Is there something about classicists that inclines them toward the Right? Pétain appointed as his education minister the prolific classical historian Jérôme Carcopino, whose Daily Life in Ancient Rome is still available; and, closer to home, in the United Kingdom, there was Enoch Powell, who studied classics at Cambridge before becoming a professor of Greek at Sydney University when he was twenty-five (about the same age as Nietzsche when he became a professor in Basle) and then an MP for Wolverhampton SW, where he delivered his 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech. As for Germany, here classical philology became particularly radicalized in the 1920s and 1930s of the previous century (as the work of Frank H. W. Edler on Heidegger and Baeumler has shown). After World War I, such classicists as Werner Jaeger, Karl Reinhardt, Paul Friedlaender, and Wolfgang Schadewaldt—all pupils of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who had taken on Nietzsche over The Birth of Tragedy—showed a deep fascination with “the fearful-beautiful Gorgon-head of the classical” (KGW II/1, 251), with a distinct emphasis on the “fearful” as it is explored by Nietzsche in “Homer’s Contest” (1872). As Walter Burkert puts it, “[i]n the first third of the twentieth century, the history of ideas took a special turn in Germany[…] [t]he rational world of the nineteenth century seemed broken, the elemental depths appeared” (cited 105).

Out of Arcadia, a selection of papers delivered at the conference “The Gods of Greece and Their Prophets: Liberal and Illiberal Moments in German Classical Scholarship since Burckhardt and Nietzsche” held at Princeton University in 1999, tackles the interface between the academy and the polis head-on, emblazoning its cover with the famously fascistoïd poster by Franz Würbel for the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. In “Jacob Burckhardt, Greek Culture, and Modernity,” Egon Flaig uncovers the antidemocratic, militaristic, and eugenistic elements in Burckhardt’s discourse. Examining the implications of Burckhardt’s aestheticization of war, Flaig notes that “in purely aesthetic terms, there is no difference between [the last heroic stand of the German SS units on the Eastern Front in winter 1944–45 against the superior forces of the Red Army] and [the self-sacrifice] of the three hundred Spartans at Thermopylae” (35). Following Flaig’s paper, Lionel Gossman defends Burckhardt in a “comment,” as if no critical remark on the great Swiss Altliberaler should go unchallenged. Gossman’s own fine contribution, “Per me si va nella città dolente” (“Through me the road to the city of desolation”—Dante, Inferno, Canto 3, line 1): Burckhardt and the Polis,” discusses the image of the state—a bleak, dark, and violent one—presented in Burckhardt’s Cultural History of Greece (posthumously published in 1898–1902), which represents, Gossman concludes, “a powerful restatement, in the age of Blood and Iron, of a classic liberal, anti-Machiavellian view of the state found in Benjamin Constant and, before him, in Montesquieu” (59). But the motives behind such a view were “certainly not pro-democratic” (59).

Martin Ruehl’s contribution, “Politeia 1871: Nietzsche contra Wagner on the Greek State” (a shortened version has since been published in Paul Bishop, ed., Nietzsche and Antiquity: His Reaction and Response to the Classical Tradition [2004]), takes as its starting point the vignettes on the front covers of The Birth of Tragedy and the first volume of Wagner’s My Life. Ruehl carefully reads “The Greek State,” written in 1871, in terms of Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for and then disengagement from Wagner: “When he invoked Schiller’s credo of universal fraternity in The Birth of Tragedy, [Nietzsche] sent out a most Wagnerian message. With ’The Greek State,’ he took it back,” Ruehl observes (86). In “On the Genealogy of the Genealogical Method: Overbeck, Nietzsche, and the Search for Origins,” Andreas Urs Sommer focuses on the contribution to Nietzsche’s thinking of
Franz Overbeck, the theologian and scholar frequently relegated to the position of “Nietzsche’s friend” but considered, with good reason, a thinker in his own right. Sommer examines some of the riches of Overbeck’s unpublished Church Lexikon, tracing his more gentle disillusionment with Christianity in contrast with Nietzsche’s more savage assault. Egon Flaig returns to the attack a second time in “Towards ‘Rassenhygiene’: Wilamowitz and the German New Right,” where, once again, he pulls no punches. Unlike Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg in his 1994 reprint of Wilamowitz’s “State and Society of the Greeks” (1923), who reads it as opposing racism and promulgating the dependence of Greek culture on oriental influences (almost in the spirit of Martin Bernal’s Black Athena), Flaig sees in Wilamowitz’s The Faith of the Hellenes a racist, anti-Judaic text, designed to support the völkisch movement of the 1930s. This time, no responding comment is offered; Burchhardt is worth defending, it seems, but not Wilamowitz.

In “From Liberalism to Neoromanticism: Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein, and the Religious Turn in fin-de-siècle German Classical Studies,” Suzanne Marchand discusses the impact on classics of “the second Oriental renaissance” of 1880–1920, as archaeology uncovered texts that swung the focus onto oriental sources, particularly ancient Iranian religion. Finally, in “Philologia perennis? Classical Scholarship and Functional Differentiation,” Ingo Gildenhard surveys texts by Hermann Usener, Wilamowitz, and Jaeger, and the changing conception of classics in the context of societal transformation, an issue discussed in Nietzsche’s inaugural lecture “On the Personality of Homer” (1869).

What emerges from these papers as a whole is, as so often, the choice of two Nietzsches: either a Nietzsche whose thought (as Sommer suggests) underwent a radical caesura, with the abandonment in the mid-1870s of the notion of origins—the darker, the better—of The Birth of Tragedy for a genealogical method interested not in Ursprung but, rather, in Herkunft (97); or a Nietzsche whose oeuvre displays a radical continuity from The Birth of Tragedy, through to Zarathustra, and beyond to The Antichrist. Can a philosophia perennis be uncovered in his writings?

Even though this collection of papers was given something of a rough ride by Hugh Lloyd-Jones in the Bryn Mawr Classical Review (2004.02.45), those who are interested in Nietzsche—his philosophical background, his subsequent reception—will want to read this fascinating and highly recommended book and then go on, if they do not already know it, to Lionel Gossman’s Basel in the Age of Burchhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas (2000). But why does there seem to be a connection between classicists and the political Right? Perhaps it is something to do with all the time spent studying cultures where women were oppressed, slavery was regarded as normal, and society was rigidly hierarchical. After all, Burchhardt’s view of Greece is of a culture centered on “competition” and “excellence”; had he been alive today, he might have become the perfect writer of mission statements for institutions of higher education. But then again, perhaps not: Burchhardt admired St. Severin of Pez, “a man who held out amid the collapse of everything.”

Glasgow


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The offspring of Lou Andreas-Salomé’s brief but close companionship with the philosopher, Nietzsche aims to bring to fruition a penetrating exposition of Nietzsche’s philosophy by the