

Letter from Antigone

A cave,
Nr. Chester
August 19, 1983

Dear Haemon,

Before I tread the path of no return, I will pen this brief letter of farewell. It is extremely dark in this cave; in fact I can hardly see the paper on which I write, but I know from Dr. Duncan Kennedy's talk on epistolary literature, that this is no reason to stop writing, although it does make the letter less plausible. In this talk, he examined the *Heroides* (whoever they are by!) and used parallels from French and English literature to highlight the virtues and vices, the possibilities and drawbacks, of the letter as a literary form. In the subsequent seminar, we looked in detail at *Heroides I* and saw how, if the letter is placed at a very specific point in time in *Odyseey II*, the wit and humour of the poem gain tension and coherence.

Before I die, I think back to the last few days in Chester and the very many useful and interesting events that have taken place. One of the main attractions of the Summer School must be the combination of practical ideas to revive a jaded teaching technique, with lectures and reading courses to rejuvenate a jaded intellect. Of the former, (choosing from a tantalising list of options) I found Peter and Rosemary Hulse's Visual Aids circuitus very helpful in alerting me to published material and also showing what could be done with artistic talent, imagination and a banda machine. Cut-out thermopolia are a must for the autumn.

Those of us who were local found Dr. Carrington's presentations of aspects of Chester very useful. In particular the visit to the Grosvenor Museum (defended as it is with some impressive Roman artillery) was an excellent guide for planning future school trips. He also brought us up to date on excavations in Chester, and led an activity group through the techniques and current aims of archaeology.

As an illustration of practical archaeology, members of the Ermine Street Guard brought Unit 3, Stage 23, to life, demonstrating the types of armour worn by Roman legionaries and auxiliaries. After looking at slides of troops firing ballistas, and tortoises disappearing at speed over West Country hills, we spent a long time trying the weight of helmets and shields, and discussing the number of man (or wife) hours required to make chain mail. We were impressed by the enthusiasm of the Guard for their attention to exact detail and, as far as possible, their accurate reconstructions using ancient techniques and comparable materials.

Intellect expanders comprised the reading groups and the series of lectures and follow-up seminars. I was particularly interested in the reading groups and the celebrated conversation in real Latin, and would have liked to spend more time on these, and also to have had the opportunity of reading more unusual works. However, the exercise was salutary and I feel a new impetus to brush up my quantities, though I despair of ever acquiring even CSE standard Greek principal parts.

Mr. John Carter began the lectures with an examination of the seriousness of Suetonius and demonstrated the moralistic programme which shapes the work, but ultimately a comparison with the more mature and logically coherent Tacitus left Suetonius as a Silly Author. Mr. Mark Hassall, engagingly depreciating his ability to read Latin inscriptions, linked Bath and Vindolanda because of the wealth of

written material found on each site. We cast our eyes over the Vindolanda underpinks and many military documents, and were horrified by the revelation that Viblia (Unit 3, Stage 22) might be a cloak, and not a girl at all! Professor David West, discussing the (?hopeless) task of a translator, gave us a foretaste of his own version of the *Aeneid*, and his seminar provoked heated discussion not only of acceptable English equivalents ('snow-white' arms no longer possible after Disney) but also of the meaning of several crucial parts of *Aeneid 8* (Vulcan and Venus — who fancies whom?) Lastly, Wilf O'Neill took us on a swag-crawl through the industrial North, demonstrating how the Classical Continuum penetrates even the most barbaric parts of Yorkshire. Perhaps equally important, Chester College provided us with excellent food and the warmest pool in the county, and ARLT tiros like myself were made instantly welcome by the very friendly atmosphere.

But back to my cave, which, on this final evening, has seen a lot of activity. Veronica Anstey produced a brisk Greek play, set in a sparsely populated Thebes (all that fighting!); Roger Davies and some Maidens and Pirates/Police-men bravely overcame the evil force of the piano; and Guy Rawlinson, who must be the Man of the Match for 1983, has showed us not only a series of beautifully planned demonstration lessons (are they ever like that in real life?), not only, as Lesbia, a virtuosio seduction (failed) in hendecasyllables of his own composition of Madam Chairwoman, as Catullus whose mind was on her poetry, but will shortly demonstrate a fine baritone in the sing-song to follow. But the curtain rises, the lights go up, and a black Cheshire cat (a local) appears to announce 'Alicia in Terra Mirabili.' The end draws nigh.

Farewell, Antigone.

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'DR. SOCLES TREATS A HUNCHBACK' OR QVIDQVID ID EST,
TIMEO MEDICOS ET SAXA FERENTIS.

"Spina parum recta est; spinae, Diodore, medebor."

Fatus et hoc Socles bis duo saxa parat.

Haec imposta gravant, onus haud tolerabile, tergus

Incurvum; moles maxima cuique fuit.

Mortuus es, Diodore miser; sed regula non est

Tergore depresso rector ulla tuo.

Calliater (*Anth. Pal.* XI.120 — date unknown)

Herbert H. Huxley