

Valedictory Lecture delivered in the Faculty of Law, Monday 27 September 2021
 For a video of the lecture and powerpoint see <https://youtu.be/DXQeM-fR9RY>
 or

<https://www.classics.cam.ac.uk/news/valdictory-lecture-regius-professor-greek>

I think I should probably go now

Richard Hunter

Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen: I want first to thank of all you attending this lecture, whether here in person or remotely. I am very grateful for your kindness. I want, however, particularly to thank those of you here in person, both in this room and next door. Attending an event such as this, as your fetching facewear reveals all too clearly, is no longer just a decision about how strong is the call of duty and how high the level of tedium one can tolerate, but now involves also much more personal decisions in the face of very real uncertainties, which are not going away any time soon. Your presence here is very much appreciated.

Staying the full distance to what we are told is the statutory retirement age can, now more than ever, feel a bit like a lingering (rather, I hope, than malingering) death: is he really *still* here? The long drawn-out death rattle of retirement is like the $\psi\upsilon\chi\omicron\sigma\sigma\alpha\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ of later Christian tradition, that painful ‘struggle of the soul’ to break free from the fleshly allurements of the Sidgwick Avenue breeze blocks in which it has been imprisoned for so long. I take little comfort (and you should take less) from the fact that the gods sent a pandemic to warn of (or perhaps against) my coming retirement, but – as future historians will acknowledge - the chronology will here brook no argument or doubt.

I first started to think about, or rather imagine, this lecture during the first covid lockdown in the spring and summer of that *annus horribilis* 2020, a number we more normally associate with perfect vision. What else, after all, was there to do back then? In what now seems both unimaginably long ago and as if it were yesterday, our tragico-comical Prime Minister, wearing his most ‘importance of being earnest’ expression, and/or the very long-suffering but improbably named Prof Whitty, turned up every day on the computer to tell you how many people had died (a number always, of course, well within the parameters of government projections). At the same time - next slide please - my wife was busy translating a book about assisted dying, and I was pottering with a commentary on Greek funerary poetry. No wonder a sense of retirement as a one way trip to Zurich loomed before my eyes. The processes of death and retirement, and of dealing with them, have of course been very much studied (the Faculty of Classics itself, always ahead of the R-number (R for retirement, presumably), some years ago had an X-, or was that Exit-Caucus, paper on Death – so irreproachably interdisciplinary it glowed in the dark, unlike the dead it claimed to study. It is now, I gather, to be followed by a course on ‘The Afterlife’ – well, optimism is something we all need at the moment). One of the most famous such models of modern times is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s model of five stages of grief through which the terminally retiring pass: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Those of you who have not yet reached the retiring age may find this

slide easier to read. I know, I know, it is said that the Kübler-Ross model is outdated and no longer (if it ever was) fit for purpose; well, much the same, Vice-Chancellor, could be said for compulsory retirement at 67 – it seemed a good idea at the time ... I guess that a Valedictory Lecture, all passion now spent, falls somewhere between ‘depression’ and ‘acceptance’. So here is another smiley to depict that state. It is perhaps Catullus’ attempt at distraction and self-consolation which best catches the mood-swings and all too frequent lows of the last year: *otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est ... otium et reges prius et beatas / perdidit urbes*, ‘retirement, Catullus – that’s your problem; retirement has caught up with Regiuses before you ...’.

Back then in 2020 it was hard not, with Herodotus’ Solon, to ‘look to the end’, and so one text which came to occupy my broodings more and more was Euripides’ *Alcestis*, the earliest of his plays which we possess (438 BC), the dramatization of the ψυχορραγία of the wife who offered to die in place of her husband Admetus and of how she was saved from death by the sudden intervention of Heracles. The play is full of imagery and language which we also find in the inscribed epitaphs with which I was then much occupied. All of the characters of the play, sympathetic and unsympathetic alike, go out of their way to say ‘nice things’ about Alcestis, almost as if she were retiring; such praise linguistically relegates Alcestis to the already dead. As for Admetus, the play is filled with his lamentations and regret; he is both saved by his wife’s sacrifice and left utterly bereft.

παύσω δὲ κώμους συμποτῶν θ’ ὀμιλίας
στεφάνους τε μουσάν θ’ ἢ κατεῖχ’ ἐμοὺς δόμους.
οὐ γὰρ ποτ’ οὔτ’ ἂν βαρβίτου θίγοιμ’ ἔτι
οὔτ’ ἂν φρέν’ ἐξάροαμι πρὸς Λίβυν λακεῖν
αὐλόν· σὺ γὰρ μου τέρψιν ἐξείλου βίου.

I shall put an end to revels and the company of banqueters and to the garlands and music which once filled my halls. I shall never touch the lyre, or lift my heart in song to the Libyan pipe. For you have taken all the delight from my life.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 343-7

The irony of Admetus’ claim to Alcestis, ‘you have taken all the delight from my life (347), i.e. he will not go to parties or play music anymore, is however apparently lost on him. It is, as Laetitia Parker put it with reference to another of his potentially unfortunate laments, ‘all too easy in the circumstances for him to say the wrong thing’ (Parker 2007, note on vv. 334-5), but one of the questions posed most sharply by epitaphic language, as also – as I know only too well – by the language of valediction, is, ‘what would be the *right* thing to say’?

σὺ γὰρ μου τέρψιν ἐξείλου βίου.
σοφῆ δὲ χειρὶ τεκτόνων δέμας τὸ σὸν
εἰκασθὲν ἐν λέκτροισιν ἐκταθήσεται,
ὧ̅ προσπεσοῦμαι καὶ περιπτύσσων χέρας
ὄνομα καλῶν σὸν τὴν φίλην ἐν ἀγκάλαις
δόξω γυναῖκα καίπερ οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν·
ψυχρὰν μὲν, οἶμαι, τέρψιν, ἀλλ’ ὅμως βάρως
ψυχῆς ἀπαντλοίην ἄν. ἐν δ’ ὀνειράσιν
φοιτῶσά μ’ εὐφραίνεις ἄν· ἠδὲ γὰρ φίλους

κάν νυκτὶ λεύσσειν, ὄντιν' ἄν παρῆ χρόνον.

For you have taken all the delight from my life. An image of you shaped by the hand of skilled craftsmen shall be laid out in my bed. I shall fall upon it, and as I embrace it and call your name I shall imagine, though I have her not, that I hold my dear wife in my arms, a cold pleasure, to be sure, but thus I shall lighten my soul's heaviness. And perhaps you will cheer me by visiting me in dreams. For even in sleep it is sweet to see loved ones for however long we are permitted.

Euripides, *Alcestis* 347-56

Admetus' promise to his dying wife that he will take an image of her to his bed after her death (*Alc.* 348-54), but no other living woman, is a passage with which the retiring and the retired might feel a special affinity. Are we too an absent presence, mere figments of your πόθος, an 'empty fancy' hovering, like the phantom of Helen, over Desk 23 (West side) to offer the 'cold pleasure' of memory as we return to haunt your dreams? Unlike *Alcestis*, however, I can be completely confident that no replacement will be stretched out as a lifeless object of desire in my bed or even my Chair, while these are still warm, or at least as warm as 1.14 gets for most of the year. I know that I am not alone in regretting this strange non-period of celibate mourning which, for reasons at which I can only guess, the silent powers of darkness, paradoxically playing Admetus-roles almost to perfection, have imposed upon the subject we are here to celebrate; it is, I sadly suspect, too late now even for Heracles to drop by. As Aeschylus' chorus of retired old men once sort-of said about the death of another self-sacrificing female, let's hope it all turns out OK in the end.

αἴλινον αἴλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

Say 'woe, woe!', but may the good prevail!

Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 121

This passage of the *Alcestis* opens more than one window, and in this lecture I want simply to point to some of those familiar riches through texts which have always been important to me. The skilfully made representation of the beloved dead may, for example, serve as an image, both solid and unyielding, but also strangely evanescent, of the classical antiquity with which we engage every day and night, fashioned from our memories, our imaginings and our longings, but always falling short, a poor substitute for the real thing, as unanswering as the written words of a classical text:

δεινὸν γάρ που, ὦ Φαίδρε, τοῦτ' ἔχει γραφή, καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὅμοιον
ζωγραφία. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐκείνης ἔκγονα ἔστηκε μὲν ὡς ζῶντα, ἐὰν δ'
ἀνέρη τι, σεμνῶς πάνυ σιγᾶ. ταῦτὸν δὲ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἄν ὡς τι
φρονούντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρη τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος
μαθεῖν, ἔν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταῦτὸν ἀεὶ.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 275d

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is in truth like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a very solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they understood something, but if you question

them, wishing to know about what they say, they always say the one same thing.

In fact however, it is in my experience not true that Greek and Latin texts ‘always say the one same thing’, though sometimes when supervising on Lysias 1 or the *Medea* for the third time in an afternoon it can seem like that; every serious conversation with these texts is different, if, that is, you are prepared to listen hard to them and do not assume that what they *really* want to talk about are the things which happen to be important to you and to contemporary society.

These verses about Admetus’ statue are unsurprisingly one of the better known and most discussed passages of the play, but not necessarily for the right reasons. The authors of one recentish book say ‘It does not take much perspicacity to doubt seriously that any woman, never mind one about to die, would be flattered, consoled, reassured, or in any way pleased to know that her husband would so readily replace her with an inanimate piece of stone’. Serious philologists will immediately see the weakness in this claim: how do they know that Admetus has a *stone* image in mind – wood might make all the difference? [[That was a joke about philology ...]] This passage of Admetus’ speech, habitually labelled ‘bizarre’, ‘extravagant’, ‘disconcerting’, ‘macabre’, ‘comic’, ‘absurd’, ‘self-indulgent’, ‘grotesque’ etc etc by modern critics, is in fact a very interesting challenge to our confidence as to how well we think we understand ancient culture, and particularly literate culture. Stories of what we have learned to call *agalmatophilia*, the love of statues, are common enough in antiquity; I now incidentally prefer ‘statuephilia’, since this golden Kate Moss as Siren from the BM exhibition of that name appeared on the cover of a Festschrift very movingly presented to me earlier this year. Be that as it may, what Admetus has in mind is in fact less *agalmatophilia* than a kind of *nekrophilia* (or would be, if either was, which they are not, attested Greek words), but our sources for these stories usually precisely point to their specialness, their oddity, their quality of θαῦμα we might say – this, after all, is why they are cited, usually in compendious and anecdotal writers – but Euripides gives us, apparently, no guidance as to how we are to judge Admetus’ words, except for our own sense of him as a character, and one thing that can be said about modern discussion of the *Alcestis* is that there is absolutely no unanimity about this play, perhaps less than for any other surviving drama.

If Euripides forces us back on to our own sense of ancient behaviour, we are also abandoned by the ancient critical tradition. There are no ancient or Byzantine scholia, that is marginal notes, preserved on these verses. We must not, of course, make too much of this. All surviving scholia in manuscripts are the result of multiple processes of selection and reduction, and the relatively sparse surviving scholia on the *Alcestis* are, for the most part, of an explanatory or glossing kind. And yet, and yet ... There are no scholia of *any* kind on *Alcestis* 348-356, and I wonder just how loudly this silence speaks. Γραμματικοί, often characterised by stern, if not Christian, morals, may well have felt that Admetus’ consolatory statue in the bed, to say nothing of his erotic dreams, required no explanation (rather the reverse perhaps) and certainly no attention being called to them, and so averted their eyes (at least in public). Had Euripides had his own Aristarchus in second-century Alexandria, the verses might well have been deleted – I could write the relevant scholium myself: ‘The verses are athetised because Admetus sleeping with a statue is laughable and the style banal; but others say the poet marvelously captures the anguish of the lover etc etc ...’. Certainly, if the verses had not been transmitted, we would have no way of knowing

that something was missing. That the passage was, furthermore, not apparently picked by later anthological traditions – to which I shall also return – may have several explanations. These traditions on the whole avoid strongly first-person and scenically contextualized passages in favour of the generalizing and the morally didactic; our passage fails on both counts – it might in fact have been just too weird to make it into anthologies.

If, however, it is true – and I stress that this is a big ‘if’ – that ancient readers (at least) were less interested in and/or surprised by the detail of these verses than we are, then (to repeat) we should be reminded (and cannot be reminded too often) how partial and fragile is our understanding of Greek literary culture over the *longue durée* of antiquity. This of course (and perhaps rightly) has never stopped modern critics of Greek literature who all too rarely heed the warnings of ancient silence. Thus those who want to move beyond assertions of the bizarre and the extravagant have, to put it very simply, generally adopted one of three (partially overlapping) strategies. The first is simply to downplay the whole oddity, to naturalise it – after all, we put photos of the dead beside our beds and the Greeks had no cameras ... Nearly a century ago H.J. Rose drew attention in this context to a newspaper report that a ‘Hungarian of good family’ was refused marriage ‘by the parents of a remarkably beautiful Jewess’, and so he had ‘a lifelike wax figure of her made, and for some time kept it in his flat and talked to it, until he was induced to take it with him into an asylum’. There is much about the deep cultural embeddedness of this story that we need Gábor Betegh to unpack for us, but the basic drift of the argument is – OK, Admetus was a bit extreme, but that’s Thessalians (or Hungarians) for you, so what is the problem?

Wilamowitz (for, inevitably, it was he) pointed to similarities between the statue-motif in the *Alcestis* and our later sources for the story of Laodamia’s grief for her Thessalian husband Protesilaos, the first Greek to be killed at Troy. We know that Euripides dramatized some version of the story in his *Protesilaos* (of uncertain date), though most of what we can conjecture about the plot is fragile at every point. It is, however, likely enough that the play used both Laodamia’s creation of a statue of her dead husband which she may have slept with and/or treated with cult honours, and also his brief return from the dead, guided by Hermes; Laodamia may have killed herself when Protesilaos was forced to return to the Underworld. So what the *Alcestis* offers on this view, then, is a reflex of real (or believed) Thessalian legend and/or funerary practice. We are here not far from how Aristotle explained odd passages of Homer through appeal to surviving customs in remote parts of Greece. The layers of the text thus preserves sedimented traces at every level.

It is, however, with rather later texts that Admetus’ image of his wife is usually connected. In Socrates’ extraordinary speech on love and the soul in Plato’s *Phaedrus*

ὁ δὲ ἀρτιτελής, ὁ τῶν τότε πολυθεάμων, ὅταν θεοειδὲς πρόσωπον ἴδῃ κάλλος εὖ μεμμημένον ἢ τινα σώματος ιδέαν, πρῶτον μὲν ἔφριξεν καὶ τι τῶν τότε ὑπῆλθεν αὐτὸν δειμάτων, εἶτα προσορῶν ὡς θεὸν σέβεται, καὶ εἰ μὴ ἔδειξεν τὴν τῆς σφόδρα μανίας δόξαν, θύοι ἂν ὡς ἀγάλματι καὶ θεῷ τοῖς παιδικοῖς.

But he who is newly initiated, who beheld many of those realities, when he sees a godlike face or form which is a good image of beauty, shudders at first, and something of the old awe comes over him, then, as he gazes, he reveres the beautiful one as a god,

and if he did not fear to be thought quite mad, he would offer sacrifice to his beloved as to an image and a god.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 251a

we hear how the lover is reminded of the eternal beauty he has previously seen when he sees ‘a godlike face or some form of body which imitates beauty well’ and then, after shuddering (ἔφριξε, a verb commonly used of religious awe), ‘reveres (σέβεται) it as a god as he looks upon it, and if he did not fear a reputation for utter madness, he would sacrifice to his beloved boy as to an image (ἀγάλματι) and a god’ (251a). The idea recurs shortly afterwards

τόν τε οὖν ἔρωτα τῶν καλῶν πρὸς τρόπον ἐκλέγεται ἕκαστος, καὶ ὡς θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐκείνον ὄντα ἑαυτῷ οἷον ἄγαλμα τεκταίνεται τε καὶ κατακοσμεῖ, ὡς τιμήσων τε καὶ ὀργιάσων.

Now each one chooses his love from the ranks of the beautiful according to his character, and he fashions him and adorns him like a statue, as though he were his god, to honour and celebrate his rites.

Plato, *Phaedrus* 252d-e

where the lover is said to treat his beloved ‘as his own god, and he fashions and adorns him like a statue (οἷον ἄγαλμα τεκταίνεται τε καὶ κατακοσμεῖ), so as to honour him and celebrate his rites’. It is not just that these passages have striking motifs in common with the *Alcestis*, but rather that Plato is here an early witness to the erotic discourse of art with which we are so familiar from later antiquity. When we read that the lover ‘fashions and adorns [his beloved] like a statue’ it is hard of course not to think of Pygmalion’s *mira ars* with the statue-woman he created:

et modo blanditias adhibet, modo grata puellis
munera fert illi ...
conlocat hanc stratis concha Sidonide tinctis
adpellatque tori sociam acclinataque colla
mollibus in plumis tamquam sensura reponit.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.259-69

Now he addresses her with fond words of love, now brings her gifts pleasing to girls, ... He lays her on a bed spread with coverlets of Tyrian hue, calls her the consort of his couch, and rests iher reclining head upon soft, downy pillows, as if she could enjoy them.

Admetus’ statue has, of course, long since been seen as one of the forerunners of Pygmalion’s art, and we do not have to add this passage of the *Phaedrus* to the long list of prior texts which Ovid has turned to his own use, but the temptation is hard to resist, for the *Phaedrus* was one of *the* classic texts on the nature of love. When the lover catches sight of the beloved who recalls perfect beauty, he is warmed and that warming melts the place where his soul should sprout feathers and the feathers begin to grow (251b); again, we do not have to recall Pygmalion’s statue’s apparent

warming (*uisa tepere est*, v. 281) when the artist kisses it/her, a pointed contrast to the ‘cold delight’ which Admetus knows that his statue will bring him, but we well might. So too,

dum stupet et dubie gaudet fallique ueretur,
rursus amans rursusque manu sua uota retractat.
corpus erat: saliunt temptatae pollice uenae.

The lover stands amazed, rejoices still in doubt, fears he is mistaken, and tries his hopes again and yet again with his hand. It was flesh: the veins pulse beneath his testing finger.

ἡ δ' ἐντὸς μετὰ τοῦ ἡμέρου ἀποκεκλημένη, πηδῶσα οἶον τὰ σφύζοντα ...

and the sprouts within, shut in with the yearning, throb like pulsing arteries ...

when the statue’s body ‘comes alive’, *saliunt temptatae pollice uenae* (v. 289), we do not have to see virtually a translation of how the lover’s feathers in the *Phaedrus* ‘throb like pulsating blood vessels’, πηδῶσα [sc. ἡ βλάστη τοῦ περοῦ] οἶον τὰ σφύζοντα (251d XX), but I hope you will forgive me if I do. It should be no surprise to see Ovid reflecting the importance of such a central erotic text. The principal difference between Plato and Ovid also reminds us of what is most important for Plato. In Ovid it is the statue which warms and comes alive, whereas in Plato it is the lover, for – as in the *Symposium* – what matters for Plato is what love can do for the lover, not for the object of love.

What our passage of the *Alcestis* suggests would be very much worth knowing, is to what extent Plato was here drawing on an already developed literary discourse about the status of statues, poised (like Alcestis herself) between life and non-life. We come here, in fact, to the third way in which modern critics have sought to understand Admetus’ plans for life after Alcestis, and that is by incorporating it within a rich set of ideas about how (and in how many ways) images emblemise the absent presence of what they ‘represent’. There is a dauntingly rich bibliography here, much of it descending from a seminal essay of Jean-Pierre Vernant, and members of this Faculty – some of whom are in this room – have made significantly calorific contributions to it, and from which I have learned and borrowed. The language which Admetus uses makes his statue part-corpse of the ‘real’ Alcestis and part-image of her. He does not just whisper sweet nothings in her ear, like Pygmalion (*modo blanditias adhibet*, v. 259) who never gives his statue a name, but he addresses the statue as ‘Alcestis’ (*Alc.* 351), he ‘calls her by her name’ (we might say). Whether she answers we will never know, but it is at least tempting to read some later dialogues between a husband and his dead wife, inscribed on the wife’s tomb, as evocations of such pillow-talk with the dead, perhaps under the influence of this passage of the *Alcestis* (I think particularly of a poem from late Hellenistic Knidos – first brought to serious scholarly attention by Johanna Hanink – the second stanza of which –

Ἄτθίς, ἐμοὶ ζήσασα καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πνεῦμα λιπούσα,
ὡς πάρος εὐφροσύνης νῦν δακρύων πρόφασι,
ἀγνά, πουλυγότητε, τί πένθιμον ὕπνον ἰαύεις,
ἀνδρὸς ἀπὸ στέρων οὔποτε θείσα κάρα,
Θεῖον ἐρημώσασα τὸν οὐκέτι; σοὶ γὰρ ἐς Ἴδαν

ἦλθον ὁμοῦ ζωᾶς ἐλπίδες ἀμετέρας.

Atthis, who lived for me and left your breath behind in me, as once you brought me joy now it is tears, faithful, much lamented wife, why do you sleep the sleep of grief? Before, you never moved your head from your husband's breast. You have abandoned Theios who cannot go on: with you the hopes for our common life have gone down to Hades.

takes on, I think, a remarkable new colour if we imagine it whispered into the ear of a statue lying in the widower's bed). The name is important. We do not have to swallow all the reams of what has been written about the 'Phrasikleia epigram' of the second half of the sixth century BC, a rare case where we have the image as well as the poem, to see that the question of the naming of an image is important:

σῆμα Φρασικλείας. κούρη κεκλήσομαι αἰεὶ,
ἀντὶ γάμου παρὰ θεῶν τοῦτο λαχοῦσ' ὄνομα.

CEG 24 = GVI 68

This is the tomb of Phrasikleia. I shall forever be called a maiden, as I have received this name from the gods in place of marriage.

Plato certainly did. In a very famous passage of the *Cratylus* Socrates conjures up the possibility of a 'perfect' image and the naming-problem that that would cause:

ἄρ' ἂν δύο πράγματα εἴη τοιάδε, οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκῶν, εἴ τις θεῶν μὴ μόνον τὸ σὸν χρῶμα καὶ σχῆμα ἀπεικάσειεν ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς πάντα τοιαῦτα ποιήσειεν οἷάπερ τὰ σά, καὶ μαλακότητος καὶ θερμότητος τὰς αὐτὰς ἀποδοίη, καὶ κίνησιν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν οἷάπερ ἡ παρὰ σοὶ ἐνθεῖη αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάντα ἅπερ σὺ ἔχεις, τοιαῦτα ἕτερα καταστήσειεν πλησίον σου; πότερον Κρατύλος ἂν καὶ εἰκῶν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;

Plato, *Cratylus* 432b-c

Would there be two things, Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, if some god should not merely imitate your colour and form, as painters do, but should also make all the inner parts like yours, should reproduce the same flexibility and warmth, should put into them motion, life, and intellect, such as exist in you, and in short, should place beside you a duplicate of all your qualities? Would there be in such an event Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses? [trans. Fowler]

An *eikon* that reproduced *all* the features of its model would no longer be an *eikon*, and would deserve to be called by the name of the model as much as the model itself did. The action of the god strikingly foreshadows what Venus actually does to Pygmalion's statue, though (like Pandora) that has no actual 'model', except perhaps the imaginary form of a beautiful woman. For Admetus, the image both is and is not 'Alcestis'; *Alcestis emerita* perhaps.

The image is *not* Alcestis because, apparently, Admetus will know that what he has in his arms is just an image; the 'real' one will visit him in nocturnal dreams (354-6). It may, of course be, that one of the purposes of the image is precisely to make it much more likely that Alcestis will come to him in his dreams; Admetus is, if you like, stacking the odds in favour of such erotic dreams by embracing the statue as he falls asleep. We do not have to appeal to the very familiar link in ancient culture between

dreams and images to understand that. What does Admetus mean when he says ‘I shall imagine (δόξω), though I have her not, that I hold my dear wife in my arms’. The habitual ‘parallel’ which everyone cites is the verses from the *Helen* where Helen describes Paris after the substitution of the phantom Helen for the real one:

Ἥρα δὲ μεμφθεῖσ' οὔνεκ' οὐ νικᾷ θεὰς
 ἐξηνέμωσε τᾶμ' Ἀλεξάνδρω λέχη,
 δίδωσι δ' οὐκ ἔμ' ἀλλ' ὁμοιώσασ' ἔμοι
 εἶδωλον ἔμπνουν οὐρανοῦ ξυνθεῖσ' ἄπο
 Πριάμου τυράννου παιδί· καὶ δοκεῖ μ' ἔχειν,
 κενήν δόκησιν, οὐκ ἔχων.

But Hera, annoyed that she did not defeat the other goddesses, made Alexandros' union with me as vain as the wind: she gave to king Priam's son not me but a breathing image she fashioned from the heavens to resemble me. He imagines—vain imagination—that he has me, though he does not.

Euripides, *Helen* 31-6

In fact, however, there is a fundamental difference in the two cases. There is, as far as I am aware, no suggestion in any of the accounts of the ‘phantom’ Helen from Stesichorus onwards that Paris realized that the woman in his arms and his bed was not ‘Helen’; Paris’ ‘belief’ was, according to Helen, an empty one. Whether or not he would have cared if he had known it was just a divinely created εἶδωλον is another matter ... Does Admetus mean ‘I will be able to imagine that I have my dear wife in my arms, though I will not have her’? In a famous anecdote the poet and wise man Simonides responded to someone who asked him why the Thessalians were the one people he could not deceive that Thessalians were too stupid to be taken in by him. Are we to understand that Admetus is one Thessalian who is not too stupid *not* to allow himself to be deceived by art in the right way, someone who both knows and (briefly) does not know what he holds in his arms, Gorgias’ ideal audience for tragedy, as it happens? The ‘cold pleasure’ he will receive is not merely some form of emotional and sexual release, but is also the pleasure of the omnipresent but differentially suppressed consciousness of the power of artistic skill. This is one pleasure which the gods refused to grant to Paris. δοκεῖν is after all, appropriately enough, a deceptively simple verb, a verb of ‘appearances’. Admetus in the *Alcestis* thus sets out an agenda which Ovid, at least, thought was still very much alive, or – like Galatea - worth breathing life into, when he wrote the Pygmalion-narrative.

For us, Greek texts can and should not be disentangled from the afterlife in antiquity with which they travel and through which, often by the skin of their teeth or the luckiest of chances, they reach us. The afterlife of Euripides’ *Alcestis* begins for us, of course, with Attic comedy. In Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, performed in Athens 27 years after the *Alcestis*, the taut and distraught Kinesias, suffering from the sex-strike of Athenian women, comes to the Acropolis in search of his wife Myrrhine and urges Lysistrata to fetch her a.s.a.p.:

ὥς οὐδεμίαν ἔχω γε τῷ βίῳ χάριν,
 ἐξ οὐπερ αὕτη ἔξηλθεν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας,
 ἀλλ' ἄχθομαι μὲν εισιών, ἔρημα δὲ
 εἶναι δοκεῖ μοι πάντα, τοῖς δὲ σιτίοις
 χάριν οὐδεμίαν οἶδ' ἐσθίων. ἔστυνα γάρ.

I have no delight in my life since she left our home. I go into the house and feel pain; everything seems desolate to me; I derive no pleasure from the food I eat. My erection does not allow it.

Ar. *Lys.* 864-9

Kinesias' distress evokes Admetus' grief:

πῶς γὰρ δόμων τῶνδ' εἰσόδους ἀνέξομαι;
 τίν' ἂν προσειπῶν, τοῦ δὲ προσρηθεῖς ὑπο
 τερπνῆς τύχοιμ' ἂν εἰσόδου; ποῖ τρέψομαι;
 ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἔνδον ἐξελά μ' ἐρημία,
 γυναικὸς εὐνάς εὐτ' ἂν εἰσίδω κενὰς
 θρόνους τ' ἐν οἴσιν ἴζε ...

For how shall I endure entering this house? Whom will I greet, by whom be greeted, that my homecoming may give me pleasure? Which way shall I turn? For the desolation within will drive me out of doors when I see my wife's bed and the chairs in which she sat now empty ...

Eur. *Alc.* 941-6

For both bereft husbands all is ἔρημον, 'deserted, laid waste', the house haunted by the absence of the woman who is no longer there; Kinesias' physical reaction ('I am permanently erect' ἔστυκα γάρ) offers a suitably comic and unromantic version of the Euripidean husband who promises to take an image of his dead wife to bed with him and to have sex with his wife in his dreams (*Alc.* 348-56). The afterlife of Greek tragedy begins long before it is safely tucked away in libraries, let alone dead and buried.

The processes which we see at work in Aristophanic comedy inaugurate (and foreshadow) a very long process of diffusion, of what we have learned to call *paideia*, 'literary culture', though that term covers a multitude of social and cultural positions. It is a pleasing happenstance (but perhaps more than that) that our next surviving glimpse of the *Alcestis* is indeed in Plato and in the mouth of a character who, in many ways, may be seen as a kind of model for one type of πεπαιδευμένος, 'cultured gentleman', from a later age. In the *Symposium*, Phaedrus, who makes the first speech in praise of Eros, a speech about which I have learned a great deal from Christian Keime, adduces as an example of the lengths to which 'those in love' will go Alcestis' willingness to die for her husband and the extraordinary honour the gods paid her out of admiration for what she had done. Phaedrus is represented in the *Symposium* as someone both conversant with, and very keen to cite, poetry as evidence, τεκμήρια, for his views, and someone who in fact is familiar with the whole literary heritage (177a-c). Phaedrus' confident discussion of the poetry of the past resembles nothing so much as the many scholia on classical authors, going back ultimately to Hellenistic scholarship, which similarly collect and transmit the mythographic heritage, or (and this is perhaps less surprising) one of Athenaeus' equally sympotic and even more learned deipnosophists. This striking agreement in literary mode across 600 years of ancient culture deserves more thought than it normally receives, while also reminding us of the ever-present danger of viewing ancient literary culture with too teleological a set of spectacles.

Much of my research in the last decade or so of my tenure of the Regius Professorship has in fact been devoted to, I would not be so presumptuous as to call it something as knee-trembling as ‘classical reception’, but rather attempts – duly forecast in the title of my Inaugural Lecture – to tease out (in particular) Platonic, Hesiodic and Homeric strands in subsequent literate culture. Academic trajectories, no less than literary careers, can – as Cédric Scheidegger as much as anyone has taught us – be reconstructed in the rosy glow of hindsight, but I have at least some claims to pig-headed perseverance here. The two early moments of reception of the *Alcestis* on which I have focused both, in rather different ways, foreshadow ways in which classical texts shaped and were integrated into the bloodstream of later Greek culture; both moments might well be described as ‘coming before’.

Every surviving tragedy has of course its own story to tell about later literate culture, and there is more than one way to seek to trace the scent of these stories. Consider what Heracles says to the servant who is shocked by how the hero can enjoy himself when the house is in mourning:

τὰ θνητὰ πράγμαθ' ἦντιν' οἴσθ' ἔχει φύσιν;
οἶμαι μὲν οὐ· πόθεν γάρ; ἀλλ' ἄκουέ μου.
βροτοῖς ἅπασι κατθανεῖν ὀφείλεται,
κὺν ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἐξεπίσταται
τὴν αὔριον μέλλουσαν εἰ βιώσεται·
τὸ τῆς τύχης γὰρ ἀφανὲς οἱ προβήσεται,
κάστ' οὐ διδακτὸν οὐδ' ἀλίσκεται τέχνῃ.
ταῦτ' οὖν ἀκούσας καὶ μαθὼν ἐμοῦ πάρα
εὐφραϊνε σαυτὸν, πῖνε, τὸν καθ' ἡμέραν
βίον λογίζου σόν, τὰ δ' ἄλλα τῆς τύχης.

Do you know the nature of our mortal life? I think not. How could you? But listen to me. Death is a debt all mortals must pay, and no man knows for certain whether he will still be living on the morrow. The outcome of our fortune is hid from our eyes, and it lies beyond the scope of any teaching or craft. So now that you have learned this from me, cheer your heart, drink, regard this day's life as what is yours, but all else belongs to Fortune!

Euripides, *Alcestis* 780-9

Parts of Heracles' reflections on human life, aimably banal, generalizing and repetitive as they are (an imitation, so I am told, of an observable effect of alcohol even today – I guess we'll find out in about half an hour), are quoted as late as two miscellaneous anthologies of the fifth century AD, including one of our very most important sources for Greek literature, the remarkable philosophical, ethical and moralizing anthology, originally in four substantial books covering both prose and verse, of John of Stobi in Macedonia, hence usually called ‘Stobaeus’. Almost inevitably, what we have of Stobaeus is itself just a fragment, though a rather large one, filling five solid volumes on the library shelves; a very much fuller version of the anthology was available to Photius, the ninth century Patriarch of Constantinople, who tells us that Stobaeus sent the anthology to his son because the young man was not very good at remembering what he had read. Every parent will recognize the problem (Stobaeus' son doubtless had other, perhaps more corporeal, distractions), but Stobaeus' rather sledgehammer remedy for adolescent *ennui* was perhaps less idiosyncratic in late antiquity than it appears now. It is probably too much to hope that

I will live to see a Cambridge PhD devoted to Stobaeus (or even perhaps to his son, one of the unsung heroes of our subject), although in my time the Degree Committee has waded through much stranger things. Is it, incidentally, pure chance that two of our three surviving ancient papyri from the *Alcestis* feature Heracles' homespun philosophy? Probably ...

We have some evidence for the early history of poetic anthologies at the end of the fifth and first half of the fourth centuries BC, nearly a millennium earlier, but very much – well, nearly everything in fact - remains unclear about subsequent processes of copying and augmentation. Perhaps the earliest (and certainly the most intriguing) evidence for the practice is a passage which has some claim to be the only *ipsissima uerba* we possess of the sophist, Hippias of Elis, a contemporary of Socrates at the end of the fifth:

τούτων ἴσως εἴρηται τὰ μὲν Ὀρφεῖ, τὰ δὲ Μουσαίῳ κατὰ βραχὺ ἄλλῳ ἀλλαχοῦ, τὰ δὲ Ἡσιόδῳ τὰ δὲ Ὀμήρῳ, τὰ δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις τῶν ποιητῶν, τὰ δὲ ἐν συγγραφαῖς τὰ μὲν Ἑλλησι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροις· ἐγὼ δὲ ἐκ πάντων τούτων τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὁμόφυλα συνθεῖς τοῦτον καινὸν καὶ πολυειδῆ τὸν λόγον ποιήσομαι.

Hippias D22 Laks-Most

Of these some have perhaps been expressed by Orpheus, others by Musaeus, here and there to put it briefly, others by Hesiod, others by Homer, others by the other poets; others in prose treatises; some by Greeks, others by non-Greeks. But I myself have put together from out of all these the ones that are most important and are akin to one another, and from them I shall compose the following new discourse of multiple forms.

It is often surmised that this passage, which has sprouted its own little bibliographical allotment and about which there would be much to say on another occasion, came from the introduction to a work of Hippias entitled 'Collection' (Συναγωγή), but as the only knowledge we have of that work (beyond its title) is that it mentioned a very beautiful and clever Milesian woman who had fourteen husbands (presumably consecutively) – perhaps she 'collected' them - we cannot get very far. We owe our knowledge of this passage to the Christian philosopher and theologian Clement of Alexandria (c 200 AD) who cited it, in the course of his own extraordinary anthologising miscellany, the *Stromateis* 'Patchworks', to prove his contention (which of course it does *not*) that Greek writers plagiarized each other, as a confirmatory proof that they stole language, ideas and doctrines from Christians also. Where did Clement find this sentence? Quite probably in another anthologising source: it is, or has been made to be, meta-anthological, a text about the practice of anthologising preserved in an anthology. How late were the 'other poets and prose-writers' whom Hippias exploited – did they include, Euripides, for example? When was the sentence excerpted and how did it survive? When did the last complete text of this work of Hippias disappear? Who was the last person to read it? Ancient philosophers regularly have to struggle with what we might call such doxographical problems, but Anglophone scholars of Greek literature have tended to avert their eyes and return to the comfortable zone of texts which survive in their entirety: editions of fragments and studies of their transmission are something people do elsewhere and in foreign (to us) languages. This, I think, is a real pity. It is upon such work that our knowledge of how classical literature was read and transmitted depends; we will, inevitably, always see through a glass darkly, but how much better is that than impenetrable intellectual blindness, particularly if that blindness is self-imposed. This is not to say that matters are straightforward. The other two surviving passages which have some claim to

preserve the actual words of Hippias are apparent quotations of the sophist in two fragments of a lost work of Plutarch (some 500 years after Hippias) preserved (again) in Stobaeus, some three and a half centuries after Plutarch ... No one ever promised that it would be easy ...

‘Close reading’ (of a kind), with particular attention to context, is a practice familiar from, for example, the γραμματικοί whose work in abbreviated form has reached our scholia, notably of Homer, but this was by no means the only ‘reading practice’ of antiquity; how and why excerpts come to be grouped together in the compendious anthologies of later antiquity and what reading practices such groupings seem to imply is an area where much more work is needed if we have any interest at all in how the textual culture of antiquity developed and reproduced itself. We all know that Euripides was quotable and that ancient literary culture was a culture of citation, but it is always very difficult to trace lines of diffusion with any clarity; that would be one task of a book about Euripides and ancient culture. The subject-matter of the *Alcestis*, moreover, lent itself easily enough to subjects, like death, which were (and remain) of general interest: Stobaeus alone cites the play, not just on the inescapability of death, but also more than once on the subject ‘that marriage is not a good thing’ (vv. 238-9, 882-4 ~ Stob. 4.22b.41, 4.22b.39), more optimistically (and this is one of the reasons you never grow tired of Stobaeus) on ‘that marriage sometimes works out and sometimes does not – it all depends’ (vv. 879-80 ~ Stob. 4.22c.79), and also on the hard truth that ‘it is easier to give advice to another person than to yourself’ (v. 1078 ~ Stob. 4.49.6), and this darkly sobering thought about the decisions which retirement entails brings me finally to the *uale* of the valedictory.

I have been very lucky for the past 46 years since I first arrived in Cambridge to find a Classics community in which people cared about the Graeco-Roman world, enjoyed talking about it, and drank a lot while doing so. I will forever be more grateful than I can say to those who took me under their wing back then; some of them are here (at least in spirit) today. I was a ξένος who was made to feel very much at home (my accent spared me the whole Homeric ‘who are you and where do you come from?’ routine). The increasing internationalism of the Faculty and of my colleagues has been one of the real pleasures of the last decades, and more recently a major antidote to recurring bouts of post-Brexit depression. All academic institutions are stalked by the virus of self-satisfied and complacent inwardness, and the more successful the institution the greater the danger of exposure to that virus (or, rather, to the Oxbridge variant) and thus the greater the need for vigilance. In my little corner of the Faculty alone, we have been joined during my Professorship by Lucia Prauscello from Italy (but now resident with the souls of the Blessed), Renaud Gagné from Montreal, and Rebecca Laemmle from Switzerland. We have benefited beyond measure from this appropriation of quite different academic cultures, from such diversity, just as we benefit enormously from the very breadth of academic activities and methodologies on show in the Faculty: I hope, for example, that Simon Goldhill and Tim Whitmarsh will understand when I say that I am very glad that *they* are here to do what they do – I certainly could not. I learn every day from my colleagues, and that is the real vaccine which keeps staleness at bay and has made it at most times such a pleasure to work in the Faculty of Classics. Dio Chrysostom suggests that the best type of retirement (ἀναχώρησις) is ‘retirement into yourself and paying attention to your own affairs’ (20.8), and our small academic world is indeed full of erstwhile colleagues loudly celebrating the alleged freedom which retirement brings, but for me – and I hope for those who follow me – the Faculty’s affairs are indeed ‘my own

affairs', they are not ἀλλότρια, and that is why I have so much enjoyed working here and why letting go is so difficult. Being a part of this Faculty for several decades, and being the Regius Professor of Greek for the last twenty years, have always for me been extraordinary privileges which I hope I have never taken for granted and which far exceed just happening to have a job here. The future will be different. I accept of course Seneca's dictum (*Epist.* 19.2), knowledge of which, as of so much else, I owe to Emily Gowers, that 'retirement should be neither paraded nor concealed, obvious but not conspicuous', and I shall do my best to preserve its spirit.

Let me also add – but this is no footnote – that I and the Faculty more generally have always also been extraordinarily lucky with the administrative staff on whom we depend and I would like particularly to thank the staff of the Faculty Library who have always indulged my not altogether-legal nesting habits, and above all Tamsin James and Nigel Thompson who could not have been more imaginative, supportive and helpful administrative officers during my two periods as Chair of the Faculty.

Many of you will have noticed that the title of my lecture hubristically evokes what Socrates says at the end of the most famous valedictory to have survived from antiquity, namely Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. Socrates departs with a request and, like Myles Burnyeat in his memorable Valedictory in what now seems like a very different, very distant age, I too will pick up that structure. For any intellectually serious study of the literate and material culture of Greek and Roman antiquity a reading knowledge of the languages is not an optional pleasure but a pleasurable necessity, and we are doing a disservice if we seek to pretend otherwise or fail to try to make our students understand that. I take it as a given, as made clear in my Inaugural of 20 years ago, that different students will both want and need different levels of linguistic facility and that range must be written, as indeed it is now, into what we do. Please therefore continue, in the very best, in some ways unique, traditions of this Faculty, to give the students of the future the tools, of which language is one, but far from the only one, to enable them properly to conduct the holistic study of Greek and Roman antiquity on which we have always prided ourselves, harry them to read, argue and care about Greek and Roman literature and culture, and give them no peace if their minds are set on other more lucrative and banausic concerns (and I say that while also acknowledging my gratitude to the Faculty of Law for hosting this event) or upon alluring academic paths which use the patina of Graeco-Roman antiquity to pursue intellectual agendas which, however admirable in themselves and however much – as Mary Beard rightly and constantly reminds us – Classics has always been reinventing itself, have very little to do with understanding Greek and Roman antiquity and its real legacy. There are of course hard choices to be made – even I know that. The struggle in the Faculty over competing pathways to Graeco-Roman antiquity and the place of language learning, a struggle to which I also alluded in my Inaugural, of course continues here and elsewhere, sometimes very heatedly and divisively, but we must have the intellectual and educational clarity not just half-blindly to imitate trends elsewhere, but to decide and pursue our own reasoned agenda and to be prepared to explain it to those, inside and outside, who are prepared seriously to listen. I remain hopeful that a significant part at least of the Faculty knows what is at stake. Please do not allow this occasion to turn out to be a Valedictory in more senses than one.

My rather unsurprising views about the future of our discipline are, you will be shocked to learn, perhaps not universally shared, even on Sidgwick Ave. If, however, as I have tried to do, you all commit yourselves to the serious future of Greek studies and, in particular, the study of the ancient Greek language and the extraordinary literature, philosophy and history written in it, then I can reasonably ask nothing else (well, nearly nothing ...). The foresight of Pat Easterling and Ted Kenney in launching the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series of commentaries on classical texts, a brand name admired and envied all over the world, outreach in the very best sense of the term, shows what can be achieved. This above all, however. In whatever directions you take the Faculty and our shared subject in the future, please be gentle with and look out for each other – the brutality of the pandemic, which we still barely understand, the dissipation of social and socialising structures and the weakening of health-giving debate and open discussion to which it has led at a time of great difficulty for the discipline, and the extraordinary and extraordinarily differential pressures the pandemic has placed on colleagues and students all over the world mean that our subject, by whatever name you wish to call it, as you hold it in your arms in bed at night, seeking a response, needs as never before that care and gentleness, which come from an understanding and a feeling (and feelings are very important here) of what we share and how fragile that is.

But now, to pick up the Platonic Socrates' words yet again, it is time to depart, me into retirement, and you to the next meeting of the Prelims/IA/IB and Summer School Reform Working Group. Which of us goes to a better place, I must leave to you to decide. But thank you all anyway. It has mostly been very great fun. I will miss it more than I can say.