards  
Second prize:        2 t-shirts with design of the second winner

**Use of Winning Design:** Winning designs will be displayed and publicly recognized at the next annual meeting of the Ohio Classical Conference and in a future edition of *Humanitas*, the newsletter of the Ohio Classical Conference.

**Deadline:** All entries must be postmarked by **Friday, May 19, 2006**.

**Send all entries to:**

Steven Strauss  
Notre Dame Academy  
Toledo, Ohio 43606  
e-mail: sstrauss@nda.org

# Ohio Classical Conference Annual Latin Week: T-Shirt Design Contest

2005–2006 School Year

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

T-shirt size: \_\_\_\_\_

Check the single division in which this design is to be entered:

- Middle School (grades 5–8)
- High School, Level I (grades 9–10)
- High School, Level II (grades 11–12)
- Computer generated (open to all levels)

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Remember to indicate your t-shirt sizes as the winners get t-shirts with their designs!