

Summer Beach Reading for Classicists
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This list began as an in-house resource for the classics community at the University of Michigan. It was not intended for broad circulation. The material that it contains has been gathered and presented in an improvised and informal way, much like seasonal lists of recommended reading published by newspapers and magazines. There is no attempt here to be scholarly, exhaustive, or objective.

A simple version of this list, giving only authors and titles (no descriptions and reviews), is also available.

Overview of Summer Beach Reading for Classicists

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The Greeks and Romans are good company. For many of us, however, getting to know them well involves reading with a dictionary at hand and having access, physical or virtual, to various types of primary and secondary sources. But what if you're going to the beach? Is it possible to spend time with the Greeks and Romans there? Manuscripts can't leave the library, there's no room in a tote bag for the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, and sand is bad for hard-drives. A paperback translation or a few articles might serve your interests. But perhaps you have lighter fare in mind; after all, if you're at the beach, you must be on vacation.

For some time now I've been compiling "Summer Beach Reading for Classicists" for the classics community at the University of Michigan. The books on this list are inspired by what we know, or wish we knew, about the Greeks and Romans. Most are works of imagination: historical fiction set in the ancient world, ancient myths retold, and contemporary stories that owe something to how the ancients saw their world and their place in it (or that reveal our obsession with that world). Many of the books bridge the temporal and cultural gap between "us and them" in compelling and surprising ways, sometimes filling in historical and literary gaps. For example, Ursula Le Guin lets Lavinia speak where Vergil didn't, Zachary Mason has brought us "the lost books" of the *Odyssey*, and Jane Allison envisions the exile of Ovid, the "love artist," as the story behind the composition and disappearance of his tragedy *Medea*.

The list includes many mystery series, a genre that has no end of practitioners and devoted readers, as well as several versions of the Trojan War myth. There are old favorites (Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian*) and guilty pleasures (Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*), a smattering of science fiction (Dan Simmons's *Olympos*) and a graphic novel (Frank Miller's *300*). Books by travel writers, historians, and biographers round out the list, among them Patricia Storace's *Dinner with Persephone*, Ryszard Kapuscinski's *Travels with Herodotus*, and Neal Ascherson's *The Black Sea*. This last book begins with words from Konstantin Paustovsky's autobiography that capture the spirit in which the list is compiled: "I must admit, I can be perfectly happy reading...and equally happy pouring the sands through my fingers."

Summer Beach Reading for Classicists

Historical Fiction

Historical Fiction: Mysteries & Espionage

Ancient Myths Retold

Ancient/Mediterranean Contexts for Modern Tales

Fantasy & Science Fiction

Graphic Novels

History and Biography

Travel Writing

HISTORICAL FICTION (see next section for mysteries & espionage)

***Robert Harris** completes his trio of novels about Cicero with *Dictator*, which “narrates the last miserable fifteen years of his protagonist’s and the free Republic’s existence, a story that begins in the bitterness of exile and ends with murder and mutilation...” *Dictator* is told “through the voice of someone not blind to [Cicero’s] faults but who loved him all the same, his slave secretary Tiro.... In Harris’ hands he is more Dr Watson than Jeeves” (Greg Woolf, *TLS*).

*In *Blood and Steel*, the “second book of his new Throne of the Caesars series, [Harry] Sidebottom continues his retelling of one of the bloodiest periods of Roman history—the Year of the Six Emperors. In Rome in the year 238 AD, Emperor Maximinus’s reign hangs in the balance. The empire is bleeding manpower and money in an attempt to sustain its wars in the north, and rebellions flare in the far reaches of its territories. Meanwhile in Africa, Gordian the Elder and Younger are proclaimed as the new Augusti. A family descending from the Imperial bloodline, they represent a chance for the establishment to take back the empire. The first blood of the revolt is shed in Rome when an assassin murders the emperor’s prefect, announcing to Rome that the Gordians have taken the throne; still bitter at Maximinus’s rise from the barracks to power, the Senate endorses the rebellion, and chaos descends on the capitol.” *Iron and Rust*, the first novel, is set in 235 AD. “A surprise attack and the brutal murder of Emperor Alexander and his mother ends the Severan dynasty and shatters four decades of Roman certainty. Military hero Maximinus Thrax is the first Caesar risen from the barracks. A simple man of steel and violence, he will fight for Rome unconditionally. The Senators praise the new Emperor with elaborate oratory, but will any of them accept a Caesar who was once a shepherd boy? In the north, as the merciless war against the barbarians consumes men and treasure, rebellion and personal tragedy drive Maximinus to desperate extremes, bloody revenge, and the borders of sanity” (publisher’s blurb).

“While contemplating the luck of her expansive education (the gift of an unusually doting father), 15-year-old **Cecilia**,” the title character of this novel by **Linda Ferri** “muses in her diary, ‘only a fool would flee his lucky star.’ Though determined to find herself through study of the philosophers and to seek solace in

song, she feels the impending threat of marriage and the obligation to fulfill her role as a Roman noblewoman in the second century” (*Booklist*).

The Masters of Rome Series by **Colleen McCollough** (perhaps better known for *The Thorn Birds*) begins with the story of Marius and Sulla, which was blurbed at the time of its publication as “a powerful story told with the verve of a novelist and the commitment of a historian” (*The Sunday Times*) and “a truly astonishing work” (*Time*). Titles in the series: ***The First Man in Rome, The Grass Crown, Fortune’s Favorites, Caesar’s Women, Caesar, The October Horse.***

Youssef Ziedan’s novel *Azazel*, “rendered in a poetic translation by Jonathan Wright, tells the story of a collection of scrolls from the fifth century AD that have recently been unearthed in excellent condition in northern Syria by a European archaeologist. The scrolls contain an autobiography written in Syriac, the narrative of a Christian monk, Hypa, who is born in Upper Egypt...and migrates first to Alexandria and then to a Syrian monastery.... Hypa is a linguist, physician, poet and philosopher. He is a totally credible creation – curious, observant and vulnerable. His musings about the world around him and his personal turmoil are periodically interrupted by Azazel – Beelzebub – who offers unhelpful, if not diabolical, advice and may be Hypa’s inner conscience” (Peter Clark, *TLS*).

The Woman of Andros, “[**Thornton Wilder’s** best-selling novel, published in 1930, is set on the obscure Greek island of Brynos before the birth of Christ, and explores Everyman questions of what is precious about life and how we live, love, and die. Eight years later, Wilder would pose the same questions on the stage in a play titled *Our Town*, also set in an obscure location, this time a village in New Hampshire. *The Woman of Andros* is celebrated for some of the most beautiful writing in American literature” (publisher’s blurb).

Annabel Lyon, author of *The Golden Mean*, returns with ***The Sweet Girl***, which “follows Aristotle’s strong-willed daughter as she shapes her own destiny....Aristotle has never been able to resist a keen mind, and Pythias is certainly her father’s daughter: besting his brightest students, refusing to content herself with a life circumscribed by the kitchen, the loom, and, eventually, a husband. Into her teenage years, she is protected by the reputation of her adored father, but with the death of Alexander the Great, her fortunes suddenly change. Aristotle’s family is forced to flee Athens for a small town, where the great philosopher soon dies, and orphaned Pythias quickly discovers that the world is not a place of logic after all, but one of superstition. As threats close in on her—a rebellious household, capricious gods and goddesses—she will need every ounce of wit she possesses, and the courage to seek refuge where she least expects it” (publisher’s blurb). In ***The Golden Mean***, Aristotle narrates the story of his association—as tutor, mentor, and father figure—with a young Alexander on the cusp of discovering his own power and prowess. Although lauded by some and distrusted by others, including, eventually, Alexander’s father, Philip of Macedon, Aristotle remains true to his own philosophical methods and ideals, as Alexander becomes his most ambitious personal and professional project. Lyon’s portrait of Alexander’s fledgling mental and martial acumen rings true, and her ability to penetrate the mind and convincingly articulate the thoughts and emotions of one of the greatest intellects of all time is absolutely astounding. This window into an ancient world is well worth opening” (Margaret Flanagan, *Booklist*). “I think this quietly ambitious and beautifully achieved novel is one of the most convincing historical novels I have ever read” (Hillary Mantel).

One finds a deep vein in the work of Christian Cameron. First, the Tyrant Series (in five installments so far with a sixth to come out in 2014) chronicles the adventures of Kineas, former cavalry officer in Alexander's army turned mercenary, and, starting in the third book, his twin son and daughter Satyrus and Melitta, as they negotiate the internecine struggle for power in the Hellenistic Age. **Titles: *Tyrant, Storm of Arrows, Funeral Games, King of the Bosphorus, Besieger of Cities, Force of Kings***. Also, the Long War series centers on Arimnestos, who, in the first book, ***Killer of Men***, "is a farm boy when war breaks out between the citizens of his native Plataea and their overbearing neighbours, Thebes. Standing in the battle line - the wall of bronze - for the first time, alongside his father and brother, he shares in a famous and unlikely victory. But after being knocked unconscious in the melee, he awakes not a hero, but a slave. Betrayed by his jealous and cowardly cousin, the freedom he fought for has now vanished, and he becomes the property of a rich citizen of Ephesus. So begins an epic journey from slavery that takes the young Arimnestos through a world poised on the brink of an epic confrontation, as the emerging civilization of the Greeks starts to flex its muscles against the established empire of the Persians. As he tries to make his fortune and revenge himself on the man who disinherited him, Arimnestos discovers that he has a talent that pays well in this new, violent world, for like his hero, Achilles, he is 'a killer of men'" (publisher's blurb). In ***Poseidon's Spear***, "Arimnestos of Plataea is a man who has seen and done things that most men only dream about. Sold into slavery as a boy, he fought his way to freedom - and then to everlasting fame: standing alongside the Athenians at the Battle of Marathon where the Greeks crushed the invading Persians. Sometimes, however, a man's greatest triumph is followed by his greatest sorrow. Returning to his farm, Arimnestos finds that his wife Euphoria has died in childbirth, and in an instant his laurels turn to dust. But the gods are not finished with Arimnestos yet. With nothing left to live for, he throws himself from a cliff into the sea, only to be pulled by strong arms from death's embrace. When he awakes, he finds himself chained to an oar in a Phoenician trireme. And so begins an epic journey that will take Arimnestos and a motley crew of fellow galley slaves to the limits of their courage, and beyond the edge of the known world, in a quest for freedom, revenge - and a cargo so precious it's worth dying for" (publisher's blurb). One more by Cameron: ***Alexander: God of War***: "To many he was a god. To others he was a monster. The truth is even more extraordinary. As a boy, Alexander dreamed of matching the heroic feats of Achilles. At eighteen he led the Macedonian cavalry to a stunning victory against the Greeks. By twenty-five he had crushed the Persians in three monumental battles and was the master of the greatest empire the world had ever seen. Men began to call him a god. But behind the legend was another, more complex story. Narrated by his boyhood friend Ptolemy, this is the story of Alexander as you have never heard it before: raw, intimate, thrilling - a story of extraordinary daring and unimaginable endurance; of wanton destruction and murderous intrigue - the epic tragedy of a man who aimed to be more than human" (publisher's blurb).

Conn Iggulden continues his "Emperor" series with ***The Blood of Gods***: "Julius Caesar has been cut down. His blood stains the hands of a cabal of bold conspirators, led by famed general Marcus Brutus—whom Caesar once called a friend. Have these self-proclaimed liberators bravely slain a power-mad tyrant or brutally murdered the beloved Father of Rome? Hailed as heroes by a complicit Senate and granted amnesty, the killers eagerly turn toward plotting the empire's future under their control. But Caesar's death does not rest easily with all of Rome. For two men whose bonds of friendship, family, and fidelity to the emperor are unbreakable, the shocking assassination is nothing less than treason. And those responsible must pay with their lives" (publisher's blurb). Previous titles in the series: ***The Gates of Rome, The Death of Kings, The Field of Swords, The Gods of War***.

Two more novels in the Warrior of Rome series by Harry **Sidebottom** have appeared: *The Caspian Gates* and *The Wolves of the North*. The third installment, *Lion of the Sun*, “catches the barbarian officer [Ballista] at one of Rome’s lowest points, in AD 260 when the Emperor Valerian has been taken captive by the Persian king Shapur. Ballista is forced to taken an oath of loyalty to Shapur, which he breaks, for he is loyal t Rome, not to the usurping traitors on the eastern frontier, but to Valerian’s son Gallienus in the west. That is the moral knot that ties together the action of the book and intensifies Ballista’s fear for his family at Antioch: the oath’s sanction was the death of the perjurer’s children” (Barbara Levick, *TLS*). In the second volume, *King of Kings*, “AD 256 - the specter of treachery hangs ominously over the Roman Empire. The sparks of Christian fervor have spread through the empire like wildfire, and the imperium is alive with the machinations of dangerous and powerful men. All the while, Sassanid forces press forward relentlessly along the eastern frontier. The battle-bloodied general Ballista returns to the imperial court from the fallen city of Arete - only to find that there are those who would rather see him dead than alive. Ballista is soon caught in a sinister web of intrigue and religious fanaticism...his courage and loyalty will be put to the ultimate test in the service of Rome and the Emperor” (publisher’s blurb). *Fire in the East*, the first voume in the series “opens in Italy in 238 AD, at the event which started the infamous ‘Year of the Six Emperors’: the assassination of Maximinius the Thracian, where the fatal blow is struck by the novel’s protagonist, Ballista, the Warrior of Rome. The plot then advances ten emperors, or seventeen years, to the war with Sassanid Persia. Ballista is appointed Dux Ripae...and sent to the fictional town of Arete to hold it against the Shah and his eastern hordes.... [Sidebottom] concentrates on providing a complex and human account of urban people under siege” (Justin Warshaw, *TLS*).

Readers who cannot get enough Roman history might indulge in these series: By **R. W. Peake**, MARCHING WITH CAESAR series: *Conquest of Gaul*, *Civil War*, *Antony and Cleopatra Part I*, *Antony and Cleopatra Part II*. By **James Mace**, SOLDIER OF ROME series (ARTORIAN CHRONICLES): *The Legionary*, *The Sacrovir Revolt*, *Heir to Rebellion*, *The Centurion*, *Journey to Judea*. Also by Mace: *Empire Betrayed: The Fall of Sejanus* and *Centurion Valens and the Empress of Death*. By **S. J. A. Turney**, MARIUS’ MULES series: *The Invasion of Gaul*, *The Belgae*, *Gallia Invicta*, *Conspiracy of Eagles*. By **Gordon Doherty**, LEGIONARY series: *Legionary*, *Viper of the North*. By **Peter Darman**, PARTHIAN CHRONICLES: *The Parthian*, *Parthian Dawn*, *Parthian Vengeance*, *Carrae*. By **K. M. Ashman**, ROMAN: *The Fall of Britannia* and *The Rise of Caratacus*. By **Anthony Riches**, EMPEROR series: *Wounds of Honour*, *Arrows of Fury*, *Fortress of Spears*, *The Leopard Sword*, *The Wolf’s Gold*, *The Eagle’s Vengeance*, *The Emperor’s Knives*. By Simon Scarrow EAGLE series: 11 titles and counting. By **Frederik Nath**, BARBARIAN WARLORD series (GALDIR SAGA): *A Slave’s Tale*, *Rebel of the North*, *Protector of Rome*.

Consider also these one-offs in the genre of the Roman historical novel: *Tribune: A Novel of Ancient Rome* by **Patrick Larkin**; *The Flames of Rome*, by **Paul L. Maier**; and *Centurion: A Novel of Ancient Rome*, **Peter W. Mitsopoulos**.

“What would have happened if Hannibal had received the reinforcements necessary for him to topple the Roman Empire? That fascinating “what if” is the central premise of *Hannibal’s Children*, **John Maddox Roberts’** latest historical novel, which begins with the arrival of Philip V of Macedon and his formidable army at a pivotal point in the series of wars between Carthage and Rome, allowing the brilliant Hannibal to force a surrender in which the Romans are driven north out of Italy. Fast-forward a hundred years: the Romans are plotting their revenge against Hannibal’s progeny, starting with a trade mission-cum-military

espionage expedition led by Marcus Scipio. Scipio does a thorough job of sizing up the capabilities of the Carthaginians before leaving behind his rival, Titus Norbanus, to manage that situation in Carthage while he embarks on a similar expedition to Egypt. He then plans an ingenious series of maneuvers to retake Italy, pitting the Carthaginians against the Egyptians while manipulating both the queen of Egypt and Hannibal's heir, Hamilcar II, before a series of dramatic battles that feature the innovative war technology of the era" (Publisher's Weekly). Look for Roberts' SPQR series below, in *Historical Fiction: Mysteries and Espionage*.

The Emissary by **Aniruddha Bahal** "transports you to the heart of Greece in the time of Alexander the Great. Seleucus, son of Nicanor, learns to cope with treachery at a very young age. It doesn't take him long to master the art of deceit himself; his journey from renegade citizen to powerful public figure is testimony to his skills. And from the exhilarating chariot race in Olympia to Alexander's encounter with the Persian army on the banks of the Granicus, his story rivets you from beginning to end" (publisher's blurb: www.harpercollins.co.in).

The Emperor Justinian's consort is the most memorable of all the Roman Empresses: her serene looks are preserved in the mosaics of Ravenna and her reputation is forever tarnished by Procopius in the *Secret History*." In ***Theodora: Actress, Empress, Whore*** by **Stella Duffy**, the Empress "is as beautiful as the tiled images and as lascivious, scheming and manipulative as Procopius' portrait, but these traits are softened by...a strong streak of loyalty and a post-feminist gloss" (Justin Warshaw, *TLS*).

The novels in the trilogy by **Benita Kane Jaro** center on the lives of historical figures. In ***The Key***, "Gaius Valerius Catullus, the boy from the provinces who became the lover of the most powerful and beautiful married woman in Rome, is dead at twenty-nine. His friend Marcus Caelius Rufus must search for the meaning of his life in the slums and bloody secret cults, the palaces and law courts of the tottering Roman Republic.... Jaro inserts English translations of and comments on Catullus' poems into the text." ***The Lock*** is "[b]uilt around the letters and speeches of Cicero, many of which appear in the novel." In ***The Door in the Wall***, "Marcus Caelius Rufus is a young Roman noble who at first sides with Caesar but becomes disenchanted after witnessing a massacre that he has committed. He feels compelled to compile a report of the internecine struggle so far, although he does not know who will read it, for he is uncertain which of the warriors he hopes will win" (publisher's blurbs). Jaro's most recent novel, ***Betray the Night***, focuses on Ovid's wife after he is "suddenly exiled by the Emperor Augustus for an unknown reason.... Pinaria stays behind to try to salvage something of their lives and to work to bring him home. A woman alone, she is handicapped by the powerlessness of her position. It is not until she leaves behind the world of men to search among the people Rome has forgotten: the women, the slaves, the runaways and temple prostitutes, that she begins to understand what has happened to her life and her husband's, and what the world around her really is" (publisher's blurb).

In **Robert Harris' *Conspirata: A Novel of Ancient Rome*** (published under the title *Lustrum* in the U.K.), "Cicero must regularly foil death threats, his vestibule patrolled by a fearsome guard dog; his front door barricaded against invaders; and his wife, Terentia, alternately moping about the danger and questioning his response to it. Many of his supposed allies are really wolves in sheep's togas, and the spies Cicero plants in enemy camps sometimes prove cowardly or inconveniently mortal. One, a woman, winds up gutted like a fish. While they were sharp with words around the Roman Senate, they were even sharper with daggers. Will Cicero survive, entrails intact? What of the Republic he governs?" (Frank Bruni, *NYTBR*). *Conspirata*

is Harris' follow-up to Harris' *Imperium: A Novel of Ancient Rome*. "The tumultuous history of Rome from 79 to 64 B.C. comes alive in this fictional biography of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the politician and superb orator who rose to the empire's highest office after starting as an outsider from the provinces. His first legal case drew him into a long battle with powerful Gaius Verres, the dangerously corrupt governor of Sicily. Cicero displayed his wit and talent for oration and strategy to triumph over Verres and other opponents in high-profile cases. Harris has written a fast-paced tale" (*School Library Journal*). Don't miss Harris' *Pompeii: A Novel*. "With detailed examination of time, place, and circumstance, Harris brings to life first-century Pompeii and its surroundings. Vesuvius, a sleeping giant, towers over the Bay of Naples while the citizenry frets over a drought that is threatening the water supply" (*School Library Journal*). Enter Marcus Attilius Primus, the new overseer of the aqueduct, who finds mystery, corruption, and love in the shadows of the threatening volcano.

The Gladiators by **Arthur Koestler**, is a deeply disturbing novel about the failure of mass revolutionary movements. . . .Based upon the historic revolt of 73-71 B.C.E. . . .this actual event was one of the great revolutions of ancient history, a slave revolt that threatened the power of the Roman empire; a revolt -- if it had succeeded -- that would perhaps have mirrored the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917-20. Lenin's favorite character in history is said to have been precisely the gladiator of the school in Capua, Spartacus, who emerged as the primary commander of the slave forces; however, the real leader, in Koestler's novel, is the gladiator without ambition or ideals, 'the man with the seal's head', Crixus. Crixus is the expression of vengeance as justice and indulgence as the compensation for privation and exploitation, understanding that the rich and the powerful always win in the end so the only sensible response is to take everything you can while you can. . . .There is plenty of mayhem in this book but essentially it is for those who are willing to ask questions about base human nature and live with the results (from the Vintage Classics edition).

Spartacus, **Howard Fast**. First there was the book. . . .

The Cleft, **Doris Lessing**. "In the last years of his life, a Roman senator embarks on one final epic endeavor, a retelling of the history of human creation. The story he relates is the little-known saga of the Clefts, an ancient community of women with no knowledge of nor need for men. Childbirth was controlled through the cycles of the moon, and only female offspring were born—until the unanticipated event that jeopardized the harmony of their close-knit society: the strange, unheralded birth of a boy" (harpercollins.com).

Julian: A Novel, **Gore Vidal**. "High entertainment" (*NYTBR*). "A subtle, provoking, enthralling book" (*The Christian Science Monitor*). "Gore Vidal has the sharpest sense of what political power consists of, how it is achieved and what it does to a man. And at the same time he is funny, roaringly funny. . . . Julian is a brilliant beacon of light in the dim grey landscape of the historical novel" (Louis vi).

An Imaginary Life, **David Malouf**. "In the first century A.D., Publius Ovidius Naso, the most urbane and irreverent poet of imperial Rome, was banished to a remote village on the edge of the Black Sea. From these sparse facts, Malouf has fashioned an audacious and supremely moving novel" (publisher's blurb). "A work of unusual intelligence and imagination, full of surprising images and insights. . ." (*NYTBR*). Ovid's life is also the subject of **Jane Alison's** *The Love Artist*. "Contemporary soap opera meets Ancient Rome in Alison's passionate first novel about the renowned poet Ovid's fall from imperial grace. At once

inventive and historically accurate, the book chronicles Ovid's infatuation with Xenia, a young witch/healer he encounters while vacationing on the Black Sea" (*Library Journal*).

Memoirs of Hadrian, Marguerite Yourcenar. "Written in the form of a testamentary letter from the Emperor Hadrian to his successor, the youthful Marcus Aurelius, th[is] work is as extraordinary for its psychological depth as for its accurate reconstruction of the second century of our era. The author describes the book as a meditation upon history, but this meditation is built upon intensive study of the personal and political life of a great and complex character as seen by himself and by his contemporaries, both friends and enemies" (publisher's blurb).

Tides of War: A Novel of Alcibiades, Steven Pressfield. "[An] epic novel of the Peloponnesian War, as Athens and Sparta slug it out for Greek hegemony during the Hellenic Age.... Pressfield is a masterful storyteller, especially adept in his graphic and embracing descriptions of the land and naval battles, political intrigues and colorful personalities, which come together in an intense and credible portrait of war-torn ancient Greece" (*Publishers Weekly*).

Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae, Steven Pressfield. "A gripping and swashbuckling re-imagining of the battle of Thermopylae. A novel that, in addition to plenty of sweep and sting, has a feel of authenticity about it from beginning to end" (*NYTBR*).

The Ides of March: A Novel, Thornton Wilder. "A brilliant epistolary novel set in Julius Caesar's Rome.... Through vividly imagined letters and documents, Wilder brings to life a dramatic period of world history and one of history's most magnetic, elusive personalities. In this inventive narrative, the Caesar of history becomes Caesar the human being. Wilder also resurrects the controversial figures surrounding Caesar -- Cleopatra, Catullus, Cicero, and others. All Rome comes crowding through these pages -- the Rome of villas and slums, beautiful women and brawling youths, spies and assassins." (publisher's blurb).

I Claudius: From the Autobiography of Tiberius Claudius, Robert Graves. "Despised as a weakling and dismissed as an idiot because of his physical infirmities, Claudius survived the intrigues and poisonings that marked the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and the mad Caligula to become Emperor of Rome in 41 A.D. *I, Claudius*...stands as one of the modern classics of historical fiction" (publisher's blurb). The story continues in ***Claudius the God: And his Wife Messalina.***

The historical novels of **Mary Renault** include her Alexander trilogy. ***Fire From Heaven:*** "Alexander's beauty, strength, and defiance were apparent from birth, but his boyhood honed those gifts into the makings of a king." ***The Persian Boy*** "traces the last years of Alexander's life through the eyes of his lover, Bagoas." ***Funeral Games:*** "After Alexander's death in 323 B.C. his only direct heirs were two unborn sons and a simpleton half-brother. Every long-simmering faction exploded into the vacuum of power. (publisher's blurbs). Note also Renault's ***The Last of the Wine***, which is set in Ancient Athens at the end of the 5th cent B.C.

Alexander is the subject of another trilogy, this one by **Valerio Massimo Manfredi.** ***Child of a Dream:*** "Alexander's swift ascent to manhood, as a protégé of Aristotle and close friend of Ptolemy and Hephiastion, and the start of his great adventure to conquer the civilised world." ***Sands of Ammon:*** "Alexander's quest to conquer Asia, the limitless domain ruled by the Great King of the Persians." ***The Ends of the Earth:*** "Alexander's epic quest continues into the heart of Asia and on towards the mystery of India" (publisher's blurb: panmacmillan.com).

Also by **Valerio Massimo Manfredi**, these novels. *Spartan*: “This is the saga of a Spartan family, torn apart by a cruel law that forces them to abandon one of their two sons - born lame - to the elements. The elder son, Brithos, is raised in the caste of the warriors, while the other, Talos, is spared a cruel death and is raised by a Helot shepherd, among the peasants. They live out their story in a world dominated by the clash between the Persian empire and the city-states of Greece - a ferocious, relentless conflict - until the voice of their blood and of human solidarity unites them in a thrilling, singular enterprise.” *The Last Legion*: The story opens on the day that the Western Roman Empire collapses finally in 470AD, as the Last Emperor of Rome is encamped protected by the Nova Invicta Legion. All is lost in the space of a few minutes as a horde of Barbarians sweep through the camp in the fog, kill the Imperial family and take the young Emperor captive. The Roman Empire is in ruin. But all is not lost. From the dust of battlefields emerges a small team of invincible warriors - The Last Legion. Their task is to rescue the Emperor and his enigmatic tutor and to try and resurrect the glory of Rome.” *Heroes (aka Talisman of Troy)*: “The protagonist of this tale is Diomedes, the last of the great ancient Greek Homeric heroes, who seeks to return to his beloved homeland after years of war against Troy. But destiny has other plans for him. Betrayed by his wife, who plots to murder him and persecuted by hostile gods, he has no choice but to turn his sails west, towards Hesperia, the mysterious mist-shrouded land that will one day be called Italy. He ventures boldly into this new world, for he carries with him the magic Talisman of Troy, a mysterious, powerful idol that can make the nation that possesses it invincible.” *Tyrant*: “Sicily 412 BC: the infinite duel between a man and a superpower begins. The man is Dionysius, who has just made himself Tyrant of Syracuse. The superpower Carthage, mercantile megalopolis and mistress of the seas. Over the next eight years, Dionysius’ brutal military conquests will strike down countless enemies and many friends to make Syracuse the most powerful Greek city west of mainland Greece. He builds the largest army of antiquity and invents horrific war machines to use against the Carthaginians, who he will fight in five wars.” *Empire of Dragons*: “Southern Anatolia, 260 AD. The town of Edessa, a Roman outpost, is on its last legs, besieged by the Persian troops of Shapur I. Roman Emperor Licinius Valerianus agrees to meet his adversary to draw up a peace treaty, but it is only a trap and the Emperor and his twelve guards are chained and dragged away to work as prisoners in a solitary Persian turquoise mine. After months of forced labour the Emperor dies, but his guards make a daring escape lead by the heroic and enigmatic chief, Marcus Metellus Aquila. They meet a mysterious, exiled Chinese Prince, Dan Qing, and agree to safeguard his journey home to reconquest his throne from his mortal enemy, a eunuch named Wei” (publisher’s blurbs: panmacmillan.com).

Steven Saylor, known for his Roman sub Roma series of mysteries, is also the author of *Roma*, an “epic ‘panaoramic historical saga’ spanning 1,000 years of Roman history” (Minougue, *TLS*). “Skipping over several generations at a time, Saylor puts the Potitii family descendants at the side of Romulus and Remus at the official founding of the city; of Scipio Africanus during the Punic Wars; of the legendary reformers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus during the turbulent second-century B.C.; and of Julius and Augustus Caesar as the Republic ebbs into Empire. Solidly anchored in fact and vividly imagined, this long book moves at a sprightly clip and features some vibrant personages. One of the most memorable is Pinaria, a Vestal Virgin who loses her innocence to an enigmatic slave, and secondaries such as the deformed giant Cacus who terrorizes the early Roman settlement. Linked by blood and by a gold amulet (in the shape of a winged phallus) that is passed from generation to generation, the Potitii family gets to see some fascinating things” (*Publishers Weekly*).

Salamambo, Gustave Flaubert. “Immediately after the protracted and crippling First Punic War with Rome, the Carthaginian army under Hamilcar was obliged to contend with a revolt by its unpaid mercenaries—an anarchic barbarian horde of mixed race—led by the Libyan Matho. It is a story of the most appalling savagery which Flaubert was anxious to render in spirit and in detail. His invention of the exotic and chilling Salamambo, priestess in the temple of the Goddess Tanit, and her obsessive relationship with Matho, lends dramatic unity to a tale of epic grandeur” (publisher’s blurb).

Dream of Scipio, Iain Pears. “In the final days of the Roman Empire, in the years of the Black Death, in the darkest hours of World War II, three men sought refuge from the madness that surrounded them in the realm of ideas. Set in Provence at three different critical moments of Western civilization, *The Dream of Scipio* follows the fortunes of these men.... The stories of these three are linked by a classical text—’The Dream of Scipio’—a work of Neoplatonism that poses philosophical questions as pertinent in the fifth, fourteenth, and mid-twentieth centuries as they are today. What is the obligation of the individual in a society under siege? What is the role of learning when civilization itself is threatened, whether by acts of man or nature? Does virtue lie more in engagement or in neutrality?” (publisher’s blurb). “An impressively original and audaciously imaginative intellectual thriller” (*Washington Post Book World*).

Death of Virgil, Hermann Broch. “It is the reign of the Emperor Augustus, and Publius Vergilius Maro, the poet of the *Aeneid* and Caesar’s enchanter, has been summoned to the palace, where he will shortly die. Out of the last hours of Virgil’s life and the final stirrings of his consciousness, the Austrian writer Hermann Broch fashioned one of the great works of twentieth-century modernism, a book that embraces an entire world and renders it with an immediacy that is at once sensual and profound. Begun while Broch was imprisoned in a German concentration camp, *The Death of Virgil* is part historical novel and part prose poem -- and always an intensely musical and immensely evocative meditation on the relation between life and death, the ancient and the modern” (publisher’s blurb). “Broch is the greatest novelist European literature has produced since Joyce, and...*The Death of Virgil* represents the only genuine technical advance that fiction has made since Ulysses” (George Steiner). “Hermann Broch belongs in that tradition of great twentieth-century novelists who have transformed, almost beyond recognition, one of the classic art forms of the nineteenth century” (Hannah Arendt).

Quo Vadis, Henryk Sienkiewicz. Set in ancient Rome during the reign of the emperor Nero, *Quo Vadis?* tells the story of the love that develops between a young Christian woman and a Roman officer who, after meeting her fellow Christians, converts to her religion. Underlying their relationship is the contrast between the worldly opulence of the Roman aristocracy and the poverty, simplicity, and spiritual power of the Christians” (Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature).

The Walled Orchard Series, by **Tom Holt**, is “about classical Athens as seen through the eyes of a comic playwright--Eupolis of Pallene.” ***Goatsong: A Novel of Ancient Athens:*** “Born 38 years after the battle of Salamis established Athens as the preeminent Greek power, Eupolis spends his youth mainly in the company of his father’s goats. From age nine onward, he warbles childish poems to these animals, and even writes a play called *The Goats* in honor of its chorus and first audience. When war breaks out between Sparta and Athens, however, the mood darkens; the great plague decimates Athens and orphans Eupolis. Yet in due course he develops a brilliant career as a comic poet, and gets to know luminaries of the era, including Aristophanes, Cleon and Socrates.” ***The Walled Orchard:*** “Poor comic dramatist Eupolis has promised the god Dionysus that he’ll look after his arch-rival and fellow soldier, the playwright

Aristophanes. As they embark on the invasion of Sicily, the Peloponnesian War turns into a “fever-stricken slaughterhouse”; upon returning to his native Athens, Eupolis is falsely accused of treason and blasphemy” (*Publishers Weekly*).

Tom Holt has also written these historical novels: *A Song for Nero*: “Holt may be the Mel Brooks of historical fiction--funny and smart with a solid base of fact and philosophy. In fact, a younger, scrawnier Brooks could be cast as Galen the Athenian, the narrator of this book, which suggests it was not Nero who died in the 69 C.E. uprising in Rome, as history states, but his look-alike, Callistus, Galen’s brother, who sacrifices himself for his beloved friend. So Galen--a thief with a face variously described as resembling a ferret, weasel, or rat--feels an obligation to his brother’s memory to help the less-than-street-smart emperor, and the pair spends a decade committing petty crimes to make ends meet, landing in prison and peril and narrowly avoiding death. But as Nero’s identity is uncovered, he is prey both for past deeds and for knowing where to find a legendary treasure that he has nearly forgotten. Holt presents theories of Seneca along with some vivid mayhem and murder, but it’s his nonstop wit, threaded with homespun discourse and a sobering final turn, that makes this an unparalleled treat” (*Booklist*). *Olympiad*: “Two thousand, seven hundred and seventy-six years ago, a group of men ran between two piles of stones and invented sport. If, that is, history can be believed. The first-ever Olympic Games in 776 BC were apparently so memorable that all Western chronology is based upon them. All that we know about them is the name of the man who won the race. Over two and a half millennia later, it’s about time somebody told the story” (publisher’s blurb). *Alexander at World’s End* “[T]his richly entertaining historical novel... tells the story of two remarkable men: one who conquered empires with apparent ease, and one who struggled with the day-to-day problems of a small provincial town. It is the story of men whose paths crossed only briefly, but whose encounter changed both their lives - and the course of history” (publisher’s blurb).

Marius the Epicurean, Walter Pater. “Pater takes us on one young man’s personal journey from paganism to Christianity in ancient Rome, a didactic work in which Pater explores the role of religion in culture and in art and celebrates the aestheticism he championed in his criticism” (publisher’s blurb: Cosimo Classics).

Ben Hur, Lew Wallace. “Judah Ben-Hur lives as a rich Jewish prince and merchant in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 1st century. His old friend Messala arrives as commanding officer of the Roman legions. They become bitter enemies. Because of an unfortunate accident, Ben-Hur is sent to slave in the mines while his family is sent to leprosy caves. As Messala is dying from being crushed in a chariot race, he reveals where Ben-Hur’s family is. On the road to find them, Ben-Hur meets the Christ as he is on the road to Golgotha to be crucified. That day changes Ben-Hur’s life forever, for that is the day he becomes a believer” (publisher’s blurb: Thomas Nelson).

Last Days of Pompeii, Edward Bulwer-Lytton. “Classic Victorian tale of the last days of Pompeii, doomed city that lay at the feet of Mount Vesuvius. From poets to flower-girls, gladiators to Roman tribunes, here is a plausible story of their lives, their loves, and the tragic fate that awaited them” (book description, amazon.com).

Augustus, John Williams. “A mere eighteen years of age when his uncle, Julius Caesar, is murdered, Octavius Caesar prematurely inherits rule of the Roman Republic. Surrounded by men who are jockeying for power--Cicero, Brutus, Cassius, and Mark Antony--young Octavius must work against the powerful Roman political machinations to claim his destiny as first Roman emperor. Sprung from meticulous

research and the pen of a true poet, *Augustus* tells the story of one man's dream to liberate a corrupt Rome from the fancy of the capriciously crooked and the wildly wealthy" (publisher's blurb: Vintage). "Augustus is a vividly imagined re-creation of classical Rome, but its intuitive grasp of the experience of immense power makes it an unusual, and superior, novel" (*The Boston Globe*). "One is drawn deeply into a world whose complexity, luxury, political cynicism, public gullibility, and violence seem very much like our own" (*The New Yorker*).

Several novels set in ancient Rome are the work of **Allan Massie**. *Caesar* "tells of the rise of Caesar in Rome and on the Empire's battlefields, from the crossing of the Rubicon to the Ides of March. The story is told by Decimus Brutus, one of Caesar's closest generals who nevertheless joins the conspiracy to murder" (amazon.co.uk). *Antony*, "narrated partly by Antony himself as he stands on the verge of ruin, and partly by his Greek secretary Critias, ... charts Antony's fortunes since the murder of Julius Caesar" (book description, amazon.com). *Augustus: A Novel* "reconstructs the lost memoirs of Augustus.... This putative autobiography tells Augustus's own story in his frank and forceful style, from the assassination of his adoptive father, through his military, political, and personal struggles, to his final days as emperor in everything but name" (publisher's blurb: Trafalgar Square). In *Tiberius: The Memoirs of the Emperor*, [l]ike Robert Graves, Massie sets out to rehabilitate his protagonist, but he stakes out distinctive ground beyond the Claudius novels by letting the narrator, a melancholy and reluctant autocrat, escape from 'the despotism of fact' into a more impressionistic, reflective meditation on human nature, history and his own place in it. Without skimping on period detail or the Caesar's lurid political and sexual machinations, the text eschews extreme sensationalism or pedantry for an examination of the appalling solitude of power. In a voice suffused with regret but free of illusion, the aging emperor lucidly reviews his life, recognizing that his ascent to the imperial pinnacle paradoxically made him prey to abandonment, betrayal and loss." (*Publisher's Weekly*). In *Caligula* "[o]ur narrator is a nobleman, Lucius, commissioned to write Caligula's biography by the Empress Agrippina – wife of stuttering Claudius, mother of Nero and sister of the late, "by few lamented" Emperor Gaius. Uncertain of Agrippina's spin-doctoring purpose in resurrecting her brother's reputation, Lucius resolves to write a first draft for himself and his heirs, to try to make some sense of Caligula's reign and to assess his own role in it. It is this uncensored draft, with its frank asides and personal digressions, that we read" (www.telegraph.co.uk). *Nero's Heirs* begins "'To C. Cornelius Tacitus, Senator: I confess that I do not know whether I am more honoured or more amazed: that you, the distinguished author of the Dialogue on Oratory, and of the ever to be admired Life of your father-in-law, the Emperor C. Julius Agricola, should turn to me and request my help in preparing the materials for the History of our own terrible times, on which you tell me you have audaciously embarked.'" (Massie). "The person enlisted by Tacitus is the – fictional – M. Aemilius Scaurus, exact contemporary and former playmate of Domitian, and natural son of Narcissus, the secretary to the Emperor Claudius. Still in exile, by now self-imposed, he tries to compose his recollections of the fateful year for Tacitus, and is confronted with his personal memories of those months. The story alternates between letters to Tacitus and recollections, not fit for the eyes of Tacitus, often painfully relived" (romanhistorybooksandmore.freesevers.com). *The Evening of the World* is "[s]et in the period of the barbarian invasions. Its hero is a young Roman nobleman named Marcus, the son, according to one legend, of the Archangel Michael. Marcus undergoes extraordinary experiences as he searches for meaning and stability in a twilight world where the old gods are dead or dying, but their mysteries still attract, and the new religion is threatened by new barbarisms. Marcus's journeys take him over the empire, from Italy to

Greece and Byzantium, to the camp of Alaric the Goth and the wastes of the northern forests, from a Christian monastery to the horde of Attila the Hun. His is a world where everything is possible and nothing solid, a world that is full of danger and mystery, of love and terror, of simple faith and abstruse philosophy, of cruelty, strange perversions, treachery and undaunted courage.” (publisher’s blurb: Orion).

Novelist Allan Massie has called attention to the largely forgotten Roman novels of **Jack Lindsay**, especially *Rome for Sale*, an account of the Catilinarian conspiracy. Other titles include *Caesar is Dead* and *Last Days with Cleopatra* (*Prospect Magazine*, Nov 06; *The Independent on Sunday*, Dec 21 2003).

The historical novels of **Naomi Mitchison**, include *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, set in Athens during the Peloponnesian War; *The Conquered*, about Julius Caesar’s Gaulic campaign; and *The Young Alexander the Great*.

A series of novels by Alfred Duggan, most centered on Rome: *Three’s Company*, *Family Favourites*, *The Romans*, *Winter Quarters*, *The Last King: Rome’s Greatest Enemy*, *Beseiger of Cities*. In *Family Favourite* “Elagabalus at only 13 years old led his army to victory and became Emperor of Rome. He was a god-like young man: strong, beautiful, charming, and beloved of his soldiers. But when he rose to power, Elagabalus rejected his family’s influence and they, like the Senate, became his deadly enemies. With his customary elegant writing, esteemed writer Alfred Duggan draws us into the tale of this unusual and outrageous leader and the lethal political world of third century Rome” (book description, amazon.com).

Ross Leckie (author of *Bluff Your Way in the Classics*) gives us a trilogy: *Hannibal*, *Scipio*, *Carthage*. On the first book— “...a lusty, full-throttle portrait of the great Carthaginian general.... The writing.... is direct and unflinching...one is finally left with the powerful image of a lonely, haunted leader, stewing in his hatred and brooding obsessively about his actions” (Scott Veale, NYTBR). The third book “tells the final chapter of the great Punic wars, the deadly rivalry between the bastard sons of Hannibal and Scipio, and the total destruction of the Carthaginian empire. The breadth of Leckie’s knowledge of the period coupled with his poetic prose style brings the classical world to life in a truly masterful manner” (book description, amazon.com).

“*Emperor* by **Colin Thubron** is a mightily ambitious novel. It describes the conversion to Christianity of the emperor Constantine the Great.... What is so original about Colin Thubron’s book...is its form. The novel is constructed as if it were a sheaf of documents by different authors. The entries are arranged by date, but are constructed as if assembled from a jumble of material stuffed at random by an incompetent clerk into a satchel that was then lost. The author thus assumes many voices, many forms, many perspectives” (Philip Spires, articlesbase.com/literature--articles/emperor-by-colin-thubron-338510.html).

The Laughter of Aphrodite: A Novel about Sappho of Lesbos, **Peter Green**. “Green has constructed a convincing and fascinating tale of intrigue, conspiracy and war. . . . Anyone who reads this informed and imaginative recreation of Sappho and her world will find it hard to forget” (Bernard Knox, *New Republic*). “We have no business to romanticize the ancient past, or to see the glory that was Greece as a history of gods and heroes, remote from us, preserved in the translucent air of ancient (proper, well-intentioned) values. In fact, of course, the Greeks were just as disgraceful as we are (and Green’s persuasive Sappho makes that clear” (Mary Margaret McCabe, *TLS*).

Counting the Stars, **Helen Dunmore**. Dunmore “uses the poems [of Catullus] to reconstruct the story of Catullus’ affair with Clodia. At the same time, she investigates not only the death of Metellus Celer, but

also the untimely demise of the sparrow. . . . The end of the novel is exciting: the murders (as both deaths turn out to be) bring together Clodius, Clodia and her most faithful retainer in a shocking story of violence, incest and gangland corruption” (Mary Beard, *TLS* 2-22-08).

The Ptolemies Series: ***House of the Eagle, The Ptolemies, Daughter of the Crocodile, Duncan Sprott***. “One comes across a wide variety of narrative voices in the course of reading fiction. But this is the first time I have opened a novel and found myself being addressed -- in fact berated as an ignoramus -- by a god. The narrator in Duncan Sprott’s *The Ptolemies* is no less than Thoth, the Ibis God of the Egyptians, who in the realm of story is supreme, being God of Wisdom, Lord of Scribes, Keeper of Memory. A more authoritative reciter would be hard to find. Who better to guide us through the savage and exotic story of the founding and early fortunes of the House of Ptolemy, which lasted from the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. until shortly before the birth of Christ?” (Barry Unsworth, *Washington Post Bookworld*). “Sprott chronicles the calamitous, ill-fated reign of the first Greek pharaoh of Egypt in his fascinating but overstuffed third novel, a historical reconstruction that traces the rise and fall of Ptolemy, the alleged son of King Philip of Macedonia” (*Publishers Weekly*).

HISTORICAL FICTION: MYSTERIES & ESPIONAGE

Nick Drake begins his mystery series with ***Nefertiti: the Book of the Dead***, which “will entice readers into the adventures of detective Rai Rahotep, whose beat is ancient Egypt. Summoned by the powerful Akhenaton, Rahotep must find Queen Nefertiti, who has disappeared. To find her, he ventures through crowded back streets and palace corridors, talking to those who loved the queen and those who would do her or her strange, powerful husband harm. Enemies and secrets are everywhere, and at the center of Rahotep’s own puzzle is another conundrum, born of political and religious turmoil and fueled by murder, violence, and a hunger for power” (*Booklist*). Rahotep solves more mysteries in ***Tutankhamun: the Book of Shadows*** and ***Egypt: the Book of Chaos***.

“The setting for ***Rome: The Art of War***, by **M. C. Scott** is “AD69, The Year of the Four Emperors. Three Emperors have ruled in Rome this year and a fourth, Vespasian, has been named in the East. As the legions march toward civil war, Sebastos Pantera, the spy whose name means leopard, returns to Rome intent on bribery, blackmail and persuasion: whatever it takes to bring the commanders and their men to Vespasian’s side. But in Rome, as he uses every skill he has ever learned of subterfuge, codes and camouflage, it becomes clear that one of those closest to him is a traitor, who will let Rome fall to destroy him. Together the two spies spin a web of deceit with Rome as the prize and death the only escape” (publisher’s blurb).

The Vespasian series by **Robbert Fabbri** begins with ***Tribune of Rome***: “Vespasian leaves his family farm for Rome, his sights set on finding a patron and following his brother into the army. But he discovers a city in turmoil and an Empire on the brink. The aging emperor Tiberius is in seclusion on Capri, leaving Rome in the iron grip of Sejanus, commander of the Praetorian Guard. . . . Sejanus is ruler of the Empire in all but name, but many fear that isn’t enough for him. Sejanus’ spies are everywhere - careless words at a dinner party can be as dangerous as a barbarian arrow. Vespasian is totally out of his depth, making dangerous enemies. . . .and soon finds himself ensnared in a conspiracy against Tiberius. With the situation in Rome deteriorating, Vespasian flees the city to take up his position as tribune in an unfashionable legion on the Balkan frontier. . . .Somehow, he must survive long enough to uncover the identity of the traitors behind the

growing revolt.” The story continues in *Rome’s Executioner*: “Even after four years military service at the edge of the Roman world, Vespasian can’t escape the tumultuous politics of an Empire on the brink of disintegration. His patrons in Rome have charged him with the clandestine extraction of an old enemy from a fortress on the banks of the Danube before it falls to the Roman legion besieging it. Vespasian’s mission is the key move in a deadly struggle for the right to rule the Roman Empire. The man he has been ordered to seize could be the witness that will destroy Sejanus.... Before he completes his mission, Vespasian will face ambush in snowbound mountains, pirates on the high seas, and Sejanus’s spies all around him. But by far the greatest danger lies at the rotten heart of the Empire, at the nightmarish court of Tiberius, Emperor of Rome and debauched, paranoid madman.” And in the third installment, *False God of Rome*: “[P]olitical events in Rome draw [Vespasian] back to the city. When Caligula becomes emperor, Vespasian believes that things will improve. Instead, he watches his leader deteriorate from being Rome’s shining star to a blood-crazed, profligate madman. Lavish building projects, endless games, and public displays of his incestuous relationship with his sister, Drusilla, and a terrified senate are nothing to Caligula’s most ambitious plan....” (publisher’s blurbs).

Semper Fidelis is the latest installment in **Ruth Downie’s** series centering on the military doctor Ruso in Roman Britain. “Ruso, back with the 20th Legion, is doing his best to avoid all the hullabaloo surrounding the visit of the Emperor Hadrian and his wife, the unimpressed Empress Sabina. Ruso slips away to the underused fortress of Eboracum (modern York), only to find that things are going seriously wrong there for the Legion’s British recruits. It’s not long before he and Tilla realise they’ve picked a dangerous place to hide. Mysterious injuries, and even deaths, begin to appear in the medical ledgers. Bound by his sense of duty and ill-advised curiosity, Ruso begins to ask questions nobody wants to hear” (<http://rsdownie.co.uk/>). In *Caveat Emptor*, Ruso investigates the case of a missing tax collector and the emperor’s missing tax money. About the first three books in this series—*Medicus*: “The salacious underside of Roman-occupied Britain comes to life in Britisher Downie’s debut. Gaius Petrius Ruso, a military medicus (or doctor), transfers to the 20th Legion in the remote Britannia port of Deva (now Chester) to start over after a ruinous divorce and his father’s death. Things go downhill from there. His quarters are filthy and vermin-filled, and his superior at the hospital is a petty tyrant. Gaius rescues and buys an injured slave girl, Tilla, from her abusive master, but she refuses to talk, can’t cook and costs more to keep than he can afford. Meanwhile, young women from the local bordello keep turning up dead, and nobody is interested in investigating. Gaius becomes a reluctant detective, but his sleuthing threatens to get him killed and leaves him scant time to work on the first-aid guide he’s writing to help salvage his finances. Tilla plots her escape as she recovers from her injuries, and just when Ruso becomes attached to her, she runs away, complicating his personal life and his investigation. Downie’s auspicious debut sparkles with beguiling characters and a vividly imagined evocation of a hazy frontier” (*Publisher’s Weekly*). The sequel in this “novel of the Roman Empire” series is *Terra Incognita* (published as *Ruso and the Demented Doctor* in Britain). “Toward the beginning of Hadrian’s reign in A.D. 118, Gaius Petreius Ruso, a doctor originally from Gaul, has attached himself to a contingent of the Roman army, the 10th Batavians, en route to the northern edge of the Roman Empire in Britannia. When Felix, a soldier, is found beheaded, the prefect of the 10th Batavians, Decianus, assigns Ruso to investigate, despite a confession to the murder by Thessalus, retiring medic to the Tenth Batavians Bedbugs. Decianus is concerned that the attack presages further unrest from the locals, who ascribe the killing to their antlered god, Cernunnos. Reluctantly, Ruso probes Thessalus’s motives for admitting the crime and finds that many others also had an interest in seeing Felix dead”

(amazon.com). In *Persona Non Grata* Ruso returns to his home in Gaul only to find his estate in financial ruin and an assortment of mysterious deaths to investigate.

Pliny the Younger is featured in a series of mysteries by **Albert A. Bell**: *All Roads Lead to Murder*, *The Blood of Caesar*, and *The Corpus Conundrum*. Tacitus lends a hand at solving the cases.

Pliny the Younger (again!) is on the case of a murdered senator at the command of Domitian in *Roman Games* by **Bruce Macbain**. The fate of the senator's slaves, suspected in the crime, hangs in the balance. Pliny has only fifteen days, the duration of the Ludi Romani, to save them. Lending a hand this time is Martial.

The Pericles Commission and *The Ionia Sanction*, by **Gary Corby**: Nico, an investigative agent and friend of Pericles, is the central character in these mysteries set in 5th century Athens.

Decius Caecilius Metellus the Younger is the start sleuth in **John Maddox Roberts'** SPQR series of mysteries set in Rome of the late Republic, spanning 70 to 20 BCE (thirteen volumes so far and counting). Roberts is also the author of *Hannibal's Children* (see the first Historical Fiction category above).

Lindsey Davis is the author of twenty historical mysteries, featuring Marcus Didius Falco and set in Rome of the Flavian era. In her most recent, *Nemesis*, "Marcus Didius Falco is going through a rough time. Shortly after the death of his infant son, he receives news that his father has died. Alas, crime waits for no man, and Falco must grapple with his grief as he investigates the suspicious disappearance of a middle-age couple who supplied statues to his father. (It seems they got on the bad side of the Claudii, a flock of sinister freedmen.) At the same time, the discovery of a mutilated corpse at a graveyard prompts rumors of a serial killer. Marcus' longtime friend and colleague Petronius helps him gather clues on the murder case, but it's not long before Anacrites, Rome's loathsome chief spy, steals it out from under them" (Allison Block, *Booklist*). In *Alexandria*, "Falco has taken his pregnant wife, two daughters, and brother-in-law to Alexandria on what is ostensibly a vacation... In fact, Falco is charged with keeping his eye on things, and indeed trouble brews right away—the Librarian of Alexandria's great library is found dead in his sealed office. There's been plenty of controversy surrounding the Librarian already, and the controversy over who will succeed him turns bloody. Who knew that the race for a top library spot could be so intriguing? The mystery is intricately plotted, the characters are well drawn, and Falco is as engaging a protagonist as ever, still tough but wiser and more reflective, too" (Barbara Hoffert, *Library Journal*). Other titles include: *The Silver Pigs*, *Shadows in Bronze*, *Venus in Copper*, *The Iron Hand of Mars*, *Poseidon's Gold*, *Last Act in Palmyra*, *Time to Depart*, *A Dying Light in Corduba*, *Three Hands in the Fountain*, *Two for the Lions*, *One Virgin Too Many*, *Ode to a Banker*, *A Body in the Bath House*, *The Jupiter Myth*, *The Accusers*, *Scandal Takes a Holiday*, *Delphi and Die*, *Saturnalia*.

Set in Greece in 1940, *Spies of the Balkans* by Alan Furst "focuses on Costa Zannis, a senior Salonika police official known for his honesty and ability to settle matters before they got out of hand. As the Nazis' intentions for Europe's Jews becomes clear, Zannis goes out of his way to aid refugees seeking to escape Germany. When Mussolini's troops invade Greece, Zannis joins the army, where he meets Capt. Marko Pavlic, who as a policeman in Zagreb investigated crimes committed by the Ustashi, Croatian fascists. With their similar politics, Zannis and Pavlic soon become friends and allies" (*Publisher's Weekly*).

Murder Most Classical, **Christiana Elfwood** (aka **Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood**). "The sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia, outside Athens, is preparing for its major festival, which includes the graduation

ceremony of a group of girls who were temporarily living in the sanctuary while serving the goddess in the ritual office of bears. Just before the festival a murder takes place in the woods during the Sacred Hunt. A young man, found with the body, seems the obvious suspect and is arrested. But Chloe, the subpriestess of Artemis, is not convinced that he is the murderer and decides to investigate. She discovers that several people had both the motive and the opportunity to kill the victim. Then a second murder takes place, and this time it is hard to find any reason for it. Was it the same killer or a different one? As the festival is fast approaching there are religious pressures for the murders to be solved before it begins, because otherwise the killer might pollute the sacred rites. Chloe is prepared to risk everything to find the murderer. And she does” (publisher’s blurb).

Marilyn Todd is the author of two “High Priestess Iliona Mysteries.” In the first, *Blind Eye*, “it is 466 BC. Blackmailed into spying for Sparta’s hated secret police, High Priestess Iliona has no option but to play along with its ruthless commander, Lysander. But as the purpose of the mission unfolds, Iliona comes to realize that the threat to her country doesn’t come from the arch-enemy, Athens; it comes from deep within Sparta itself. There is a traitor in the team that Lysander has sent to Sicily with her. But who is it?” In *Blood Mood*, “on the night when rites are held to avert witchcraft, three bodies are found in bizarre circumstances, and for the rulers of Sparta, the timing is terrible. Hosting a trade delegation that has traveled all the way from the Black Sea, the last thing they want is for their delicate negotiations to be undermined by allegations of black magic. Convinced the deaths are an elaborate plot by their arch-enemy, Athens, to drive a wedge between the blossoming allies, they call in Lysander, head of Sparta’s hated Secret Police, to settle the matter quickly and cleanly...The whole thing seems too contrived for his liking, and knowing that High Priestess Iliona can read people and interpret their behaviour, he enlists her help - using bribery and blackmail” (publisher’s blurbs).

Gordianus “The Finder,” expert sleuth, is the central character in the Roma sub Roma series by **Steven Saylor**, who set his mysteries in and around ancient Rome and populates them with a host of historical figures: Sulla, Caesar, Pompey, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Cicero, Spartacus, Clodius, and Clodia, to name a few. Look for these titles. *Roman Blood, Arms of Nemesis, Catilina’s Riddle, The Venus Throw, A Murder on the Appian Way, The House of the Vestals, Rubicon, Last Seen in Massilia, A Mist of Prophecies, The Judgment of Caesar*.

The philosopher Aristotle plays detective in a series of murder mysteries by **Margaret Doody**. Look for these titles: *Aristotle Detective, Aristotle and Poetic Justice, Aristotle and the Secrets of Life, Poison in Athens*. “Cleverly written, [*Aristotle Detective*] is not only a classic whodunit, but also a historical legal thriller with aspects of Ancient Greek classic culture mentioned en passant. Many consider this book among the best mysteries of the last twenty-five years” (bastulli.com). Published in the U.K. and translated into French and Italian, these novels are hard to find in the U.S.

The Marcus Cornivus Mystery Series, by **David Wishart**, includes *In at the Death, Ovid, Old Bones, White Murder, A Vote for Murder, Last Rites, Food for the Fishes, Parthian Shot, The Lydian Baker, Sejanus, and Germanicus*. Just out is *Illegally Dead*: “When Corvinus receives a letter from his adopted daughter, Marilla, with a tantalizing PS mentioning a possible murder, he hot-foots it to Castrimoenum at once. Not everyone, however, agrees that Lucius Hostilius was murdered. Poison was apparently the means of death, but Lucius was terminally ill. It was only a matter of time. Although he hasn’t any official investigative status, Corvinus can’t resist doing a little amateur sleuthing. And he has barely begun when

two other corpses turn up and he is formally on the case. Lucius had been suffering something of a personality change because of his illness, so there is no shortage of suspects among friends and family whom he had antagonized. But Corvinus goes up many a blind alley before arriving at the heart of the mystery” (amazon.com). “A sinuous plot and robustly drawn characters, including an uppity slave and a formidable widow, all add piquancy to this stew of small-town misdemeanors” (*Financial Times*). Wishart is also the author of *Nero*, in which Petronius, the emperor’s arbiter of taste, plays central role.

ANCIENT MYTHS RETOLD

In *The Whispering Muse*, “[t]he muse whispers into the ear of Caeneus, once an Argonaut questing for the golden fleece, now second mate on a 1940s Danish merchant vessel schlepping paper pulp to Turkey. Each evening at dinnertime he tells tales of his 3,000-year-old experiences, prompted by the voice inside a rotten fragment of the Argo’s hull, which he holds to his ear like a telephone receiver. Long-term fans of *Sjón*, the Icelandic bard whose projects have included lyrics for Björk, volumes of surrealist poetry and several prizewinning novels, will recognise this trademark interweaving of myth and postmodern playfulness. Caeneus, relic from the golden age of heroism, is not, however, the hero of *The Whispering Muse*. We see him through the jaundiced eyes of our narrator, Valdimar Haraldsson, erstwhile author of *Memoirs of a Herring Inspector* and a 17-volume journal ‘devoted to my chief preoccupation, the link between fish consumption and the superiority of the Nordic race’” (Michel Faber, *The Guardian*).

In *Plato’s Papers: a Novel* by Peter Ackroyd, “[t]he intellectual legacy of Platonic philosophy takes on entertaining new life. . . . Prefatory quotations from various fictional scholarly sources inform us that the human race has reached the year a.d. 3700, despite the quenching of the world’s ‘light’ (due to nuclear catastrophe?) centuries ago, followed by a period of enlightenment (‘The Age of Witspell’). The setting is London, where a great ‘orator’ named Plato dispenses wisdom, eons after his namesake flourished in Athens (during ‘The Age of Orpheus’). In 55 brief chapters, Ackroyd juxtaposes brief conversations between Plato and his (feminine) soul and with his several admiring disciples (who discuss him, in separate chapters), with the great man’s ‘exequies’ on evidence of earlier civilizations’ mistakes (an exhumed copy of Poe’s stories is believed to be ‘the unique record of a lost race’ sunk in paranoia and depression; surviving fragmentary texts reveal the existence of a prophetic black singer named George Eliot and ‘a clown or buffoon who was billed as Sigmund Freud’), and excerpts from Plato’s ‘glossary’ of antiquities (‘rock music’ is presumed to denote ‘the sound of old stones’). . . . Plato’s fascination with the alien cultures of the past inspires him to undertake a ‘Journey to the Underworld,’ during which he discovers the parallel existence (beneath Witspell) of ‘Mouldwarp’ (our own civilization, supposedly ended when ‘the light’ disappeared). The result is his trial, ostensibly for corrupting the young; in reality, for having introduced uncertainty into a world smugly convinced that it knows itself, and thus knows all” (*Kirkus Reviews*).

Two novels explore the story of Cassandra from the heroine’s point of view. In Hilary Bailey’s *Cassandra: Princess of Troy*, Cassandra escapes Clytemnestra’s murderous revenge and finding her way to Thessaly, where she records her own version of the events at Troy. *The Autobiography of Cassandra: Princess and Prophetess of Troy* by Ursula Molinaro is characterized as a “contemporary feminist novel” with a “witty glossary of the mortals and gods” (publisher’s blurb), and a “subtly polemical reconstruction of the *Iliad*” (Euridice, *American Book Review*). That the novel predates Christa Wolf’s version of Cassandra’s story by four years is noted in reviews.

City in Love, by **Alex Shakar**, is “set in a very different New York City in 1 B.C.,” and “is a stunning (re)vision of myth, using Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as the foundation. The city takes the place of nature for Shakar’s modern characters as they pursue their quests and meet their fates on the streets rather than the high seas. Shakar has created such memorable characters as Roxanne, schoolgirl superhero from Queens, and the Junk Man, who builds his lady love from the trash he finds while dumpster diving. Welcome to a brilliant new millennium” (amazon.com review).

Song of Achilles, **Madeline Miller**. “Greece in the age of heroes. Patroclus, an awkward young prince, has been exiled to the kingdom of Phthia to be raised in the shadow of King Peleus and his golden son, Achilles. “The best of all the Greeks”—strong, beautiful, and the child of a goddess—Achilles is everything the shamed Patroclus is not. Yet despite their differences, the boys become steadfast companions. Their bond deepens as they grow into young men and become skilled in the arts of war and medicine—much to the displeasure and the fury of Achilles’ mother, Thetis, a cruel sea goddess with a hatred of mortals. When word comes that Helen of Sparta has been kidnapped, the men of Greece, bound by blood and oath, must lay siege to Troy in her name. Seduced by the promise of a glorious destiny, Achilles joins their cause, and torn between love and fear for his friend, Patroclus follows. Little do they know that the Fates will test them both as never before and demand a terrible sacrifice” (publisher’s blurb). “Miller’s prose is more poetic than almost any translation of Homer... This is a deeply affecting version of the Achilles story: a fully three-dimension man - a son, a father, husband and lover - now exists where a superhero previously stood and fought.” (The *Guardian*). “A captivating retelling of *The Iliad* and events leading up to it through the point of view of Patroclus: it’s a hard book to put down, and any classicist will be enthralled by her characterisation of the goddess Thetis, which carries the true savagery and chill of antiquity” (Donna Tartt, *The Times*).

“In one of the chapters in **Zachary Mason’s** dazzling debut novel, Odysseus—the wily warrior and canny voyager from Homer’s epic poem—emerges as the creator of his own legend. He’s a war-weary soldier who leaves the battlefield and finds refuge outside Troy, posing as an itinerant bard, a poet who begins by singing the classics and later takes ‘to telling the story of Odysseus of the Greeks, cleverest of men, whose ruses had been the death of so many.’... In *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* Mr. Mason...has written a series of jazzy, post-modernist variations on *The Odyssey*, and in doing so he’s created an ingeniously Borgesian novel that’s witty, playful, moving and tirelessly inventive. This is a book that not only addresses the themes of Homer’s classic—the dangers of pride, the protean nature of identity, the tryst between fate and free will—but also poses new questions to the reader about art and originality and the nature of storytelling. It’s a novel that makes us rethink the oral tradition of entertainment that thrived in Homer’s day...while at the same time making us contemplate the other art inspired by ‘The Odyssey,’ from Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ to Kubrick’s ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’ and Charles Frazier’s ‘Cold Mountain’” (Michiko Kakutani, *NYT*).

“**David Malouf’s Ransom** reimagines the tragic story at the heart of *The Iliad*. Achilles mourns his childhood friend Patroclus after he is killed by Hector. Achilles takes his revenge by killing Hector in battle and desecrating his body. The central action in Mr. Malouf’s novel occurs when Priam, Hector’s father and king of Troy, travels in a mule-drawn cart with half of the city’s treasure (the “ransom”) to plead for the return of Hector’s body so that it can be buried properly. Two instances of towering grief meet in the encounter” (Edmund White, *NYT*). “A masterpiece, exquisitely written, pithy and wise and overwhelmingly

moving, constructed with invisible, successful craft that leaves the reader wondering how in the world it has been done” (Alberto Manguel, *The Australian*).

Lavinia. “In *The Aeneid*, Vergil’s hero fights to claim the king’s daughter, Lavinia, with whom he is destined to found an empire. Lavinia herself never speaks a word. Now, **Ursula K. Le Guin** gives Lavinia a voice in a novel that takes us to the half-wild world of ancient Italy, when Rome was a muddy village near seven hills. Lavinia grows up knowing nothing but peace and freedom, until suitors come. Her mother wants her to marry handsome, ambitious Turnus. But omens and prophecies spoken by the sacred springs say she must marry a foreigner—that she will be the cause of a bitter war—and that her husband will not live long. When a fleet of Trojan ships sails up the Tiber, Lavinia decides to take her destiny into her own hands. And so she tells us what Vergil did not: the story of her life, and of the love of her life” (houghtonmifflinbooks.com).

King of Ithaca, Glyn Iliffe. “Greece is a country in turmoil, divided by feuding kingdoms desiring wealth, power and revenge. When Eperitus, a young exiled soldier, comes to the aid of a group of warriors in battle, little does he know that it will be the start of an incredible adventure. For he is about to join the charismatic Odysseus, Prince of Ithaca, on a vital quest to save his homeland. Odysseus travels to Sparta to join the most famous heroes of the time in paying suit to the sensuous Helen. Armed with nothing but his wits and intelligence, he must enter a treacherous world of warfare and politics to compete for the greatest prize in Greece. But few care for the problems of an impoverished prince when war with Troy is beckoning.... An epic saga set in one of the most dramatic periods of history, *King of Ithaca* is a voyage of discovery of one man’s journey to become a King – and a legend” (panmacmillan.com).

An Arrow’s Flight, Mark Merlis. This novel “tells the story of the Trojan War and Pyrrhus, the son of the fallen Achilles, now working as a go-go boy and hustler in the big city. Magically blending ancient headlines and modern myth, Merlis creates a fabulous new world where legendary heroes declare their endowments in personal ads and any panhandler may be a divinity in disguise” (publisher’s blurb). “Merlis’s insight into human nature and his ability to find and articulate grace in the ordinary process of human exchange is remarkable” (*Publishers Weekly*). “Top-of-the-line...compulsively readable and very, very sexy” (*The Advocate*).

The Songs of Kings: A Novel, Barry Unsworth. “A stubborn wind from the northeast ushers in rough times for the House of Atreus, and the Greek ships, en route to Troy, remain trapped in the straits at Aulis. Unsworth’s retelling of the story, familiar from Euripides, of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia to appease the gods so that the boats can sail is a bold, modern tale with cynical riffs on the themes of duty and power, truth and fiction. His Greek warriors are schemers and media-savvy self-promoters who are desperate to look good in the sung reports that are their equivalent of the news media—songs that are, we realize, the seeds of the Homeric tradition” (*The New Yorker*).

Achilles: A Novel, Elizabeth Cook. “This forceful re-creation of the life of Achilles sacrifices nothing to modernity: gods mate violently with mortals, ghosts feast on sheep’s blood, and Achilles rages and slays, unburdened by psychology. At the same time, this brief, intense novel is unmistakably modern in intent, turning a war epic into a meditation on the limits of human perfectibility. Fragments of keen, almost carnal prose have the cumulative effect of a requiem” (*The New Yorker*).

***An Iliad*, Alessandro Baricco.** This retelling of the Homeric epic is defiantly modern: it excises the gods and supplants the omniscient narrator with alternating voices, as one character after another—hero and bit player alike—is granted the opportunity to speak and shed light on the decade-long siege of Troy. Alluding to our current time of “battles, assassinations, bombings,” Baricco’s text lingers on the futility of an unending war, and casts the arrival of the thousand-odd ships as an invasion by an overwhelmingly superior force, met by young recruits throwing stones. Still, in substance, his version cleaves closely to the original. As in Homer, the lesser-known foot soldiers come to life only at the moment of their death, when they enter history; each killing is singular, and almost lovingly detailed—a sword pierces a skull and a man falls, “teeth biting the cold bronze” (*The New Yorker*).

***Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays*, Christa Wolf.** “In this volume, the distinguished East German writer Christa Wolf retells the story of the fall of Troy, but from the point of view of the woman whose visionary powers earned her contempt and scorn. Written as a result of the author’s Greek travels and studies, *Cassandra* speaks to us in a pressing monologue whose inner focal points are patriarchy and war. In the four accompanying pieces, which take the form of travel reports, journal entries, and a letter, Wolf describes the novel’s genesis” (book description: amazon.com).

***Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson.** “Is it poetry? Is it a novel in verse? A fable? A myth? However you define Carson’s distinctive and wildly inventive new work, it is riveting reading. At the center of the narrative is a winged red monster named Geryon; throughout, we see him struggling with his family, falling for the indifferent Herakles, and discovering photography as a means of comfort and escape. Wistful yet whimsical, offhand yet intense, funky yet erudite” (*Library Journal*). “Carson writes in language any poet would kill for: sensuous and funny, poignant, musical and tender, brilliantly lighted” (Ruth Padel).

***Last of the Amazons*, Steven Pressfield.** “The Amazon kingdom, peopled and ruled by a ferocious society of female warriors, occupies land near the Black Sea. The Amazon war queen, Antiope, leads an army of female warriors feared for their savage cruelty and hatred of the Greeks. When Theseus, the Greek king of Athens, journeys into Amazon territory, he and Antiope spar verbally, but fall in love, creating a dilemma for both” (*Publisher’s Weekly*).

***Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, C.S. Lewis.** “This tale of two princesses - one beautiful and one unattractive - and of the struggle between sacred and profane love is Lewis’s reworking of the myth of Cupid and Psyche and one of his most enduring works” (amazon.com).

***The King Must Die* and *The Bull From the Sea*, Mary Renault.** Novels of the “mythical hero Theseus, slayer of monsters, abductor of princess, and king of Athens” (publisher’s blurb).

***The Penelopiad: The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus*, Margaret Atwood.** “Homer’s *Odyssey* is not the only version of the story.... I have drawn on material other than the *Odyssey*, especially for the details of Penelope’s parentage, her early life and marriage, and the scandalous rumors circulating about her. I’ve chosen to give the telling of the story to Penelope and to the twelve hanged maids. The maids form a chanting and singing Chorus, which focuses on two questions that must pose themselves after any close reading of the *Odyssey*: What led to the hanging of the maids, and what was Penelope really up to? The story as told in the *Odyssey* doesn’t hold water: there are too many inconsistencies. I’ve always been haunted by the hanged maids and, in *The Penelopiad*, so is Penelope herself” (from Margaret Atwood’s introduction to *The Penelopiad*).

***Odysseus: A Life*, Charles Beye.** “In this highly unusual and entertaining book... Charles Beye imagines a biography of the fictional Bronze Age hero, and puts his unique spin on Odysseus’ strange and adventuresome existence.... Beye’s account reads like a modern novel. Furthermore, it is filled with interesting facts about the texture of life in the second millennium B.C.E.” (publisher’s blurb).

***Weight: The Myth of Atlas and Heracles*, Jeannette Winterson.** “Condemned to shoulder the world - forever - by the gods he dared defy, freedom seems unattainable to Atlas. But then he receives an unexpected visit from Heracles, the one man strong enough to share the burden - and it seems they can strike a bargain that might release him.... Jeanette Winterson asks difficult questions about the nature of choice and coercion in her dazzling retelling of the myth of Atlas and Heracles. Visionary and inventive, believable and intimate, Weight turns the familiar on its head to show us ourselves in a new light” (publisher’s blurb: Canongate Books).

***Firebrand*, Marion Zimmer Bradley.** “Blending archaeological fact and legend, the myths of the gods and the feats of heroes, Marion Zimmer Bradley breathes new life into the classic tale of the Trojan War- reinventing larger-than-life figures as living people engaged in a desperate struggle that dooms both the victors and the vanquished, their fate seen through the eyes of Cassandra-priestess, princess, and passionate woman with the spirit of a warrior” (book description at amazon.com).

ANCIENT/MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXTS FOR MODERN TALES

*“When a severed hand is discovered at an archaeological site near a monastery in Chios, Greece,” in ***The Devil Takes Half: a Greek Islands Mystery* by Leta Serafim**, “the local chief of police investigates its possible ties to two missing persons. When the body count begins to rise, the diligent chief reluctantly pairs up with the local crime-show-obsessed priest to solve the peaceful island’s first homicide.... This solid police procedural has a literary style and a wry sense of humor, and it is enhanced by details of archaeology and history” (Emily Byers, *Statesman Journal*).

*An excerpt from Cavafy’s poem “Ithaca” provides the epigraph to ***The Rocks***, by **Peter Nichols**, which tells the story of ex-spouses living on Mallorca. “Lulu is a sort of ageless, cold but captivating sprite, a free-spirited cipher, both witch and nymph, Circe and Calypso.... Her ex-husband, Gerald Rutledge, is a former sailor whose intended Odyssey of a voyage was cut short.... The ex-spouses, now in their 80s, have coexisted without speaking a word to each other for some 60 years. They run into each other at the market, an encounter charged with ancient hostility and bitterness so intense, they end up tumbling off a cliff to their deaths in the Mediterranean Sea. The question driving the engine of the novel backward is: Why?” (Kate Christensen, *NYTBR*).

*In the summer of 1914 a young Englishwoman, Vivian Rose Spencer, joins an archaeological dig in Turkey, fulfilling a long-held dream. Working alongside Germans and Turks, she falls in love with archaeologist Tahsin Bey and joins him in his quest to find an ancient silver circlet. But the outbreak of war in Europe brings her idyllic summer to a sudden end, and her new friends become her nation’s enemies” (bloomsbury.com). ***A God in Every Stone* by Kamila Shamsie** is “[a]n heir to E.M. Forster’s vision . . . Stretching from the ancient Persian Empire to the waning days of the British Empire, the novel has an enormous wingspan that catches a wonderful storyteller’s wind... beautifully composed, and often terribly moving” (Alan Cheuse, All Things Considered, NPR).

*“Think *Breaking Bad*, Greek style”—so says the website of **Jeffrey Siger**, author of the mystery *Devil of Delphi*. “In modern day Delphi, a young Athens emigree seeks to re-build his life in anonymity among its pastoral, rolling hills and endless olive groves. But the man's dark past is too celebrated, and his assassin skills are too much in demand for his fate to be left to his own hands. When he's given no choice but to serve the ruthless aims of an international criminal mastermind, he agrees, but on his terms. His methods bring unexpected death to a member of one of Greece's most prominent and feared political families, and draws Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis into the eye of a political and media firestorm threatening to bring down the nation's government. It is a gripping, fast-paced story played out against a backdrop of World Heritage Sites” (publisher's blurb). This is the latest book in Siger's Chief Inspector Andreas Kaldis series, the previous six titles, in publication order, being *Murder in Mykonos*, *Assassins of Athens*, *Prey on Patmos*, *Target: Tinos*, *Mykonos after Midnight*, *Sons of Sparta*. Due out later this year is the eighth book in the series, *Santorini Caesars*.

***Patricia Highsmith** fans are likely to be drawn to *The Two Faces of January*: “In a grubby Athens hotel, Rydal Keener is bored and killing time with petty scams. But when he runs into another American, Chester MacFarland, dragging a man's body down the hotel hall, Rydal impulsively agrees to help, perhaps because Chester looks like Rydal's father. Then Rydal meets Colette, Chester's younger wife, and, once captivated, becomes entangled in their sordid lives, as the drama marches to a shocking climax at the ruins of the labyrinth at Knossos” (publisher's blurb).

Lauren Groff's *Fates and Furies “is about a marriage in which each partner has a radically disparate view, not just of their union, but of the type of narrative constituted by their lives. It's as if husband and wife each inhabit a different novel, in a different genre – one sunnily domestic, the other gothic.... The first half of the book offers Lotto's view of their life together as he rises from charming but failed actor to celebrated playwright, thanks in no small part to Mathilde's editorial finesse. The second half reveals that Mathilde has, through implacable willpower, transcended circumstances that read like a hotchpotch of Greek tragedy, fable and detective novel” (Laura Miller, *The Guardian*).

*In *Oreo*, “A biracial girl brought up by her black grandparents sets off on a quest to find her long-lost Jewish father in **[Fran] Ross**' brilliant and biting satire.... Transforming the myth of Theseus and the Labyrinth into a feminist picaresque, Ross sends Oreo into the heart of New York City, where, in a series of absurd, unsettling, and hilarious encounters—no one is safe from Ross' razor-sharp deconstruction—she inches ever closer to her own origin story.... Ross' novel, with its Joycean language games and keen social critique, is as playful as it is profound” (Kirkus Review).

The Amber Fury* by **Natalie Haynes is “a novel in five acts about what happens when a grieving theatre director is given a job teaching troubled teenagers at a pupil referral unit in Edinburgh, and decides to read Greek plays with them. As the school year progresses the class moves from *Oedipus Rex* to the *Oresteia*, arguing with each other and their teacher about destiny, death, revenge and self-sacrifice as they go. That it will all go dreadfully wrong is announced at the start” (Susanna Rustin, *The Guardian*). This novel has been compared to Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*.

The Unfinished World and Other Stories* by **Amber Sparks “is the work of a young writer whose voice feels far wiser than her years, as she engages with ancient themes: the Greek myths, the rituals of death, the small tokens that lovers trade over a lifetime of experience.... [S]he plays with both fantasy and form. No

one story sounds like another, yet her singular voice floats through the collection, tying it together with opulent prose that draws heavily on history and the macabre” (Rachel Syme, *NYTBR*).

****The Helios Disaster*** by **Linda Boström Knausgaard** is “the tale of Anna Bergström, the name given to the 12-year-old narrator by social services. Like the Greek goddess Athena, Anna was born out of her father's head but became estranged from him soon afterwards. The book explores religion, madness, time, language, and is translated from the Swedish, with nerves of steel, by Rachel Willson-Broyles. The emotional intensity created by Boström Knausgaard...recalls Sylvia Plath, but her spare, accelerating modern myth owes something to the poet/classicist Anne Carson's novels in verse” (Max Liu, *The Independent*).

*“Unfolding over the course of a single warm July day in London in 1985, the book follows a young Indian man, Ananda, in his early 20s, as he wakes up in his rented room in Warren Street, potters around, attends a tutorial...then goes to see his uncle, Rangamama. Uncle and nephew walk south for a bit, take the tube to Ananda's, buying some Indian sweets en route, then go out to dinner at a curry house, after which they saunter back to Ananda's room. That's it. Yet everything happens in these 200 pages on different levels.... ***Odysseus Abroad*** is [Amit] Chaudhuri's conversation with Joyce's *Ulysses* (and, therefore, inevitably, with Homer too); a homage and a love-letter, but also, crucially, an intervention. It is not simply a matter of the echoes between characters and situations in Chaudhuri's novel on the one hand and Joyce's and the *Odyssey* on the other, or of the symbolic and metaphorical correspondences between the works, however engaging the investigation of such mappings may be. Rather, the more substantive relational affiliation occurs on the level of tradition and its appropriation. It is nothing less than an audacious act of literary positioning, a mark on an existing map changed now by that very mark, which says, ‘Here I am’” (Neel Mukherjee, *The Guardian*).

*“**Reginald Hill** writes crime fiction that is both grittily down-to-earth and dauntingly erudite. His reach never exceeds his formidable grasp, but his latest book, ***Arms and the Women*** (subtitled *An Elliad*), demands that his readers work to keep up. Fortunately, your effort is rewarded. *Arms and the Women* is an excitingly ambitious variation on the mystery genre.” The plot centers on threats against Ellie, the wife of one half of Hill's well-known detective team Pascoe and Dalziel. “Ellie is pondering life's meaning and her own identity as a woman, a mother and a writer. She has found unexpected comfort in secretly penning a strange, ribald sequel to the ancient Greek poet Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*” (Karen G. Anderson, *January Magazine*).

****Outline*** by **Rachel Cusk** “is a novel in ten conversations. Spare and lucid, it follows a novelist teaching a course in creative writing over an oppressively hot summer in Athens” (publisher's blurb). It “defies ordinary categorisation. It is about authorial invisibility, it involves writing without showing your face. The narrator is a writer who goes to teach creative writing in Greece and becomes enmeshed in other peoples' narratives which Cusk stitches, with fastidious brilliance, into a single fabric” (Kate Kellaway, *The Guardian*).

Richard Powers' latest, ***Orfeo***, is “a modern (loose) retelling of the myth of Orpheus—the story of a retired composer who becomes the subject of a high-stakes national security investigation due to his

extracurricular dabbling with biochemical agents.” It is a “sprawling, unwieldy mix of musical theory, myth, and personal journey” (Chloe Schama, *New Republic*).

“The bones of [*Orrie’s Story* by **Thomas Berger**] are familiar: a war hero returns after years away to find himself unwelcome. In his absence his wife has taken a lover, and together wife and lover conspire in his murder. The son, urged on by the murdered hero’s furious daughter, kills his father’s killers. It is the Oresteia, but updated and translated into life in small-town America at the close of World War II” (*Library Journal*).

A Vision of Battlements, an autobiographical novel by **Anthony Burgess** (of *A Clockwork Orange* fame) drawing on his WWII experiences in Gibraltar, is “based on the journey of Aeneas – his hero is called Ennis, and Turnus becomes Turner” (Margaret Drabble, *Amphora*).

In *The Seven Sisters*, **Margaret Drabble** gives us “another novel featuring an intelligent woman facing late middle age alone.... A sudden change in finances sends Candida to Tunisia and Italy, following the journeys of Virgil’s Aeneas in the company of six spiritual “sisters,” which leads to unexpected plot twists” (*Library Journal*). “The Seven Sisters argues for the beauty and relevance of myth and literature, even in the contemporary life of a middle-aged woman far away in time and sensibility from Aeneas and Dido. The women’s *Aeneid* expedition is the highlight of the book: magical, poetic, bright, expansive” (Marisa Knox, *Yale Review of Books*).

Lynn Freed “uses the Demeter-Persephone myth in *House of Women*, a lyrical, female exploration of the story. Here, a daughter struggles to free herself from her over-protective mother, only to find herself trapped in another form of hell and sexual subjugation with her husband, the “Syrian,” whose name is Naim – an unusually anti-maternal interpretation of the myth and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*” (Margaret Drabble, *Amphora*).

In *The Lake of Dead Languages* by **Carol Goodman**, Jane Hudson “has come [to a private girls’ school] to teach Latin, many years after having attended the school herself. But back in her school days, she was mixed up with a group of students who worshiped *their* Latin teacher, and their heightened sensitivities to the sensual world combined with the emotional tumult of their pubescence resulted in a series of multiple suicides. Now divorced from her husband and raising a little girl, Jane plans to settle in at this place with which she is so familiar, despite the darkness of its history. But her past literally comes back to haunt her, mysteries and secrets swirling around her as if she were caught in a maelstrom” Brad Hooper, *ALA*).

Identical, the latest murder mystery concerned with guilt and innocence by **Scott Turow**, looks to the myth of Castor and Pollux for its conceit. “State Senator Paul Giannis is a candidate for Mayor of Kindle County. His identical twin brother Cass is newly released from prison, 25 years after pleading guilty to the murder of his girlfriend, Dita Kronon. When Evon Miller, an ex-FBI agent who is the head of security for the Kronon family business, and private investigator Tim Brodie begin a re-investigation of Dita’s death, a complex web of murder, sex, and betrayal-as only Scott Turow could weave-dramatically unfolds” (publisher’s blurb).

Sol Yurick “recast an ancient Greek battle as a tale of warring New York street gangs and earned a cult following in print, on film and eventually in a video game.... He based the story on ‘Anabasis,’ written by the Greek soldier Xenophon” (William Yardley, *NYT*). “*The Warriors* chronicles one New York City gang’s nocturnal journey through the seedy, dangerous subways and city streets of the 1960s. Every gang

in the city meets on a sweltering July 4 night in a Bronx park for a peace rally. The crowd of miscreants turns violent after a prominent gang leader is killed and chaos prevails over the attempt at order.... An exhilarating novel that examines New York City teenagers, left behind by society, who form identity and personal strength through their affiliation with their 'family,' *The Warriors* weaves together social commentary with ancient legends for a classic coming-of-age tale" (publisher's blurb).

In *The Watch*, "a legless woman approaches a military outpost in Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, ostensibly to retrieve the body of her brother, who has been killed in a firefight. Having survived that firefight, the soldiers inside the compound are wary and edgy. That's the setup to a taut and gritty story that unfolds amid the dust, shadows, and unease of one slice of the war in Afghanistan" (Neal Thompson, amazon.com). "**Roy-Bhattacharya** re-animates the timeless themes of *Antigone*... This brave, visceral novel breaks new ground and does what previous versions of *Antigone* never have: It makes each character deeply humane, challenging the reader to sympathize with every one of them" (NPR.org). "We watch as the resistance of an isolated American garrison in Afghanistan is ground down, not by force of arms but by the will of a single unarmed woman, holding inflexibly to an idea of what is just and right" (J.M. Coetzee).

In *Masters of Atlantis* by **Charles Portis** (author of *True Grit*), "Lamar Jimmerson is the leader of the Gnomon Society, the international fraternal order dedicated to preserving the arcane wisdom of the lost city of Atlantis. Stationed in France in 1917, Jimmerson comes across a little book crammed with Atlantean puzzles, Egyptian riddles, and extended alchemical metaphors. It's the Codex Pappus – the sacred Gnomon text. Soon he is basking in the lore of lost Atlantis, convinced that his mission on earth is to administer to and extend the ranks of the noble brotherhood. *Masters of Atlantis* is a cock eyed journey into an America of misfits and con-men, oddballs, and innocents" (publisher's blurb).

"A young American student spends a year in the exotic world of post-World War I Rome. While there, he experiences firsthand the waning days of a secret community (a "cabala") of decaying royalty, a great cardinal of the Roman Church, and an assortment of memorable American ex-pats. *The Cabala*, a semiautobiographical novel of unforgettable characters and human passions, launched [**Thornton Wilder**]'s career as a celebrated storyteller and dramatist.

We the Drowned, **Carsten Jensen**. "Hailed as a classic in Europe, Jensen's titanic tale of a port town in Denmark is nearly seven hundred pages long and appointed with all the trappings of an epic, Odyssey allusions included. The story starts in 1848 and spans nearly a century, tracking several generations of the town's men, whose voice, a collective 'we,' narrates much of the novel (*New Yorker*, March 14, 2011).

Philip Roth draws on the myth of Oedipus in *Nemesis* to tell the story of Bucky Cantor, who unwittingly carries the polio virus to the communities he tries to help.

"'Athens has long been a place where lonely people go,' **Simon Van Booy** writes in his lushly sentimental novel set in modern Greece.... *Everything Beautiful Began After* harks back to an age when Greece was the destination for young idealistic wanderers drunk on classical tragedy (and ouzo) and in pursuit of the meanings of Love and Fate" (Sam Sacks, *WSJ*).

Set in 1970, *Come Like Shadows*, the eighth volume in **Simon Raven's** *Alms for Oblivion* series, tells the story of a group of friends involved in making a movie of the *Odyssey* on the island of Corfu.

"In his semiautobiographical novel, *Cyclops*, Croatian writer **Ranko Marinković** recounts the adventures of young theater critic Melkior Tresić, an archetypal antihero who decides to starve himself to avoid

fighting in the front lines of World War II. As he wanders the streets of Zagreb in a near-hallucinatory state of paranoia and malnourishment, Melkior encounters a colorful circus of characters—fortune-tellers, shamans, actors, prostitutes, bohemians, and café intellectuals—all living in a fragile dream of a society about to be changed forever” (publisher’s blurb). “The ‘Cyclops’ of the title stands...for all the external forces that threaten the flâneur Melkior’s survival in his imaginary world, while at the same time hinting at Marinkovic’s artistic models: Homer’s *Odyssey* as the archetypal quest and Ulysses as the archetypal ‘modern’ novel. Like in Joyce’s, in Marinković’s the action unfolds in a circular motion around a big city” (Valentina Zanca, wordswithoutborders.org).

Helen DeWitt’s extraordinary debut, *The Last Samurai*, centers on the relationship between Sibylla, a single mother of precocious and rigorous intelligence, and her son, who, owing to his mother’s singular attitude to education, develops into a prodigy of learning. Ludo reads Homer in the original Greek at 4 before moving on to Hebrew, Japanese, Old Norse, and Inuit; studying advanced mathematical techniques (Fourier analysis and Laplace transformations); and, as the title hints, endlessly watching and analyzing Akira Kurosawa’s masterpiece, *The Seven Samurai*. But the one question that eludes an answer is that of the name of his father” (amazon.com review). “has learned from her to believe that suicide is a course of action we have a right to, usually. “The last Samurai” is also about heroism—the Japanese warriors, the Greek heroes, Malory’s perfect knights, and the heroes of the sagas. The new novel, exploring new representations of cause and effect, fate and choice, shifts interest from the Self, the character, to the story, the exemplary life. It also, characteristically, deploys the interlocking of many stories in a web, which makes chance begin to look like necessity. Is Ludo making his own fate or fulfilling it? I noticed on the second reading the beautiful symmetry of the fatherless boy reading the *Odyssey* going round and round the Circle line—the periplum, as Pound kept saying of the circle of the Mediterranean around which Odysseus journeyed in search of his wife and child” (A.S. Byatt, *The New Yorker*).

The Uncoupling by **Meg Wolitzer**. [W]ill the women of Stellar Plains, N.J., ever have sex again? After new high school drama teacher Fran Heller begins rehearsals for *Lysistrata* (in which the women of Greece refuse to have sex until the men end the Peloponnesian War), every girl and woman in the community is overcome by a ‘spell that causes them to lose all desire for sex (*Publisher’s Weekly*).

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet by **David Mitchell** is “an aching romantic story of forbidden love and something of a rescue tale — all taking place off the coast of Japan, circa 1799.... Jacob de Zoet, the nephew of a pastor, is a wide-eyed and educated young clerk with the Dutch East Indies Company who arrives in Dejima, a small port on the southwest coast of Japan.... When he arrives, Dejima is a mess. Relations between the Japanese and their only -European trading partners, the Dutch, are tense.... Meanwhile, [de Zoet] has a few things of his own to hide. The first is the Psalter he has smuggled in (Christianity was unwanted in Japan at the time, its texts forbidden). The second is his growing fondness for a young well-born midwife known as Miss Aibagawa.... And are there even nods to the story of Persephone, also born of privilege, also found plucking exotic fruit, also abducted — whose removal from the world causes the world’s seasons? Maybe, maybe not. There are no easy answers or facile connections” (Dave Eggers, *The New Yorker*).

The Thousand by **Kevin Guilfoile**. In 530 B.C., a mysterious ship appeared off the rainy shores of Croton, in what is now Italy. After three days the skies finally cleared and a man disembarked to address the curious and frightened crowd that had gathered along the wet sands. He called himself Pythagoras. Exactly

what he said that day is unknown, but a thousand men and women abandoned their lives and families to follow him. They became a community. A school. A cult dedicated to the search for a mathematical theory of everything. Although Pythagoras would die years later, following a bloody purge, his disciples would influence Western philosophy, science, and mathematics for all time. Chicago, the present day. Canada Gold, a girl both gifted and burdened by uncanny mental abilities, is putting her skills to questionable use in the casinos and courthouses of Las Vegas when she finds herself drawn back to the city in which her father, the renowned composer Solomon Gold, was killed while composing his magnum opus. Beautiful, brilliant, troubled, Canada has never heard of the Thousand, a clandestine group of powerful individuals safeguarding and exploiting the secret teachings of Pythagoras. But as she struggles to understand her father's unsolved murder, she finds herself caught in the violence erupting between members of the fractured ancient cult while she is relentlessly pursued by those who want to use her, those who want to kill her, and the one person who wants to save her.

“In this spellbinding novel, [*Agamemnon's Daughter*.] written in Albania and smuggled into France a few pages at a time in the 1980s, Ismail Kadare denounces with rare force the machinery of a dictatorial regime, drawing us back to the ancient roots of tyranny in Western Civilization. During the waning years of Communism, a young worker for the Albanian state-controlled media agency narrates the story of his ill-fated love for the daughter of a high-ranking official. When he witness the ghostly image of Agamemnon—the Ancient Greek king who sacrificed his own daughter for reasons of State—on the reviewing stand during a May Day celebration, he begins to suspect the full catastrophe of his devotion” (publisher's blurb).

In *The File on H.*, “controversial Albanian dissident [Ismail] Kadare...takes on the big H, Homer, in this comic tale of small-town suspicions and a doomed academic venture” (*Publishers Weekly*). “In the mid 1930s, two young American scholars voyage to the Albanian highlands, the last remaining natural habitat of the oral epic, with one of the world's first tape recorders in hand. Their mission? To discover how Homer could have composed works such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* without ever writing them down. Their research puts them at the center of ethnic strife in the Balkans and, mistaken for foreign spies, they are placed under surveillance. Research and intrigue proceed apace, until a Serbian monk plots a violent end to their project” (publisher's blurb).

John Banville's “intriguing new novel” *Infinites* “aims to resemble a classical drama. The unities of time and place are observed, the Greek gods intrude into the action, and there's even a flawed family, full of furtive guilt and destructive love. Adam Godley, a retired meta-mathematical pioneer, lies upstairs dying. His first wife killed herself before the story begins. His present wife is a secret drinker, his daughter Petra — “like a sack half filled with sticks” — is a self-harmer, and his son, another Adam, is worrying about his wife Helen and the baby she lost. Servants and outsiders come in and out of the family presence, creating havoc. At first surprisingly, Zeus and Hermes join in. For this is, among much else, a retelling of the myth of *Amphitryon*, in which Zeus makes love to an earthly woman while disguised as her husband” (Tom Deveson, *The Sunday Times*).

The Last Ember, Daniel Levin. Jonathan Marcus a young American lawyer and a former doctoral student in classics, has become a sought-after commodity among antiquities dealers. But when he is summoned to Rome to examine a client's fragment of an ancient stone map, he stumbles across a startling secret: a hidden message carved inside the stone itself. The discovery propels him on a perilous journey from the labyrinth beneath the Colosseum to the biblical-era tunnels of Jerusalem in search of a hidden 2,000-year-

old artifact sought by empires throughout the ages. As Marcus and a passionate UN preservationist, Dr. Emili Travia, dig more deeply into the past, they're stunned to discover not only an ancient intelligence operation to protect the artifact, but also a ruthless modern plot to destroy all trace of it by a mysterious radical bent on erasing every remnant of Jewish and Christian presence from the Temple Mount. With a cutting-edge plot as intricately layered as the ancient sites it explores, *The Last Ember* is a gripping thriller spanning the high-stakes worlds of archaeology, politics, and terrorism in its portrayal of the modern struggle to define--and redefine--history itself" (publisher's blurb).

"**Ali Shaw** has created a memorable addition to [the] fabulist pantheon in his gorgeous first novel, *The Girl with Glass Feet*" (Elizabeth Hand, Washington Post). "The cold northern islands of St. Hauda's Land are home to strange creatures and intertwining human secrets in Shaw's earnest, magic-tinged debut. Ida Maclaird returns to the archipelago to find a cure for the condition her last visit brought her—she is slowly turning into glass. The landscape is at once beautiful and ominous, and its residents mistrustful, but she grows close to Midas Crook, a young man who, despite his intention to spend his life alone, falls in love with Ida and becomes desperate to save her" (*Publisher's Weekly*).

"It's a story as old as time. But what happens when an old story meets a brand new set of circumstances? **Ali Smith's** re-mix of Ovid's most joyful metamorphosis is a story about the kind of fluidity that can't be bottled and sold. It is about girls and boys, girls and girls, love and transformation, a story of puns and doubles, reversals and revelations. Funny and fresh, poetic and political, *Girl Meets Boy* is a myth of metamorphosis for the modern world" (Canongate Myths, themyths.co.uk). "It is clever, complex and thrilling.... *Girl Meets Boy* delights because it refuses to stop at a single metamorphosis; despite its compactness, its stories multiply and rebound exuberantly, its echoes calling to one another across the pages" (*TLS*). "Ali Smith bursts from the page with her fabulous retelling of the story of Iphis and Ianthe from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. *Girl Meets Boy*...pulls you in and doesn't let you go.... Smith's retelling is bold and brilliant—containing the best sex I've read in years" (*The Observer*).

"In *Sea of Many Returns*, master storyteller **Arnold Zable** delivers a cavalcade of stories, characters and places. He takes us to the island of Ithaca, the Ionian Sea, Kalgoorlie and Melbourne, as well as Port Said, the Black Sea and Danube River ports. Mentor leaves Ithaca in 1916, a young man, and arrives in Kalgoorlie. But race riots soon see him on another journey, this time to Melbourne. Nearly ninety years later, Mentor's Melbourne-born granddaughter Xanthe is translating Mentor's manuscript, and making her own journey—back to Ithaca. Through Mentor's manuscript and Xanthe's memories, we meet many people and hear their stories, spanning more than a century. Like Homer's Odysseus, they left Ithaca to journey to distant places. We follow the lives of two brothers, who, as teenagers in the 1930s, build a boat and ferry freight and passengers across the Ionian Sea until one brother leaves for Australia. We meet Antonios Lekatsas and learn of his partnership with architect Walter Burley Griffin to design some of Melbourne's most creative buildings. And we hear the stories of the women who waited on Ithaca while their men sought fortune in Australia. *Sea of Many Returns* is a moving novel exploring the immigrant experience and our connections with place and those we love" (readings.com.au).

The Hidden. "From acclaimed author **Tobias Hill**, an extraordinary novel of ancient secrets, modern conflict and what it costs to belong. In Sparta, southern Greece, a close-knit team of archaeologists dig for the buried traces of a formidable ancient power. A latecomer, Ben Mercer, finds himself drawn to the brilliance and charisma of the group: the double-edged friendship of his countryman Jason, the unsettling

beauty of the women, Natsuko and Eleschen, and the menace of Max and Eberhard, who idealise the extremes of the ancient Spartans. Thrilled by the possibility of acceptance and excited by the dangerous games they play, Ben gradually wins his way into the circle. But there is more to the group than he understands, and Ben finds out too late that some things should remain hidden. He must decide where his loyalties lie - before the decision is taken for him" (faber.co.uk).

***Gods Behaving Badly*, Marie Phillips.** "British blogger Phillips's delightful debut finds the Greek gods and goddesses living in a tumbledown house in modern-day London and facing a very serious problem: their powers are waning, and immortality does not seem guaranteed. In between looking for work and keeping house, the ancient family is still up to its oldest pursuit: crossing and double-crossing each other. Apollo, who has been cosmically bored for centuries, has been appearing as a television psychic in a bid for stardom. His aunt Aphrodite, a phone-sex worker, sabotages him by having her son Eros shoot him with an arrow of love, making him fall for a very ordinary mortal—a cleaning woman named Alice, who happens to be in love with Neil, another nice, retiring mortal. When Artemis—the goddess of the moon, chastity and the hunt, who has been working as a dog walker—hires Alice to tidy up, the household is set to combust, and the fate of the world hangs in the balance. Fanciful, humorous and charming, this satire is as sweet as nectar" (*Publishers Weekly*). "Marie Phillips's first novel, *Gods Behaving Badly*, hovers somewhere between *Pride and Prejudice* and an episode of "Bewitched." I'm not complaining; I have an unusually high regard for Elizabeth Montgomery's oeuvre. And Austen got off some good lines, too" (Ron Charles, *The Washington Post*).

"In ***Land of Marvels***, a thriller set in 1914, Barry Unsworth brings to life the schemes and double-dealings of Western nations grappling for a foothold in Mesopotamia... in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire.... Somerville, a British archaeologist, is excavating a long-buried Assyrian palace. The site lies directly in the path of a new railroad to Baghdad, and he watches nervously as the construction progresses, threatening to destroy his discovery. The expedition party includes Somerville's beautiful, bored wife, Edith; Patricia, a smart young graduate student; and Jehar, an Arab man-of-all-duties whose subservient manner belies his intelligence and ambitions. Posing as an archaeologist, an American geologist from an oil company arrives one day and insinuates himself into the group. But he's not the only one working undercover to stake a claim on Iraq's rich oil fields" (randomhouse.com).

***This Breathing World*, José Luis de Juan** (Martin Schifino and Selina Packard, trans.). "A pair of thrillers are placed up against each other in this connected collection of murder mysteries. One takes place in first-century Rome and tells the tale of Mazuf, a homosexual scribe who is driven to kill. The second is set in the modern day United States and seems to focus on the sexual exploits of a Harvard student until it is revealed that he, too, is a murderer. The two mysteries are constructed as reflections of each other, like mirrors set up in a deserted ballroom, enveloping readers in the stories of the young murderers told through their eyes" (product description, amazon.com). "[The] intertextual conceit works beautifully as a comment on the authorship and provenance of texts, bouncing back and forth across the ages, their meaning and matter acquiring new layers and shedding others" (Philip Womack, *TLS*, 2-20-09).

***The Centaur*, John Updike.** "In a small Pennsylvania town in the late 1940s, schoolteacher George Caldwell yearns to find some meaning in his life. Alone with his teenage son for three days in a blizzard, Caldwell sees his son grow and change as he himself begins to lost touch with his life. Interwoven with the

myth of Chiron, the noblest centaur, and his own relationship to Prometheus, The Centaur one of John Updike's most brilliant and unusual novels" (Ballantine Books, randomhouse.com).

The Secret History, Donna Tart. "Narrator Richard Papen comes from a lower-class family and a loveless California home to the 'hermetic, overheated atmosphere' of Vermont's Hampden College. Almost too easily, he is accepted into a clique of five socially sophisticated students who study Classics with an idiosyncratic, morally fraudulent professor.... Finally they reveal to Richard that they accidentally killed a man during a bacchanalian frenzy; when one of their number seems ready to spill the secret, the group--now including Richard--must kill him, too (*Publishers Weekly*). "Ferociously well-paced entertainment" (*NYT*).

The Athenian Murders, Jose Carlos Somoza. "In a highly original and literary approach to crime fiction, Spanish writer Somoza's gripping English-language debut interweaves text from an ancient Greek manuscript with an account of the growing anxieties of its modern translator. In the Greek text, Heracles Pontor, Decipherer of Enigmas, is called upon to solve the grisly killings of young men at Plato's Academy of Philosophy" (*Publishers Weekly*).

Fires, Marguerite Yourcenar. "Fires consists of nine monologues and narratives based on classical Greek stories. Antigone, Clytemnestra, Phaedo, Sappho are all mythical figures whose stories are mingled with contemporary themes. Interspersed are highly personal narratives, reflecting on a time of profound inner crisis in the author's life." (amazon.com).

The Last World, Christoph Ransmayr. "This beautifully evocative fable resets in contemporary time the Roman world of the poet Ovidius Naso, exiled in 8 A.D. to barbarous Tomi (in modern Bulgaria) on the Black Sea. Naso's friend Cotta is seeking the poet in Tomi, now an iron-mining town, among characters who are modern counterparts of mythic figures in Naso's *Metamorphoses*, in which humans were transformed into stars, animals, trees, rocks. Affirming their link to the savage landscape, these people reenact ancient myths, e.g., Dis and Proserpina, gods of Hades, are now Thies, a refugee German grave-digger and his quarrelsome fiancée" (*Publisher's Weekly*).

The Fall of Troy, Peter Ackroyd. "Fakes, forgeries and plagiarism abound in Ackroyd's brilliant historical novel, set in the 19th century during the excavation of the Bronze Age site of Troy.... Sophia Chrysanthis is only 16 when the German archaeologist, Herr Obermann, comes wooing: he wants a Greek bride who knows her Homer. Sophia passes his test.... Obermann is very good at the art of archaeology — perhaps too good at it. The atmosphere at Troy is tense and mysterious. Sophia finds herself increasingly baffled by the past . . . not only the remote past that Obermann is so keen to share with her in the form of his beloved epics of the Trojan wars, but also his own, recent past — a past that he has chosen to hide from her" (book description, amazon.com).

The Magus, John Fowler. "Filled with shocks and chilling surprises, The Magus is a masterwork of contemporary literature. In it, a young Englishman, Nicholas Urfe, accepts a teaching position on a Greek island where his friendship with the owner of the islands most magnificent estate leads him into a nightmare. As reality and fantasy are deliberately confused by staged deaths, erotic encounters, and terrifying violence, Urfe becomes a desperate man fighting for his sanity and his life. A work rich with symbols, conundrums and labyrinthine twists of event, *The Magus* is as thought-provoking as it is entertaining, a work that ranks with the best novels of modern times (publisher's blurb).

***The Names*, Don DeLillo.** This novel is “set against the backdrop of a lush and exotic Greece... Among the cast of DeLillo’s bizarre yet fully realized characters... are Kathryn, the narrator’s estranged wife; their son, the six-year-old novelist; Owen, the scientist; and the neurotic narrator obsessed with his own neuroses.” *The Names* is “a thriller, a mystery, and still a moving examination of family, loss, and the amorphous and magical potential of language itself” (publisher’s blurb).

***Corelli’s Mandolin*, Louis de Bernières.** “Extravagant, inventive, emotionally sweeping, [this] is the story of a timeless place that one day wakes up to find itself in the jaws of history. The place is the Greek island of Cephallonia, where gods once dabbled in the affairs of men and the local saint periodically rises from his sarcophagus to cure the mad. Then the tide of World War II rolls onto the island’s shores in the form of the conquering Italian army” (publisher’s blurb).

***Cassandra’s Disk*, Angela Green.** “The melodramatic, salacious plot could have been lifted from a soap opera, but Green’s assured voice gives this absorbing debut some substance. Set in New York, London and the Greek Islands, the story is told by Cassandra Byrd, a renowned Diane Arbus-style photographer in her late 30s writing a family memoir on the Greek island of Ithaca.” (*Publishers Weekly*).

***Middlesex: A Novel*, Jeffrey Eugenides.** “The mesmerizing saga of a near-mythic Greek American family and the ‘roller-coaster ride of a single gene through time.’ The odd but utterly believable story of Cal Stephanides, and how this 41-year-old hermaphrodite was raised as Calliope, is at the tender heart of this...novel. Eugenides weaves together a kaleidoscopic narrative spanning 80 years of a stained family history... Eugenides’s command of the narrative is astonishing.” (amazon.com).

***Some Wine for Remembrance*, Edmund Keeley.** “In September, 1944, near the village of Hortiati in Macedonian Greece the death of a German soldier in an ambush by a guerrilla unit brought on a Wehrmacht retaliation that resulted in the massacre of one hundred and forty-six villagers, sixty-nine of whom were burned to death in the sealed village bakery, and the total destruction of the village. In this fictionalized account of the atrocity, an American journalist seeking to explore whether a now-prominent Austrian statesman played any part in what happened, records the testimony of five witnesses to the act: two villagers and three Wehrmacht officers” (publisher’s blurb).

***The Marble Faun*, Nathaniel Hawthorne.** “The fragility - and the durability - of human life and art dominate this story of American expatriates in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. Befriended by Donatello, a young Italian with the classical grace of the ‘Marble Faun’, Miriam, Hilda, and Kenyon find their pursuit of art taking a sinister turn as Miriam’s unhappy past precipitates the present into tragedy. Hawthorne’s ‘International Novel’ dramatizes the confrontation of the Old World and the New and the uncertain relationship between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘fake’, in life as in art. The author’s evocative descriptions of classic sites made *The Marble Faun* a favourite guidebook to Rome for Victorian tourists, but this richly ambiguous symbolic romance is also the story of a murder, and a parable of the Fall of Man. As the characters find their civilized existence disrupted by the awful consequences of impulse, Hawthorne leads his readers to question the value of Art and Culture and addresses the great evolutionary debate which was beginning to shake Victorian society” (publisher’s blurb: Oxford University Press).

Valerio Massimo Manfredi has written two archaeological adventures. ***The Oracle*:** “Greece at the time of the Colonels, 1973 - An archaeologist discovers a gold Mycenaean vase embellished with images of the last voyage of Ulysses. But his mysterious death and the vase’s disappearance remain unexplained for ten years

until disturbing signals catalyse different characters into a relentless pursuit for the truth.” *The Tower*: “70 AD. A group of Roman soldiers crossing the Sahara desert is destroyed by a ferocious and mysterious presence hidden in a solitary tower at the extreme borders of the sea of sand. The sole survivor, the Etruscan seer Avile Vipinas, is inexplicably saved by the sound of his silver sistrum. Nineteen centuries later, young American scholar Philip Garrett is investigating his father’s disappearance in the desert 10 years earlier when he discovers the house of Avile Vipinas in the underground ruins of Pompeii, sealed by the earthquake of 79 AD. The ancient seer, before his death, had tried to describe the horrific presence in the Tower of Solitude and to make the first faltering steps to its destruction Who is the ancient civilization – older than the oldest known – that created this tower? What is its purpose?” (panmacmillan.com).

The Martlet’s Tale, **Nicholas Delbanco**. This novel “begins and ends on Rhodes with the middle section set in Athens. The episodic plot revolves around a dying old lady who allegedly has a large fortune to bestow. She leaves behind a family of relatives who will bicker and fight among themselves. In fact, however, she might have not wealth but only bitterness to offer” (helleniccomserve.com/aegeanworld). “My first novel. . . . [T]he overarching subject is—or so it seems to me now—inheritance: what we get and keep or get and lose from the past. In *The Martlet’s Tale* inheritance was explicit—a hidden treasure a grandmother bequeaths a child” (Delbanco, *Boston Review* 29.5, bostonreview.net).

As a Driven Leaf, **Milton Steinberg**. “The age of the Talmud is brought to life in a breathtaking saga. This masterpiece of modern fiction tells the gripping tale of renegade talmudic sage Elisha ben Abuyah’s struggle to reconcile his faith with the allure of Hellenistic culture. Set in Roman Palestine, *As a Driven Leaf* draws readers into the dramatic era of Rabbinic Judaism. Watch the great Talmudic sages at work in the Sanhedrin, eavesdrop on their arguments about theology and Torah, and agonize with them as they contemplate rebellion against an oppressive Roman rule” (publisher’s blurb: Behrman House).

The Mask of Atreus, **A. J. Hartley**. “An obscure museum’s dead proprietor lies in a secret room surrounded by one of the world’s most astonishing collections of Greek antiquities. Only a priceless Mycenaean death mask has been taken, along with the bones of a legendary hero thought to exist only in ancient myth. Looted by the Nazis, the treasures are still being sought by those whose dreams of glory remain undefeated. The mask is an unparalleled discovery that will be a force for devastating retribution in the wrong hands. But by the time museum curator Deborah Miller learns the truth, it may be too late not only to save herself—but to reveal to the world the awesome secret she’s uncovered” (publisher’s blurb: Berkley).

The Suitors, **Ben Ehrenreich**. “Explicitly comparing itself to *The Odyssey*, Ehrenreich’s first novel owes less to Homer’s epic than to Joyce’s. With his linguistic acrobatics, caustic wit and mix-and-match structure, Ehrenreich. . . shows the stirrings of an original talent. Set in a never-never land equal parts contemporary America and classical antiquity, the book centers on the romance of the Ulysses and Penelope-like lovers Payne and Penny. Payne gathers a loosely organized rabble of flunkies to assist him in building a palace for Penny, and soon mobilizes them into an army to fight for glory and riches. After a period of happy pillaging, Payne disappears on the warpath, and Penny and her suitors are left alone, wondering if their leader will ever return. Bound by their collective love (and lust) for Penny, the suitors begin to bicker, sinking into sadness and delusion” (*Publishers Weekly*).

Cold Mountain, **Charles Frazier**. “A loose refashioning of the classic Odyssean myth, *Mountain* trails, in exquisitely researched detail, the treacherous 300-mile journey of a wounded Confederate deserter named

Inman--back to the brilliant, cultured outsider Ada whom he doesn't quite dare believe will become his wife" (Entertainment Weekly).

***The Helmet of Horror: The Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur*, Victor Pelevin.** "By creating a mesmerizing world where the surreal and the hyperreal collide, *The Helmet of Horror* is a radical retelling of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur set in an Internet chat room. They have never met, they have been assigned strange pseudonyms, they inhabit identical rooms that open out onto very different landscapes, and they have entered a dialogue they cannot escape — a discourse defined and destroyed by the Helmet of Horror. Its wearer is the dominant force they call Asterisk, a force for good and ill in which the Minotaur is forever present and Theseus is the great unknown. *The Helmet of Horror* is structured according to the way we communicate in the twenty-first century — using the Internet — yet instilled with the figures and narratives of classical mythology. It is a labyrinthine examination of epistemological uncertainty that radically reinvents this myth for an age where information is abundant but knowledge ultimately unattainable" (product description on amazon.com).

***Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking: A Novel*, Miranda Donnal.** "Miranda Donnal is an infant when her parents move from New York City to a remote island off the coast of Maine so her father can complete a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. When her mother takes a boat to town and never returns, Miranda is raised by her reclusive father. She grows up primarily in solitude, save for a friendship with Mr. Blackwell, a fisherman who often acts as Miranda's surrogate father. This endearing bond is complicated by the mysterious relationship between Mr. Blackwell and Miranda's father. After Miranda graduates from high school, her father arranges for her to return to New York to work in the classical-studies library that he helped establish years before her birth. It is here that Miranda begins unraveling the mysteries of her father's past, while pushing beyond the threshold of isolation to discover her own enthralling path in life and love" (Leah Strauss, *Booklist*).

The Seventh Sacrament*, David Hewson.** Hewson's uncompromising trio of antiestablishment Roman cops—Nic Costa, Gianni Peroni, and their boss, Leo Falcone—are back in the Eternal City and up to their necks in another vat of hot water.... [T]he crime on the front burner—a dead body discovered in a Roman church—is merely the entrée point to a case with tentacles extending deep into ancient history and, in this instance, reaching below the city into the labyrinthian catacombs where a seven-year-old boy, the son of a distinguished archaeologist, disappeared 14 years earlier. Falcone was on that case and still broods over both his failure to find the missing boy and his role in putting the archaeologist behind bars for the murder of one of the young men assumed (but never convicted) of being responsible for the boy's disappearance. The archaeologist is out of jail now and intent on settling scores. As the story weaves across multiple time lines—the present, the weeks surrounding the boy's disappearance, and the fourth century CE, when Constantine won control of the Roman Empire—Hewson keeps his readers securely tethered to a narrative lifeline.... A superb mix of history, mystery, and humanity" (Bill Ott, *Booklist*). If you like this book then try the other mysteries in this series: ***The Villa of the Mysteries*, *A Season for the Dead (featuring a 10th-century copy of Apicius's first-century cookbook), ***The Sacred Cut*** (highlighting Vitruvius and Roman architecture).

*“What is **VALIS**? This question is at the heart of **Philip K. Dick’s** ground-breaking novel, and the first book in his defining trilogy. When a beam of pink light begins giving a schizophrenic man named Horselover Fat (who just might also be known as Philip K. Dick) visions of an alternate Earth where the Roman Empire still reigns, he must decide whether he is crazy, or whether a godlike entity is showing him the true nature of the world... *VALIS* is essential reading for any true Philip K. Dick fan, a novel that Roberto Bolaño called ‘more disturbing than any novel by [Carson] McCullers.’ By the end, like Dick himself, you will be left wondering what is real, what is fiction, and just what the price is for divine inspiration” (amazon.com blurb). *The Divine Invasion* and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* complete the trilogy.

*“Set in the Athens of 421BC, *The Goddess of Buttercups and Daisies* by **Martin Millar**, is a comedy that is by turns rambunctious, satirical and bittersweet. It features appearances by Socrates and a young Plato, the playwright Aristophanes and, intervening in the affairs of the city-state and its neighbours, sundry capricious gods and near-immortal heroes” (Johnathan Wright, *The Guardian*). “Fantasy meets history in the cult author’s big-hearted tale of capricious deities and lovable losers in ancient Greece” (*The Guardian*).

Soldier of the Mist, **Gene Wolfe**. “A science fiction/ fantasy master presents the story of Latro, an ancient Greek soldier, who has suffered a head wound. Because he cannot remember from day to day, Latro describes events in a scroll. His senses, intensified by his injury, enable him to see many things, including gods circulating among mortals” (AudioFile). Latro’s journey continues in *Soldier of Arete*. “Now a Greek slave in the service of the shipmaster Hypereides, he travels from Sestos, after its fall, to Thrace, where he fights alongside Amazons, and onto the cities of Thought (Athens) and Rope (Sparta)” (*Publishers Weekly*).

Olympos. “Drawing from Homer’s *Iliad*, Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and the work of several 19th-century poets, **[Dan] Simmons** achieves another triumph in this majestic, if convoluted, sequel to his much-praised *Ilium* (2003). Posthumans masquerading as the Greek gods and living on Mars travel back and forth through time and alternate universes to interfere in the real Trojan War, employing a resurrected late 20th-century classics professor, Thomas Hockenberry, as their tool. Meanwhile, the last remaining old-style human beings on a far-future Earth must struggle for survival against a variety of hostile forces. Superhuman entities with names like Prospero, Caliban and Ariel lay complex plots, using human beings as game pieces. From the outer solar system, an advanced race of semiorganic Artificial Intelligences, called moravecs, observe Earth and Mars in consternation, trying to make sense of the situation, hoping to shift the balance of power before out-of-control quantum forces destroy everything. This is powerful stuff, rich in both high-tech sense of wonder and literary allusions, but Simmons is in complete control of his material as half a dozen baroque plot lines smoothly converge on a rousing and highly satisfying conclusion” (*Publishers Weekly*). In *Ilium* “Genre-hopping Dan Simmons returns to science fiction with the vast and intricate masterpiece *Ilium*. Within, Simmons weaves three astounding story lines into one Earth-, Mars-, and Jupiter-shattering cliffhanger that will leave readers aching for the sequel. On Earth, a post-technological group of humans, pampered by servant machines and easy travel via “faxing,” begins to question its beginnings. Meanwhile, a team of sentient and Shakespeare-quoting robots from Jupiter’s lunar system embark on a mission to Mars to investigate an increase in dangerous quantum fluctuations. On the Red Planet, they’ll find a race of metahumans living out existence as the pantheon of classic Greek gods. These “gods” have recreated the Trojan War with reconstituted Greeks and Trojans and staffed it with

scholars from throughout Earth's history who observe the events and report on the accuracy of Homer's *Iliad*. One of these scholars, Thomas Hockenberry, finds himself tangled in the midst of interplay between the gods and their playthings and sends the war reeling in a direction the blind poet could have never imagined" (amazon.com).

GRAPHIC NOVELS

***Blutch**, the author of *Peplum*, considers his work a follow-up to the *Satyricon*. "[In] action, Blutch's book abounds: stabbing, stoning, amputation, eye-gouging, sex, seafaring, Attic dance, pirate attacks. Yet these sequences are as artificial as they are visceral, feral, and formal at once. Taking as its title the European term for the sword-and-sandal cinematic subgenre, *Peplum* offers a decidedly different take on the toga epic—one of aporia and ambiguity, a fractured tale of antiquity in all its alien majesty" (Edward Gauvin, *Paris Review*).

300: "Writer-artist **Frank Miller** and colorist **Lynn Varley** retell the battle of Thermopylae in [this] exciting and moving graphic novel.... They focus on King Leonidas, the young foot soldier Stelios, and the storyteller Dilios to highlight the Spartans' awe-inspiring toughness and valor" (amazon.com).

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

*"Meticulously researched, **Langdon Hammer's James Merrill** chronicles the life of a poet who believed nothing is lost-- and whose poetry of personal experience, sifted by sensibility, is a poetry of mirror and mask, flesh and spirit, disclosure and secrecy. Most of all, it's a poetry, and a life, crafted from the sublime and the elemental, brilliantly mixed, which Hammer interprets with tender insight and wise sympathy" (Brenda Wineapple, quoted at amazon.com).

In *Ghost on the Throne: The Death of Alexander and the Bloody Fight for his Empire*, **James Romm** "adds the narrative verve of a born writer to the erudition of a scholar. Taking what until now had been a murky gray area of ancient history that was once the province of specialists--the eventful, convoluted, and bitter struggles for power immediately following the death of Alexander the Great--Romm has crafted a richly colored, expertly narrated page-turner. A wonderful book for anyone interested in history, power—or just an amazing tale" (Daniel Mendelsohn).

"Was Roman philosopher Seneca the Younger an exemplar of Stoic virtue who, pulled into politics in the service of Emperor Nero, did his best to modulate the young despot's cruelty? Or was he a shrewd manipulator whose ethical treatises were just a cynical attempt to restore a reputation sullied by his complicity in Nero's cruel and decadent court?" In *Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero*, **James Romm**, "suggests that we might bring together these conflicting portraits by understanding Seneca as a serious thinker who suffered from passivity and obsequiousness, and had the misfortune to live at a time when intellectual activity had become particularly dangerous. Seneca's elegant humanistic vision (which would influence, among other things, Roman Catholic church doctrine), therefore, was not fraudulent, but aspirational, and somewhat tragic: ideals articulated by a flawed man who was all too aware of his inability to live up to them. Vividly describing the intensity of political life in the Nero years, and paying particular

attention to the Roman fascination with suicide, Romm's narrative is gripping, erudite, and occasionally quite grim (*Booklist*).

In *The Buried Book: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Great Epic of Gilgamesh*, **David Damrosch** "organizes his text as an archaeological dig, opening with a prefatory account of Austen Henry Layard's discovery and excavation of the ruins of Nineveh in the 1840s, then gradually working his way back from the Victorian era into ancient times" (Michael Dirda, *Washington Post*). "*The Buried Book* is a thrilling intellectual adventure: a brilliant study of Gilgamesh, it is also a rich and complex narrative of colonialist adventurers, obsessed scholars, anxious theologians, and contemporary writers all caught up in the ancient epic's amazingly wide net" (Stephen Greenblatt). **Black Sea**, **Neal Ascherson**. "In this remarkable study of the fateful encounters between Europe and Asia on the shores of a legendary sea, Neal Ascherson explores the disputed meaning of community, nationhood, history, and culture in a region famous for its dramatic conflicts" (publisher's blurb). "A superb book, beautifully written, evocative, learned, and deeply subtle" (*TLS*). A searching examination of the lands that ring the Black Sea and that were the scenes of some of the most ancient multicultural experiences of human history...rich both in historical data and in interpretation...with something to learn on almost every page" (*NYT*).

In *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, **Stephen Greenblatt** recounts how a Renaissance book hunter discovered Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, lost since antiquity, and traces the impact of this discovery on writers and artists down to the modern age.

The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek, **Barry Cunliffe**. "Although now lost, Pytheas' *On the Ocean*, an account of his 350 B.C. voyage to Britain, was excerpted by ancient authors. From these snippets, Cunliffe has reconstructed Pytheas' exploit. He also includes modern archaeological findings to highly readable effect. The symbiosis of the two sorts of evidence makes for a captivating journey" (*Booklist*). Consider too *The Ice Museum* by **Joanna Kavenna**. The author "chronicles her personal journey into the myth and reality of the legendary Arctic land of Thule. Kavenna grounds her mission in the words of those who came before her, beginning with the fourth-century Greek explorer Pytheas, whose record is the earliest mention of 'a land near a frozen ocean, draped in mist.' She then follows in the footsteps of Richard Burton, William Morris, and Anthony Trollope, and considers the political history of the Thule ideal, specifically how it attracted the Nazi Party, the contemporary dreams of the Estonian people, and the long-held convictions of explorer Fridtjof Nansen.... Kavenna's riveting retelling of Thule's history, and her understanding of how a missing land could hold the imaginations of so many different people, is purely due to her own impressive abilities. *The Ice Museum* transcends all genre description, and holds its own as a journey into a world that somehow vibrantly exists on paper and nowhere else" (*Booklist*).

The Battle that Stopped Rome: Emperor Augustus, Arminius, and the Slaughter of the Legions in the Teutoburg Forest, **Peter S. Wells**. "In A.D. 9, an army of barbarians ferociously butchered three entire Roman legions in a desolate German forest.... Archaeologist Peter Wells provides the first graphic details of this monumental confrontation" (publisher's blurb). "Clearly and effectively written, Wells' volume--part popular history and part archaeological monograph--recounts one of the most catastrophic military defeats in history" (*Publishers Weekly*).

Augustine of Hippo, Peter Brown. “Reads like a novel” (Henry Dyson). “A great biography of the greatest father of the church, and an introduction to the intellectual world of late antiquity” (*Washington Post Book World*). “A portrait in depth of the man, and a brilliant study of the period” (*NYRB*).

Portrait of a Greek Imagination, Michael Herzfeld. “Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld first met Greek novelist Andreas Nenedakis in the drafty courtyard of a public library. This encounter led to an enduring intellectual relationship that prompted Herzfeld to reconsider both the contours of fiction and the nature of anthropology. *Portrait of a Greek Imagination*, part biography and part ethnography, is Herzfeld’s contextualization of Nenedakis’s life, as it was both lived and fictionalized” (publisher’s blurb).

TRAVEL WRITING

*Katherine Kizilos’ memoir, ***The Olive Grove: Travels in Greece***, is a “nostalgic and honest travelogue by an Australian journalist who tells about her return trip to Greece as she travels from island to island over the course of 14 weeks in an attempt to rediscover her father’s homeland” (Emily Byers, *Statesman Journal*).

***On the Spartacus Road* by Peter Stothard** “defies categorisation. The author is editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* and he writes with elegance, erudition and journalistic ease. He is a classicist, and quotes his sources in their beloved original Latin (though he always offers a translation). He is the survivor of a cancer that almost killed him, and tells how that experience sent him back to Italy in new engagement with the Roman obsession with death. His journey takes him through modern Italy and deep into its past. He follows Spartacus, escaped Thracian gladiator and leader of an army of rebel slaves eventually numbering tens of thousands. For two years, the rebels brought terror to the towns they passed through and to the Roman republic itself, before they were defeated and grimly punished. The body of Spartacus was never found. To generations of Romans his name was an obscenity; to moderns he has often seemed heroic. This is not a light read. Stothard is unflinching in his account of the brutality of both the rebels and the society they fought, and also of the violence wrought by his tumour, which he named Nero (Judith Rice, guardian.co.uk).

Of ***The Appian Way: Ghost Road, Queen of Roads*** by Robert Kaster, Edward Chaplin observes: “Fascinated by Rome’s greatest road as a monument to power, death, and remembrance, and determined to trace its path today, Kaster makes a first-rate guide through time and through space, through the layers of history and the jostling of diverse cultures from Rome to Brindisi, from Appius Claudius the Blind to Kurt Vonnegut. En route, travelers should award him 5 stars for the clarity of his exposition, the accuracy and concision of his lightly-worn erudition, and the charm and relevance of personal anecdotes and striking observations. Many books will lead you down the Appian Way, but this should be the one to start your journey.”

***The Story of San Michele*, Axel Munthe.** “Munthe was a true Renaissance man a scientist and doctor as well as a poet who was a friend of Henry James, Somerset Maugham, and others. In this 1929 volume, he offers an account of San Michele, a house he built on the site of Roman emperor Tiberius’s villa on the Isle of Capri off Italy’s southern coast. His weaving of the story of the house with Italian history, mythology, and culture is reminiscent of 18th- and 19th-century travelogs. This book was a smash in several languages for many years” (*Library Journal*).

The Colossus of Maroussi, **Henry Miller**. “This book about Greece...is incandescent with his feelings for a great people and their past” (publisher’s blurb).

Dinner with Persephone: Travels in Greece, **Patricia Storage**. “I lived in Athens, at the intersection of a prostitute and a saint.” So begins Patricia Storage’s astonishing memoir of her year in Greece. Mixing affection with detachment, rapture with clarity, this American poet perfectly evokes a country delicately balanced between East and West” (publisher’s blurb).

Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese, **Patrick Leigh Fermor**. “Mani describes a journey by foot, mule and caique from Sparta to Cape Matapan, and then back up the coast to Gytheion. A climb through the precipitous spikes of the Taygetus Mountains reveals an isolated peninsula whose strange tower houses still ring with the memories of Nyklian blood feuds. Every crevice seems to carry a story: we peer into the entrance to Hades, swim below the site of a temple to Poseidon, and are guided by “two tatterdemalion” salt gatherers through the ruins of a Frankish castle” (*The Daily Telegraph*).

The Villa Ariadne, **Dilys Powell**. “Built in 1906, The Villa Ariadne was used as living quarters by the great archaeologist, Sir Arthur Evans, during his excavations of Knossos, the fabled palace of King Minos on the island of Crete. Donated by Evans to the British Archaeological School in Athens, the Villa was home to many dashing young scholars during the 1920s and 30s; among them, John Pendlebury, who became a local legend thanks to his selfless participation in the defense of Crete when the island was invaded by the Nazis during World War Two” (publisher’s blurb).

Eurydice Street: A Place in Athens, **Sofka Zinovieff**. “A beguiling blend of autobiography and travel swirled into a portrait of a city and a meditation on Greekness” (*Daily Telegraph*). “A modest and a magnificently well-judged book, which anyone thinking of an Athenian trip ought to read.” (*TLS*). “More than travel writing, this is a story of finding home” (*Kirkus Reviews*).

My Family and Other Animals. **Gerald Durrell**. “When the unconventional Durrell family can no longer endure the damp, gray English climate, they do what any sensible family would do: sell their house and relocate to the sunny Greek isle of Corfu. *My Family and Other Animals* was intended to embrace the natural history of the island but ended up as a delightful account of Durrell’s family’s experiences.” (publisher’s blurb).

Rome and a Villa, **Eleanor Clark**. “In 1947 a young American woman...went to Rome on a Guggenheim fellowship to write a novel. But Rome had its way with her, the novel was abandoned, and what followed...was a series of sketches of Roman life” (publisher’s blurb).

Pleasure of Ruins, **Rose Macaulay**. “Imagination, irony, an appetite for travel and an enchantment with the past are the hallmarks of Rose Macaulay’s classic study.... She takes us on a journey through four continents, from Egyptian Thebes—‘so old that no one remembers its beginnings’—to Corinth, the gold San Francisco of the ancient world; from Pompeii, the very gem of ruins, to Angkor-Wat in the jungles of South-East Asia and to the ruined cities of Ceylon and South America” (publisher’s blurb). “The definitive work on what the author calls, with relish, ‘Ruinenlust’.... A splendidly written, splendid-sounding book” (*The Observer*, London).

Classical Landscape With Figures, **Osbert Lancaster**. “In 1944 Lancaster packed his criteria and went off to Greece, where the British government had assigned him to the Athens embassy as first secretary. After 18 months he returned to London with his standards ...a sheaf of sketches of what he had seen. The result

is a handsomely and pointedly illustrated travel book that will even delight readers to whom the word “Acropolis” recalls nothing but a tiresome, quickly forgotten history lesson.... Some of his crispest observations are leveled at the political nature of the Greek people” (*Time*, 1944, time.com).

***Siren Land*, Norman Douglas.** “Published in 1911...*Siren Land* describes and celebrates the region around Naples, particularly the Sorrento Peninsula and the island of Capri. It was in this region in 1888 that Douglas, a Scot born in Austria, had first experienced Italy and the Mediterranean, and it was here that he had settled in 1897.... *Siren Land* opens with a discussion of ‘Sirens and their Ancestry’, a learned, leisurely stroll through the subject in what readers would come to recognize as Douglas’s best mock-erudite style. Subsequent chapters deal with that ‘Siren-loving monster’ Tiberius, the Roman emperor who retired to Capri; early appreciation of Capri’s Blue Grotto as a species of cave worship; the cemeteries and burial chapels of the region; and – a subject dear to Douglas’s heart – leisure. ‘The Life of Sister Serafina’ is an ironic hagiography, a form to which its bemused author would return repeatedly. ‘Rain on the Hills’ finds Douglas unexpectedly ‘weatherbound’ in a small upland village, musing genially on a series of otherwise unrelated subjects. In the book’s final chapter, ‘The Headland of Minerva’, he announces the end of summer and contemplates “how much there is still to see” – and, by implication, to write about. Sirens are a *leitmotiv*, as the shores and isles of the Bay of Naples are traditionally a favourite haunt.... Although its content is varied, *Siren Land* sounds a note that would distinguish Douglas’s work from first to last: ‘Many of us would do well to *mediterraneanise* ourselves for a season, to quicken those ethnic roots from which has sprung so much of what is best in our natures’” (Grove Koger. “Siren Land.” *The Literary Encyclopedia*. <<http://www.litenyc.com>).

***Travels with Herodotus*, Ryszard Kapuscinski.** “In 1955, just starting his career as a reporter, Kapuscinski wanted to travel just beyond the border of Poland. His editor sent him on assignment much farther afield, to China, Iran, and Africa, with a gift of Herodotus’ Histories. In this amazing memoir, Kapuscinski compares his own wanderings to those of the Greek historian. He wonders about the motivation behind Herodotus’ journeys, recounting how his own were spurred by unrest in Poland. Calling Herodotus the “first globalist,” Kapuscinski uses his volume as comfort, solace, guide, and inspiration. He intersperses Herodotus’ writings throughout his own musings at the modern world, comparing ancient Persia’s Darius with the then shah of Iran. As he reads about and dreads the war between the Greeks and Persians, he covers the war in the Congo. Liberated by his travels, Kapuscinski nonetheless feels the impenetrability of the “Great Wall of Language” in China and all the barriers to overcoming xenophobia and nurturing an appreciation for diverse cultures. Kapuscinski’s recollections are intimate and vibrant in his embrace of a broader world” (Vanessa Bush, *Booklist*).