



HELLENIC LINK–MIDWEST Newsletter

A CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC LINK WITH GREECE

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Upcoming Events

Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece

On Sunday February 26, at 3:PM, Hellenic Link–Midwest presents Professor Gonda Van Steen, in a lecture titled “*Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece*”. The event will be held at the Four Points Sheraton hotel, 10249 West Irving Park Road at Schiller Park.

In *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece*, Professor Van Steen studies the treatment of Aristophanes’ comedies in Greece of the past two centuries. Of course, the playwright is notorious for his bold political and sexual humor, which is why it took so much longer for his work (a total of eleven comedies) to be rediscovered in modern Greece. While classical tragedy served the purposes of post-revolutionary nation-building, Aristophanes’ comedies seemed to detract from that process. For decades, his plays were reduced to reading plays only; the first productions were not staged until 1868. After that, however, and aided by the Demoticist movement, Aristophanes’ comedies were rapidly rediscovered. By the early twentieth century his bold “women’s plays” were all the rage.

By the 1930s, Karolos Koun was rediscovering Aristophanes’ comedies with a small group of Athens College students. Among them was a later pioneer in Aristophanic productions, who staged his plays with the Greek National Theater from the mid-1950s on: Alexis Solomos. Nobody foresaw the nation-wide scandal, though, that Koun’s 1959 production of Aristophanes’ *Birds* would cause. Setbacks and acts of censorship continued to affect the Greek revival of Aristophanes until the mid-1970s. Since then, however, “everything goes” and many theater companies have used (and at times abused) Aristophanes to launch themselves onto the active but very competitive Athenian theater scene.

Gonda Van Steen earned a B.A. degree in Classics in her native Belgium and a Ph.D. degree in Classics and Hellenic Studies from Princeton University. As an Associate Professor in Classics and Modern Greek at the University of Arizona, she teaches courses in ancient and Modern Greek language and literature. Her first book, *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece*, was published by Princeton University Press in 2000 and was awarded the John D. Criticos Prize from the London Hellenic Society. She has also published articles on ancient Greek and late antiquity literature, on the reception of Greek tragedy, on Greek coinage, and on postwar Greek feminism. She is currently researching a book on theater and censorship under the Greek military dictatorship of

1967-74.

Celebration of Greek Independence Day

In celebration of the Greek Independence Day, Hellenic Link–Midwest, will present on Sunday, March 19, 2006, the Theater Nefeli at 3:00 PM at the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint John in Des Plaines, Illinois.

March 25th is the time when we pause every year and reminisce the trials and tribulations of our forefathers and the undaunted spirit that has characterized the Greek Spirit throughout the ages. The first part of the program is dedicated to the *Free Besieged* of Dionyssios Solomos. The second part, *Return to Ithaca*, written by Michael Vitopoulos, is dedicated to the Spirit of the Hellenic Diaspora, to the struggles and tribulations of the Greek man and woman who set out to seek his/her Ithaca in the lands of opportunity. It is a tribute to all those proud immigrants that worked hard to survive in difficult times and to build a better tomorrow for their children, and to maintain and pass on their Hellenic heritage. *Return to Ithaca* is a moving spectacle of drama and comedy combined with song and dance. It is a must for all ages!! The production is in Greek with English introductions.

The Theater Nefeli of the Greek Community of Toronto has won many distinctions, including: the coveted Karolos Koun Award in the 1993 Pan Hellenic Theater Competition in Athens, Greece; the first prize in the Chin International Folklore Competition for 1996; and in 1998 the first prize of the University of Crete in a theatrical competition involving the Hellenic theaters of the U.S.A, Australia, Ukraine, Germany, and Canada. Nefeli has won the love and admiration of those in our Community who attended their performances in March 1997, 1999, 2001, and 2003. Besides performing at home in Toronto, they have performed in Montreal, Athens, Thessaloniki, Kalamata, Boston, and Washington DC. The group's objectives are to promote Greek Performing Arts to mainstream audiences by producing bilingual productions, to share their experiences with people interested in Greek Theater, and to develop new scripts pertinent to the Greek Canadian experience.

Nancy Athanassopoulos-Mylonas was born in Cairo, Egypt, and migrated with her family to Sydney, Australia. A trained classical dancer, she opened her own School of Movement in 1966 where she taught classical dance, modern dance, and mime. In 1975, she founded the School of Greek Folklore Ltd. where she taught Greek traditional and modern dances, dance theater and modern dance. Nancy has traveled throughout Australia teaching, directing, and producing many cultural presentations for the various Greek Communities. She has

taught Folk dancing and Dance Theater at various public schools across Australia and has lectured to multicultural organizations and institutions on Greek culture. As an actress, Nancy has played major roles on stage and mainstream Australian Television. She is the recipient of numerous awards while a resident of Australia, including the Order Of The Medal Of Australia in recognition of 25 years of service in the arts through Greek Folklore. Since 1990 Nancy is the director and choreographer of the Greek Community Theater Nefeli.

In Brief

Opposition to Turkey's EU accession grows

According to the latest Eurobarometer survey, the Greek public's opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union has risen to 79%, from 70% previously. Opposition has also grown across the EU to 55% from 52%. Greece ranks third in its opposition to Turkey's EU accession, after Austria and the Cyprus Republic, which hold the first and second place, respectively. In non EU-member countries the highest percentages in favor of Turkey's accession to the Union are in Turkey (75%), Romania (63%) and Croatia (62%). Turkish Cypriots are also in favor, with 86%.

Greek best-seller slapped with 'insulting Turkishness' charge,

The latest legal action by a Turkish prosecutor against a writer for "insulting Turkishness" is aimed at Mara Meimaridi's best-selling novel *Witches of Smyrna*. (*Oi Magisses tis Smyrnis*), currently in its 25th Turkish-language edition. According to the mass daily "Milliyet", which quoted the independent Turkish news agency Anka, the prosecutor's office in Izmir filed criminal charges against the book based on Article 301 of Turkey's criminal code. Kenan Kocat'rk, the head of the publishing house "Literat'r", which released the best-selling novel in Turkish, was quoted as saying, "We do not wish to influence the course of a lawsuit that was legally filed, however, this novel is a type of fiction that relies on 'magical realism', similar to the writings of (Gabriel Garcia) Marquez.

"We published this book without censorship, and we do not believe that it insults 'Turkishness'; nor does the writer convey this... Some of the characters (in the novel) are Turks, who are singled-out and praised," Kocat'rk said.

He added that the Turkish edition of the novel has sold roughly 50,000 copies in Turkey, while a television series is pending. A TV series of *Witches of Smyrna* is currently airing every week in Greece.

According to reports, the excerpts deemed as insulting by the Izmir prosecutor's office include subjective references about the social mores of the peoples of Smyrna in late 19th and early 20th century. Unflattering remarks uttered by the book's characters about late Ottoman-era soldiers' dental hygiene and

predominately Turkophone districts of Smyrna, among others, apparently drew the ire of Izmir's prosecutors.

Per capita GNP of Greece increases to 82 per cent in 2004

According to the statistics service Eurostat, the per capita Gross National Product (GNP) of Greece increased from 81 per cent of the EU average in 2003 to 82 per cent in 2004. In the "EU-25," the highest per capita GNP, expressed in units of purchasing power, is in Luxembourg with 227 per cent of the EU average. Luxembourg is followed by Ireland with 138 per cent, and The Netherlands with 125 per cent. The lowest positions are held by Lithuania with 48 per cent and Latvia with 43 per cent. In Turkey, the per capita GNP is 29 per cent of the EU average.

From Our History

Plato's The Apology of Socrates

The "Apology of Socrates" is a reconstruction of the defense speeches in Socrates' trial in 399 B.C. on charges of "corrupting the youth" and "believing in gods which the State does not recognize". The word "Apology" in this context does not mean "a statement of regret requesting pardon", but "a formal statement of justification or defense".

Well, Athenians, this and the like of this is nearly all the defence which I have to offer. Yet a word more. Perhaps there may be someone who is offended at me, when he calls to mind how he himself, on a similar or even a less serious occasion, had recourse to prayers and supplications with many tears, and how he produced his children in court, which was a moving spectacle, together with a posse of his relations and friends; whereas I, who am probably in danger of my life, will do none of these things. Perhaps this may come into his mind and he may be set against me, and vote in anger because he is displeased at this. Now if there be such a person among you, which I am far from affirming, I may fairly reply to him: My friend, I am a man, and like other men, a creature of flesh and blood, and not of wood or stone, as Homer says; and I have a family, yes, and sons, O Athenians, three in number, one of whom is growing up, and the two others are still young; and yet I will not bring any of them hither in order to petition you for an acquittal. And why not? Not from any self-will or disregard of you. Whether I am or am not afraid of death is another question, of which I will not now speak. But my reason simply is that I feel such conduct to be discreditable to myself, and you, and the whole State. One who has reached my years, and who has a name for wisdom, whether deserved or not, ought not to debase himself. At any rate, the world has decided that Socrates is in some way superior to other men. And if those among you who are said to be superior in wisdom and courage, and any other virtue, demean themselves in this way, how shameful is their conduct! I have seen men of reputation, when they have been condemned,

behaving in the strangest manner: they seemed to fancy that they were going to suffer something dreadful if they died, and that they could be immortal if you only allowed them to live; and I think that they were a dishonor to the State, and that any stranger coming in would say of them that the most eminent men of Athens, to whom the Athenians themselves give honor and command, are no better than women. And I say that these things ought not to be done by those of us who are of reputation; and if they are done, you ought not to permit them; you ought rather to show that you are more inclined to condemn, not the man who is quiet, but the man who gets up a doleful scene, and makes the city ridiculous.

But, setting aside the question of dishonor, there seems to be something wrong in petitioning a judge, and thus procuring an acquittal instead of informing and convincing him. For his duty is, not to make a present of justice, but to give judgment; and he has sworn that he will judge according to the laws, and not according to his own good pleasure; and neither he nor we should get into the habit of perjuring ourselves—there can be no piety in that. Do not then require me to do what I consider dishonorable and impious and wrong, especially now, when I am being tried for impiety on the indictment of Meletus. For if, O men of Athens, by force of persuasion and entreaty, I could overpower your oaths, then I should be teaching you to believe that there are no gods, and convict myself, in my own defence, of not believing in them. But that is not the case; for I do believe that there are gods, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them. And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.

There are many reasons why I am not grieved, O men of Athens, at the vote of condemnation. I expected this, and am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal; for I had thought that the majority against me would have been far larger; but now, had thirty votes gone over to the other side, I should have been acquitted. And I may say that I have escaped Meletus. And I may say more; for without the assistance of Anytus and Lycon, he would not have had a fifth part of the vote, as the law requires, in which case he would have incurred a fine of a thousand drachmae, as is evident.

And so he proposes death as the penalty. And what shall I propose on my part, O men of Athens? Clearly that which is my due. And what is that which I ought to pay or to receive? What shall be done to the man who has never had the wit to be idle during his whole life; but has been careless of what the many care about—wealth, and family interests, and military offices, and speaking in the assembly, and magistracies, and plots, and parties. Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to follow in this way and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but where I could do the greatest good privately to everyone of you, thither I went, and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom before he looks to his

private interests, and look to the State before he looks to the interests of the State; and that this should be the order which he observes in all his actions. What shall be done to such a one? Doubtless some good thing, O men of Athens, if he has his reward; and the good should be of a kind suitable to him. What would be a reward suitable to a poor man who is your benefactor, who desires leisure that he may instruct you? There can be no more fitting reward than maintenance in the Prytaneum, O men of Athens, a reward which he deserves far more than the citizen who has won the prize at Olympia in the horse or chariot race, whether the chariots were drawn by two horses or by many. For I am in want, and he has enough; and he only gives you the appearance of happiness, and I give you the reality. And if I am to estimate the penalty justly, I say that maintenance in the Prytaneum is the just return.

Perhaps you may think that I am braving you in saying this, as in what I said before about the tears and prayers. But that is not the case. I speak rather because I am convinced that I never intentionally wronged anyone, although I cannot convince you of that—for we have had a short conversation only; but if there were a law at Athens, such as there is in other cities that a capital cause should not be decided in one day, then I believe that I should have convinced you; but now the time is too short. I cannot in a moment refute great slanders; and, as I am convinced that I never wronged another, I will assuredly not wrong myself. I will not say of myself that I deserve any evil, or propose any penalty. Why should I? Because I am afraid of the penalty of death which Meletus proposes? When I do not know whether death is a good or an evil, why should I propose a penalty which would certainly be an evil? Shall I say imprisonment? And why should I live in prison, and be the slave of the magistrates of the year—of the Eleven? Or shall the penalty be a fine, and imprisonment until the fine is paid? There is the same objection. I should have to lie in prison, for money I have none, and I cannot pay. And if I say exile (and this may possibly be the penalty which you will affix), I must indeed be blinded by the love of life if I were to consider that when you, who are my own citizens, cannot endure my discourses and words, and have found them so grievous and odious that you would fain have done with them, others are likely to endure me. No, indeed, men of Athens, that is not very likely. And what a life should I lead, at my age, wandering from city to city, living in ever-changing exile, and always being driven out! For I am quite sure that into whatever place I go, as here so also there, the young men will come to me; and if I drive them away, their elders will drive me out at their desire: and if I let them come, their fathers and friends will drive me out for their sakes. Someone will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you? Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that this would be a disobedience to a divine command, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am

serious; and if I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living—that you are still less likely to believe. And yet what I say is true, although a thing of which it is hard for me to persuade you. Moreover, I am not accustomed to think that I deserve any punishment. Had I money I might have proposed to give you what I had and have been none the worse. But you see that I have none,

and can only ask you to proportion the fine to my means. However, I think that I could afford a mina, and therefore I propose that penalty; Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, my friends here, bid me say thirty minae, and they will be the sureties. Well then, say thirty minae, let that be the penalty; for that they will be ample security to you.

(to be continued)

From The Riches Of Our Cultural Heritage

Poetry by D. I. Antoniou

ΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΗ ΘΥΜΗΘΗΚΕΣ ΑΠΟΨΕ

Την αρχή θυμήθηκες απόψε
ένα βράδυ βροχερό που αποφάσισες
πείρα να κάνεις τη νοσταλγία των μακρινών τόπων

που μας άφησαν άχρηστους,
γιά τη ζωή.

Είπαμε να μας λυπηθείς θεέ,
σπόρε φανταχτερής άνθισης,
στην άγονη γη.
Συντριμμένοι ως τη σιωπηλή παράκληση,
αφανισμένοι ως την απόγνωση,
τη μοίρα ευχηθήκαμε του απλού,
του ανίδεου την έκπληξη.
Απ' ό,τι ξέρομε ας μας άδειαζες,
δώσε μας—μέσα μας κλαίγαμε—
την κούραση
ύστερα από τον τίμιο αγώνα.

Συγκατάβαση
η απόφαση να πάρουμε το δρόμο που πήραμε
ως το τέλος από εκεί που πέσαμε
γιά να σηκωθούμε.
Μη μας δίνεις πραχτικά όνειρα,
μην ξυπνάς κληρονομικούς μαγνήτες
πλώρες που χάνονται και βρίσκονται στο πέλαγο.
Στις ανώνυμες προσπάθειες, λύτρωσέ μας
ν' ανεβούμε από εκεί που πέσαμε
νικώντας τη νίκη
σώμα με σώμα.

TONIGHT YOU REMEMBERED THE BEGINNING

Tonight you remembered the beginning,
that rainy evening when you decided
to turn into experience the nostalgia for distant lands
that left us useless
for life.

We asked you to pity us Lord,
seed of a gaudy flowering
on the sterile earth.
Crushed to silent supplication,
ravaged to desperation,
we longed for the destiny of simple men,
the astonishment of the ignorant.
Empty us of all we know,
give us — we wept within ourselves —
weariness
after the honest struggle.

Condescension;
the decision to take the road we took
to the end; to rise
from where we fell.
Do not give us practical dreams,
do not awaken the magnets of inheritance:
prows lost and found at sea.
In our anonymous endeavors, deliver us;
that we may rise from where we fell
victorious over victory
body to body.