

‘ARTS & LEARNING’ IN AMERICA

Here is a nation which stands at a loss,¹
a vessel adrift ignoring the cost.²

Minds so shackled and fixed in place,³
Thoughts un-shifted so long out of date.⁴

Now amid the fog our memory is faint⁵
Plutarch did live, yet his ‘lives’ are now quaint.⁶

Recollections abound though we recall wrong things⁷
Our wit needs renewing by the old ancient streams.⁸

Mr. Loeb thought so in colors Green and Red⁹
Then *I Tatti* Blues, to the mind, was fed.¹⁰

Clay texts advanced us as onward we go,¹¹
gripping our past with Sanskrit in full tow.¹²

So reach for those best, you are sure to find them,¹³
in literary chests of which we are all unmindful.¹⁴

Within they cry: “The End of all life is near”¹⁵—
is not this too, what Holy Scripture makes clear?¹⁶

¹ America’s loss of culture partly stems from the mishandling of events of her history.

² Our national character no longer resembles that of a stable personage. Multi-cultural trends have brought upon us a personality complex that is too difficult to fathom.

³ The foundational beliefs of America’s Founding Fathers are looked upon as little more than narrow insights into a culture opposed to diversity.

⁴ Early pilgrim theology and later, Federalist-Constitutional papers are presently deemed to be out of step with our current nation and should be amended in a manner fitting a more diverse Republic.

⁵ More than two centuries beyond the American Revolutionary War, the rearrangement of our material history has led to textbooks that have plagued us with American amnesia. We no longer have any sense of who we once were—with character and virtue attached to our histories—nor do we readily ‘see’ who we are.

⁶ Plutarch’s (AD46-120AD) *Lives of Noble Greek and Romans* is an anthology of parallel biographies in which their common moral strengths/weaknesses are illustrated. Our Founders built America in the Ancient Republican form and this can be seen in the layout of our capitol city and in the use of the many inscriptions there extant.

⁷ There are still multitudes from the pre-WWII era who remember what it was like to be instructed in the old fashioned ‘ideals’ of Americana. Their stories linger on and on.

⁸ The curriculum for children today bypasses most of those items needed to prepare youth for the events of adulthood. Thus the still waters of Quintilian’s Institutes yet languish.

⁹ The Loeb Classical Library Volumes consist of more than 500 carefully edited modern editions of ancient Greek and Latin texts, with facing page English translation. All Greek volumes are bound in Green cloth covers and the Latin books in Red cloth covers.

¹⁰ The *I Tatti* volumes are republished editions of Renaissance Latin texts and are bound in a blue cover. Each text is edited with care and represents the best works of the Renaissance-scholastic period.

¹¹ The ambiguity here is intentional: the “Clay” may represent Mr. John Clay who initiated the Clay Sanskrit Library which publishes the best of those Sanskrit texts that arose in the Indic arena from thousands of years ago. On the other hand, there is also a slight allusion to those clay texts of Amarna or cuneiform descent.

¹² Sanskrit is an ancient language of India used for religion and scholarship.

¹³ This is an exhortation to extend our hands backwards in time towards those texts which have rounded out early American character.

¹⁴ The re-issuing of the antique texts in modern editions is for the purpose of reacquainting ourselves with our past.

¹⁵ Texts worldwide purport to hold ancient ideas of the end of the world. This is ingrained in societies where religion is the dominant factor shaping culture.

¹⁶ The influence of the Holy Bible in American culture and history cannot be overemphasized. The grand narrative of American history rests on Scripture’s foundation.

The above lines provide a cultural diagnosis. Anyone familiar with American history at all understands the rich tapestry of literary traditions which have converged throughout our history. Many of the “Great Books” authors penned authorial essays and treatises that have long shaped our perspective and worldviews. Times have changed and the ancient past has passed by us leaving us with the current dregs afflicting us to this day. As a rule, books are to instruct. There may exist today that idea of novelty and fiction which attends most volumes emerging from the press now but in the beginning of all things writing was used to pass on information, useful information in fact.

Historically, Holy Scripture and Judeo-Christian principles funded nation after nation. These strict Law codes and miraculous events, along with God’s sacred choice of a special people informed early American thinking as person after person envisioned a new land of milk and honey sovereignly chosen by God. Fleeing Europe’s alleged repressive regimes was one inspiration. However, looking for a place to practice what one believes was another inspiration. Early on, there were designs for a narrowly contrived theocratic experiment. But this had to be set aside quickly as a model because fallible humans are incapable of creating religious utopias, however much they believe they are able. Those days of scrounging about for success in civil society and in government procedure and also in religious liturgy, is emblematic of the ancient books read and the writings spurred onward in that day.

The average citizen of America’s past was acquainted with figures wholly unknown to the inhabitants of these vast terrains presently. Grammar schools and academies produced literary readers and Greek and Latin grammarians of repute. They read the two epics of Homer: the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. Students pored over texts written by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Herodotus, Xenophon, and Thucydides. The orators, Demosthenes and Cicero, were highly regarded. Let us not forget the marvels of Hellenistic literature—Apollonius and Polybius, Caesar’s *War Commentaries*, Catallus, Horace, Ovid, Virgil’s *Georgics*, *Bucolics* and *Aeneid*. Then there was Livy, Tacitus and Plutarch, for his representative materials of the lives of ancient leaders. Plato too was a favorite, since he brought the founders of our Republic into contact with Socrates and connected us to Aristotle.

It was not enough to read Greek and Latin tomes. Tutors and public teachers of rhetoric and logic saw in children a soil fit for sowing the “right kinds of seeds”: hence the usage of Medieval and Renaissance

authors. All had heard of Petrarch, Dante's Divine Comedy, Giovanni Boccaccio, Ben Johnson's plays, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and of Thomas More. Shakespeare, undoubtedly, best of all, was read as scripture for humanists. Things have radically changed now, and the misshapen character of American education impedes our literary progress. There still are certainly great English stylists today in our country but the mass of literature used for curricular instruction nowadays is brutal for our children's learning circles. The historic books are there and they also are not there—meaning, they are shelved and untouched. New volumes are written *en mass* but the content is far weaker and less clear in objective.

Immediately in the wake of the founding of our nation men and women were 'alive and running over with fresh ideas.' They sought texts which could be used for interpretive purposes. How can we create and perpetuate the 'model' American citizen? This question framed not only multitudes of coffee table conversations, but also our source literature. It is for this reason traditionalists continue to cull from the John Milton's Epic, *Paradise Lost*. It is our classic in English though it was written on the other side of the ocean. The United States of America are young but their contribution to the Western Literary Tradition is notable. Consider the many American authors and works which are worthy of reading again and again:

1. The Autobiography of Ben Franklin (1706-1790)
2. The Federalist Papers
3. Washington Irving (1783-1859): The Legend of Sleepy Hollow
4. James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) The Last of the Mohicans
5. Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)
6. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864): The Scarlett Letter
7. Herman Melville (1819-1891): Moby Dick
8. Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1891): Uncle Tom's Cabin
9. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
10. Mark Twain (1835-1910) The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
11. Henry James (1843-1916)
12. Robert Frost (1874-1963)
13. T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) The Waste Land
14. F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)
15. Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961)
16. William Faulkner (1897-1962)
17. John Steinbeck (1902-1968) The Grapes of Wrath

Literary traditions, as a rule, should be passed on to future generations. Apart from all these traditions citizens lose their sense of focus and identity. Inter-personality conflicts haunt all multi-cultural groups who

have trampled the memories of people upon whose shoulders they now stand. This is why Americans (post-1980) tend to confuse relativism and cultural psychology and objective investigation. The differences between the three are vast and wide. Unable to understand how to entertain our past, research its legitimacy, organize the data and use it constructively, we now amble along dressed in the post-modern apparel of Reconstructionism.¹⁷ So fact is now replaced by subjective thesis and as written in the above poem, America is a nation adrift.

The scholastic/intellectual tradition impacted American in indescribable ways. On the religious side, Martin Luther, John Calvin--author of the "*Institutes*", William Ames and Francis Turretin, author of *Eclenctic Theology*, were pivotal figures. Undergirding all the reformed beliefs were Augustine and Aquinas. Erasmus held the reputation as the premier classicist-scholar of the day, giving to subsequent generations their own critical editions of the Greek and Latin New Testaments. Francis Bacon, John Locke and David Hume were referred to as "my own trinity" by Thomas Jefferson, he was infatuated by their intellectual abilities. The philosophy of Descarte also captivated not a few too. Standing alongside these individuals, came Kant, Hegel, Kirkegaard, and later J.S. Mill and A. Schopenhauer.

All nations are to some degree or another, enterprises. As such, they foster entrepreneurial ideals and are the seed-beds in which fertile ideas grow and develop. All it takes is a few generations of mental depreciation, and ideas, once suffuse, become scarce. The old proverb '*a well nourished mind mirrors a well read life*' is applicable in every age. Each generation of young minds must be stamped with the data from genuinely morally-authorial textbooks. This means, of course, that adults ought to hold a child's best interest at heart when designing an educational curriculum. America, like any nation, must perpetuate the beauties of its own histories in order to create a love for the *Fatherland*.

Once upon a time, G. Berkeley's *Verses on the prospects of planting Arts and Learning in America* were read as a description of our nation's noble experiment, the Founding Fathers believed this to be the case. Something has changed though. Something has disappeared into oblivion. *America, the new invention*: this phrase possessed a harmony, both biblical and necessary, to the earliest pilgrims who arrived to these Western shores. Bringing with them the virtues and the character of ancient heroes, a doomed people without a protector in a faraway land, discovered the one essential truth known to all mankind: that is, a life lived well in the present harmonizes itself to the wisdom of its past. Here are Berkeley's "Verses" on the discovery of the New World composed in 1726:

¹⁷ Reconstructionism is the second phase of deconstructionism, which seeks to dismantle older historical models held by scholarly consensus to be accurate, correct, right or true. Then the attempt is made to restore (reconstruct) a newer interpretive genre apart from any dogmatic stance. This ensures its fluctuation and possibility for change as new opinions arise with each generation of scholars.

**THE Muse, disgusted at an age and clime
Barren of every glorious theme,
In distant lands now waits a better time,
Producing subjects worthy fame :**

**In happy climes, where from the genial sun
And virgin earth such scenes ensue,
The force of art by nature seems outdone,
And fancied beauties by the true :**

**In happy climes, the seat of innocence,
Where nature guides and virtue rules,
Where men shall not impose for truth and sense
The pedantry of courts and schools :
There shall be sung another golden age,
The rise of empire and of arts,
The good and great inspiring epic rage,
The wisest heads and noblest hearts.**

**Not such as Europe breeds in her decay ;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heavenly flame did animate her clay,
By future poets shall be sung.**

**Westward the course of empire takes its way ;
The four first Acts already past,
A fifth shall close the Drama with the day ;
Time's noblest offspring is the last.**

Our Debt to Charles Anthon

On the classical side of American History, literary production was no less intense. Charles Anthon (1797-1867) was the premier Hellenist and Latinist of his day. His renown was recognized worldwide and he singlehandedly put Columbia College on the educational map. Born to a German Doctor of means and to a native French mother, he was reared with many advantages. His father served as a surgeon-general in Detroit briefly. Prepared for college in the home, he won many scholastic honors while at Columbia College. Though his parents were native speakers of German and French he did not learn these tongues at their feet but only later acquired them through diligent study on his own.

The acquisition of European tongues would later allow him access into the hitherto unknown worlds of German philology and French literature. Charles Anthon was the first man to prepare and publish a critical edition of a classical author with full commentary and exegetical notes. His copiously noted volume on Horace—at over one thousand pages—brought acclaim far and wide. He spent thirty years preparing a new series of classical texts for the colleges. By the eighteen-fifties his name was held in such high esteem that his name was mentioned abroad in various philological conferences conducted by men like P. A. Bockh (1785-1867) and P. Wagner of Dresden. In fact, in the nineteenth century no classicist in America was recognized abroad as he.

On another note: the Latin phrase: *Ars longa, vita brevis* informs us that the ancients sharply divided the spheres of artistic enjoyment and mortality. The “*ars*” constitutes those aspects of ancient civilization that in many ways are indescribable. Labors in this division appear to be never-ending and never-ceasing. Man, on the contrary, is here for a short span and his life, as abbreviated as it is, could not stand next to the elongated texts of time. Most humans do not live the kind of *vita/life* which stretch from age to age and span across millennia. America’s contributions to the field of classics cannot be traced apart from the grand and laudable efforts of the Mr. Anthon.

His criticism of Greek and Latin texts preceded B.L. Gildersleeve by more than four decades, his prolific attainments forged new pathways for his day. It is not injudicious to say that in the light of modern research his volumes are dated and weak in most areas but it is also true that his facility in research, broad reading, lucid thoughts, and careful wording is still admirable to this day. His footnotes were as beautifully annotated as any modern critical apparatus. One concluding thought on Anthon is needed. He critiqued Mr. Watson’s volume on the life of England’s Richard Porson (1760-1809), the most notable classicist of his day. Anthon’s sifting of the material overflowed into the Harper’s magazine as a popular article on Porson. However, the article displays Anthon’s ability to critically judge a much older but now deceased compeer. They shared the same fields of study but arrived to differing conclusions.

Anthon as the Jay professor of Greek and Latin Languages and literatures spent his life endeavoring to introduce ancient men and women to students who might find enjoyments and happy moments within their pages. To this end Anthon lived and for this end Anthon died. The American memory is short, and so, few historians are familiar with Anthon or even know all he accomplished to instill proper virtue in the youth of his grammar school. One day old archives will be searched and from somewhere an old book bearing his nameplate will appear, but until then, Anthon shall languish away in obscurity overshadowed by the popularity of far lesser humans.¹⁸

THE HOME LIBRARY

In the colonial days, anyone who possessed a family library of forty volumes or so was doing quite well. Early American books were expensive and bookshops were rare sights indeed. Clergymen, political

¹⁸ In Paul Shorey’s (1857-1934) paper, “Fifty years of Classical Studies in America,” amazingly, he overlooks Anthon’s contributions entirely. The paper was published in *Classical Studies in America*, Volume I.

figures and other well to do persons often went out of their way to purchase books since a modicum of one's stature in society was attached to their number in the home. Home libraries have been and should be a storehouse of wisdom. Bound between two covers, human wisdom is able to pour forth in great abundance. Public libraries are the norm today. Though they are used by so few of society's citizens, under the right management, they can draw and hold the attention of young and old alike.

The great library of Alexandria, Egypt of twenty-two hundred years ago was a pacesetter. There men inscribed scrolls, corrected {mis}spellings, added variants to their margins, study older scholia and issued authoritative versions for public use. Looking back, their labors seem juvenile, especially in light of our Library of Congress--the largest storehouse of books in the world. It contains one hundred and ten million items. Even the new Library of Alexandria, Egypt is only a faint shadow-in prestige-of what is ancient forebear once was. Now we face the budget crunches, lack of community support and the overall illiteracy of a new generation and stand and wonder at how such vast amounts of wisdom can be bypassed daily as men and women traverse the sidewalks going from here to there.

Parts of American culture regard the attention given to reading as a first place issue. Grammar school, College, Seminary and University is fine, but the "learning" process should never cease. New books are published daily, some should be read, others, should be discarded. However, the establishment of a library in one's home allocates knowledge in a transmittable form: Anyone who enjoys reading can pull up a chair and meet with a book, lounge around on the floor and converse with ancient and /or contemporary figures or simply train the mind to behave itself for a few moments as one sows new seeds of value.

It was Thomas Jefferson who saw his library burn to the ground on at least three occasions. Furthermore, it was Jefferson also who provided the basic resources for the early stages of the Library of Congress. Immediately after he sold his books to the Congress he began the purchase of more volumes. He was a true bibliophile. Then upon the burning of the Library of Congress by the British, again, it was Thomas Jefferson who provided the nucleus of material for the rebuilt library once more. In his own words, Jefferson once said of his library, "*the best chosen collection of its size probably in America, and containing a great mass of what is most rare and valuable, and especially of what relates to America.*"

Thomas Jefferson cannot be said to have cared much about which edition he purchased. He merely wanted a well hand-sewn book with nice print, which he could read at his leisure or for reference. Since he was capable of reading Greek and Latin, he read of Greece and Rome in their original languages. Moreover his Spanish, French and Italian was such that he could carry on conversation easily. On his way to Europe once, he even read the Spanish Text of *Don Quixote*. It cannot be said that the average American will develop a voracious appetite for knowledge of this magnitude, but, at any rate, it would not hurt a homeowner to build a library of books.

The next question then arises, “what books should one read to learn more about America?” I would think that the clearest path into American historical truth would be through the actual documents written by older generations of Americans. By now, the writings of many pilgrim colonists are accessible. Writing projects from colonial clergymen to outstanding poets have made their way onto the public scene. Perhaps the best pathway to better understanding the political culture surrounding the War for Independence and the writing of the American Constitution would be the published papers of the Founders.

- A. The papers of George Washington (1732-1799) and The Papers of James Madison (1751-1836) are both available through the University of Virginia, online.
- B. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) are published by the University of Princeton.
- C. The Papers of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) are published by Yale University.
- D. The Papers of John Adams (1735-1826) are published by Harvard University.

The above series of books may cost as high as \$250.00 each. Each of the above series contains multiple volume sets. Some may run to seventy or more volumes. They are not in the budgets of the average American, but the publishers knew this when they began. The best suggestion is to peruse the online digital editions. At times it may cost a small fee but you are then able to engage the original documents along with editorial notes. This is the best way. For far too long, Americans have had to depend on agenda-driven revisionists to dictate our historical data to us. Now it is actually possible to see for ourselves what was written.

Through the publishing of various ‘critical editions’ it is obvious to all scholars that some of the romantic opinions embraced in academia were wrongly based on anything but true facts. The republication of these early documents now makes it possible to ratify, confirm and/or disavow

all that was spurious. In some cases, apologies are needed. In others, a simple admission of conspiracy to withhold the truth must be acknowledged. English has not changed much in these two hundred years, and with a little “context” and perspicuity one can still romanticize again over the magnificence America. Yet this love affair must be carried on for all the right reasons. America truly is the greatest nation in the world!

Nebraska

Darrell Sutton