

2003

Aristophanes in Philadelphia: The "Acharnians" of 1886

Lee Percy

Bryn Mawr College, lpercy@brynmawr.edu

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics_pubs



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Custom Citation

L. T. Percy, "Aristophanes in Philadelphia: The 'Acharnians' of 1886," *The Classical World* 96.3 (2003): 299-313.

This paper is posted at Scholarship, Research, and Creative Work at Bryn Mawr College. http://repository.brynmawr.edu/classics_pubs/103

For more information, please contact repository@brynmawr.edu.



Aristophanes in Philadelphia: The "Acharnians" of 1886

Author(s): Lee T. Percy

Source: *The Classical World*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Spring, 2003), pp. 299-313

Published by: [The Johns Hopkins University Press](#) on behalf of the [Classical Association of the Atlantic States](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4352763>

Accessed: 10-03-2015 16:49 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Johns Hopkins University Press and Classical Association of the Atlantic States are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Classical World*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

ARISTOPHANES IN PHILADELPHIA: THE *ACHARNIANS* OF 1886

Long before curtain time on the evening of May 14, 1886, carriages blocked the intersection of Broad and Locust Streets near the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Nearly 3,000 people streamed toward the gaslit Academy that spring evening, including President Daniel Coit Gilman and Professor Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve of the Johns Hopkins University, Professors Charles Eliot Norton, William Watson Goodwin, John Williams White, and Louis Dyer of Harvard,¹ and scores of other distinguished academicians and their students from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Cornell Universities and from Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges. A large crowd of students from the University of Pennsylvania mingled easily with the social elite of Philadelphia. Although the curtain had been scheduled to rise at eight o'clock, the performance could not begin until half an hour later, after the eager throng had finally taken its seats. "Everybody is here of any note," one usher observed.²

This glittering, learned audience had gathered to see and hear Aristophanes' *Acharnians* performed in its original Greek by students from the University of Pennsylvania. They had chosen to attend this first performance of an ancient Greek comedy in North America rather than see *Othello* at the Arch Street Opera Company, Mrs. John Drew in Gilbert's comedy, *Engaged*, at the Arch Street Theatre, Arizona Joe in *The Black Hawks* at the Central Theatre, or any of the other competing entertainments in Philadelphia.³ The *Acharnians* ended its run of two performances in Philadelphia with a matinee at the Academy of Music the next afternoon. On November 19, 1886, it was reprised in New York City at the Academy of Music on Irving Place, where it drew, a headline proclaimed, "a Greater House than Patti."⁴ The proceeds of the New York performance were dedicated to the new building of The American School

¹ Norton (1827–1908), Goodwin (1831–1912), White (1849–1917), and Dyer (1851–1908) had been part of the committee in charge of the Harvard *Oedipus* of 1881, the first production of an ancient Greek drama in America (H. Norman, *An Account of the Harvard Greek Play* [Boston 1882] 45).

² Unlabeled newspaper clipping, Richards Papers, UPT 50 R514, folder 1, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania. Much of what survives from the 1886 *Acharnians* is preserved in the University Archives; I am grateful to the University of Pennsylvania and to the staff of the University Archives for assisting me with this material.

³ *The Magistrate* at the Chestnut Street Opera House, Rice's *Evangeline* at the Chestnut Street Theatre, and those two perennial favorites, the cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg and a minstrel show (unlabeled newspaper clipping, Richards Papers, folder 1).

⁴ *Philadelphia Press* (Nov. 20, 1886) Richards Papers, folder 1. The reference is to Adelina Patti (1843–1919), a leading *bel canto* soprano of the era. From 1881 to 1904 she made a series of annual tours of the United States. She appeared in the New York Academy of Music the evening before the *Acharnians*, to a smaller house.

of Classical Studies at Athens. That performance, too, was attended by luminaries of society, affairs, and academe; as one newspaper reported, "The dread array of scholarship in presence was too tremendous for detail, but every man of the audience who in his youth ever groaned over a Latin or Greek grammar looked upon the faces of Professors Goodwin and Harkness and was awed."⁵

The Philadelphia *Acharnians* was a sensation in both highbrow and popular press. Gildersleeve heralded the experiment in *The Nation*,⁶ and *Harper's Weekly* praised the New York performance for "bringing the spectator . . . right into the life of antiquity."⁷ Not all notices were high-minded, however. According to *Taggart's Sunday Times* for May 16, 1886:

The Greek play . . . by the University boys, created quite a flutter in high-toned circles last week. The aesthetic young ladies wildly cheered the stalwart students, who appeared in scant Grecian costumes, with real bare legs, hosiery being ignored as inconsistent with a real Greek play. The display beat the ordinary ballet "all hollow." Enthusiastic young ladies declared that the handsome young gentlemen on the stage, representing Grecian characters with unpronounceable names, were "just lovely."⁸

Years later, after a successful career at the bar and in the United States Senate, one of those lovely young men, George Wharton Pepper, would look back on his role as Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* as "the most interesting experience of our college life."⁹ Now hardly remembered, the *Acharnians* of 1886 deserves study not only because it was a pioneer production of Greek drama, but also because it stands at a pivotal point in the history of classical studies in America, before the final withdrawal of professional classicists from the public eye and the agora of public discourse.

I. The Production

On Wednesday evening, November 24, 1885, nineteen men, all undergraduates, alumni, or members of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, assembled at the University Club at Thirteenth and Walnut Streets in Philadelphia. Dr. William Pepper, Provost

⁵ *Philadelphia Press* (Nov. 20, 1886) Richards Papers, folder 1. The writer refers to Goodwin's *Elementary Greek Grammar* (Boston 1870) and to the first edition of *A Latin Grammar for Schools and Colleges* (New York 1864) by A. Harkness (1822–1907).

⁶ May 6, 1886, 379. I am indebted to Ward Briggs for bringing Gildersleeve's essay to my attention.

⁷ Nov. 20, 1886, 747.

⁸ Richards Papers, folder 1.

⁹ G. W. Pepper, *Philadelphia Lawyer* (Philadelphia and New York, 1944) 39.

of the University, had convened them as a Joint Committee to Produce a Greek Play. In the course of the evening the committee dutifully elected Dr. Pepper as chair and appointed subcommittees to find a venue, select actors, oversee costumes and properties, supervise finances, and devise music. The committee also fixed on the *Acharnians* as the play to be produced. Dr. William H. Klapp moved "that the Faculty of the College Department be requested to accept the work done by students in preparing for the Greek Play in lieu of an equivalent amount of College work." The motion carried. The committee also agreed that the performance should take place early in May and that the price of a seat should be not less than two dollars.¹⁰

It was a good evening's work for a committee and must have been preceded by discussions that have left no record. The Joint Committee's minutes allude to the work of separate faculty and undergraduate groups that seem to have been in existence before the meeting of November 24. These groups and the circle of faculty and classically minded alumni gathered around dynamic Provost Wharton¹¹ provided the impulse for the Philadelphia *Acharnians*.

Soon after the play went into rehearsal, Dr. William Klapp, who had charge of preparing the libretto and overseeing the costumes and scenery, wrote to Professor W. W. Goodwin, who had played a similar part in the Harvard *Oedipus*, seeking his advice and inviting him to attend the performances in Philadelphia.¹² In the same letter, Klapp sheds some light on the committee's reasons for choosing the *Acharnians* in particular: "We selected the Ach. as it has so little in it that could be offensive to the average modern mind & it is so bright and full of action & for other

¹⁰ "Minute Book of the Committee to Produce a Greek Play," Box UPS 68.2, folder 2, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania. According to the prospectus issued to announce the production (Box UPS 68.2, folder 16), the Joint Committee consisted of Provost Pepper, the Shakespearian scholar Horace Howard Furness, Charles C. Harrison, John C. Sims Jr., Rev. Dr. James W. Robins, Dr. Alfred C. Lambdin, Dr. John H. Packard, T. B. Stork, Prof. F. A. Jackson, Prof. Morton W. Easton, Prof. Hugh A. Clarke, Prof. Thomas W. Richards, Dr. William H. Klapp, Henry Reed, H. La Barre Jayne, Thomas Robins Jr., and Prof. J. G. R. McElroy, all faculty or graduates of the University of Pennsylvania, and the following undergraduates: Gerald Holsman, William C. Posey, Crawford D. Hening, George Wharton Pepper, Frazer Ashhurst, Charles Peabody, John Ashhurst III, James A. Montgomery, Edward S. Dunn, Joseph S. Levin, Lightner Witmer, and Walter Scott.

¹¹ In thirteen years as Provost (1882–1894) he established the Wharton School of Finance and Economy, the Biological Department, the Department of Philosophy, the Veterinary Department, the Training School for Nurses, the Department of Physical Education, the University Library, the Graduate Department for Women, the Department of Hygiene, the Department of Architecture, the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, the William Pepper Laboratory of Clinical Medicine, and the Department of Archaeology and Palaeontology; see E. P. Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania 1740–1940* (Philadelphia 1940) 285–332.

¹² Dr. Klapp's drafts of correspondence connected with the play are preserved in the Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Box UPS 68.2, folder 17.

reasons that it would weary you for me to enumerate." The early date of the *Acharnians* and its political character may also have led the committee to its decision.

Dr. Klapp's libretto omitted only 57 lines, about 4.5 percent of the 1234-line original.¹³ Many lines omitted might be thought offensive, at least to the respectable minds of Philadelphia in 1886. At the same time, the libretto indicates all omissions with rows of asterisks and does not bowdlerize every Aristophanic indecency. The phallic hymn (264–279), for example, remains, disguised as a "Dionysiac Hymn," although Dr. Klapp excised the indelicate banter between Dicaeopolis and his daughter leading up to it.

Klapp's handling of this passage, in fact, illustrates his two principal motives for omitting lines. One, of course, was intractable obscenity, especially obscenity directed at women; the longest cut (15 lines, 781–796) eliminates all double entendres and renders innocent all references to piglets in the episode of the Megarian's daughters. Another motive was one familiar to all directors: the need to harmonize script with staging. The Philadelphia set had no second story acting area, and so when Dicaeopolis instructs his wife to watch his phallic procession from the roof (σὺ δ', ὦ γύναι, θεῶ μ' ἀπὸ τοῦ τέγους. πρόβα, 262), only the last word of the line ("proceed") survives in the Philadelphia script.

The decision not to employ a second-story led to a minor controversy which illustrates the care with which the Joint Committee anchored the staging of the 1886 *Acharnians* firmly in philological understanding of Aristophanes' text. After the New York performance, Mr. Thomas Davidson, writing in the *World*, gave the production one of its few completely negative reviews, in the course of which he commented on the lack of a second story, which seemed to be called for especially by the words ἀναβάδην ("aloft") and καταβάδην ("below") in the scene with Euripides (407–490). Professor Morton W. Easton, who had chief responsibility for directing the play, composed a response.¹⁴ In it he pointed out the difficulty of knowing exactly what ἀναβάδην signified, and he argued that it is difficult to reconcile the hypothesis of two stories with the use of the *eccyclema* implied at lines 407 and 409.

The Joint Committee ordered 5,000 copies of the libretto, and it appeared as a handsome, 140-page volume printed by Dando and Company, Philadelphia. Copies went on sale in advance of the performance, so that the curious could prepare for an evening of Greek. The volume's red-on-black covers showed figures with lyre and flute on the front and a boar's-head rhyton on the back. Inside, readers

¹³ Lines omitted: 80–84, 119, 161, 243, 255, 259–260, 262, 523–529, 535–538, 774–775, 781–796, 1052, 1060, 1065–1066, 1091, 1149, 1199, 1201, 1214–1221.

¹⁴ It survives in manuscript (Box UPS 68.2, folder 8, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania).

found Dindorf's text on the left-hand pages, with a facing translation based on that of John Hookham Frere.¹⁵

The actors who spoke these lines were all undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania; most were members of the class of 1887. The subcommittee responsible for choosing the cast did not accomplish its work without controversy. On December 22, 1885, the Joint Committee received its recommendation for the principal roles, including George Wharton Pepper, nephew of Provost Pepper, as Dicaeopolis. At the same meeting Professor J. G. R. McElroy presented a minority report advocating that Joseph Siegmund Levin, who would play the Boeotian in both the New York and Philadelphia performances, be cast as Dicaeopolis. In Philadelphia pedigree carried the day, and the provost's nephew held the leading role.

As often happens in amateur theatricals, assignments changed slightly between casting and performance, and between the Philadelphia and New York performances.¹⁶ Rehearsals, also, seem not to have gone entirely smoothly. At some point—and experience with amateur productions makes me want to suggest that it must have been close to the time of performance—Dr. Klapp drafted a scathing letter to the chorus, to be sent by way of Professor Easton, the director. Three paragraphs will give the flavor:

I would like to know whether you are willing to take hold of the Chorus in a manner such as might be expected from you considering the prominent position assigned you, or whether you prefer to withdraw.

You are the only ones [*sic*] in the cast, who does not know his part: almost the only ones in the cast who has shown complete unwillingness to rehearse. At the chorus rehearsals, every objection to those reflections which have been absolutely necessary, or nearly every objection, has come from you. Even the ordinary duty of punctuality needed a very sharp reminder from me.

The Chorus, taken as a whole I repeat, is defective. If it is equally defective on the night of the performance I shall lay a large share of the blame on your selves.¹⁷

We may be able to recognize some of the naughtiness of this chorus in two photographs that survive from the production. In

¹⁵ Frere (1769–1846) published his translation in 1840. Wilhelm Dindorf (1802–1883) published his *Poetae Scaenici Graeci*, including Aristophanes, in 1830. Frere's translation and Dindorf's text were frequently reprinted.

¹⁶ A listing of both casts can be found on the Web site supporting this article: www.ea.pvt.k12.pa.us/html/Units/Upper/classics/Acharnians/.

¹⁷ Box UPS 68.2, folder 17, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania.

one, frequently reproduced, Dicaeopolis stands between the Megarian's daughters, who are wearing pushed back on their heads the masks that disguised them (innocently, in the Philadelphia production) as piglets. In another, two chorus members stand in similar poses; they are holding a brace of kittens. Their pose is a gloss on the suppressed sense of *χοῖρος*. (The *OED* assigns the earliest citation of "pussy" in its obscene sense to 1879–1880.)

The chorus eventually behaved itself, as choruses usually do, and the *Acharnians* went up as planned. Audiences in Philadelphia and New York saw young actors declaiming and singing Greek competently, although one reviewer thought that the actors spoke too loudly, and another found the tenors of the chorus consistently flat.¹⁸ At the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, the chorus stood about eight yards behind the footlights in front of a raised stage on which the actors performed.¹⁹ Behind the actors a central door represented the house of Euripides, with those of Dicaeopolis on one side and Lamachos on the other, and a view of the Acropolis visible behind. The costumes had been carefully designed with authenticity in mind—so much so that Lamachos had to struggle with hoplite armor of fully functional weight and heft. Professor Hugh Clarke's music earned the applause of the audience and an honorary Doctor of Music degree for the composer. The Joint Committee to Produce a Greek Play commissioned silver cups for the director, the librettist, and the composer; Dr. Easton's cup contained, in addition, a purse of \$250.²⁰ On the reverse of each cup was a simple inscription: "In Commemoration / of an event as noteworthy in the history / of Greek Literature in America, as / in the history of / The University of Pennsylvania."

II. Cultural Rivalries, Conservative Neo-Classicism, and the Revival of Greek Drama

The feeling that another blow had been struck in an old rivalry may lie behind the bold claim on those silver cups. Emulation of the Harvard Greek play of May 1881 played a large part in motivating the committee in Philadelphia. Harvard's *Oedipus*, which was originally scheduled for three performances but ran for five, was the first production of an ancient Greek play in America.²¹

¹⁸ *Philadelphia Press* (Nov. 20, 1886) Richards Papers, folder 1.

¹⁹ Dörpfeld was to argue that the ancient theater had no raised stage. His excavations of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens began in 1886 and did not become widely known until a decade later, with the publication of *Das griechische Theater* (1896).

²⁰ Dr. Klapp's cup survives in the collections of the Classics Department at the Episcopal Academy in Merion, Penn., where Klapp was Headmaster from 1891–1915; see www.ea.pvt.k12.pa.us/htm/Units/Upper/Classics/Acharnians/KlappCup.htm.

²¹ D. E. Pluggé, *History of Greek Play Production in American Colleges and Universities from 1881 to 1936* (New York 1938) 5. For a full account of the Harvard *Oedipus*, see Norman (above, n.1).

Looking back, George Wharton Pepper saw rivalry with Harvard as one reason for Pennsylvania's choice: "Harvard had recently produced the *Oedipus* of Sophocles with marked success. We were ambitious enough to undertake the more exacting task of producing a comedy."²² By choosing a comedy, the university in Philadelphia could stake a claim to rival Harvard's priority in tragedy. Perhaps this claim accounts for the college cheers that punctuated the applause at the Philadelphia performances.²³

In 1886, the Philadelphia *Acharnians* may have seemed to catch the beginning of a trend. At Harvard itself discussions about putting on a Greek play had begun as early as 1876.²⁴ Only the destruction of its college buildings by fire prevented Notre Dame from putting on its *Oedipus* two years before Harvard's. As it was, the university in South Bend produced an *Oedipus* in 1882 and an *Antigone* in 1883. Beloit College followed with another *Antigone* in 1885 and with a *Eumenides* in 1886, both in English translation. Although Pennsylvania's pioneering *Acharnians* was only the fifth production of an ancient Greek play by an American college or university, and perhaps the sixth in America,²⁵ Greek drama was very much in the academic air of America during the Gilded Age. Between 1881 and 1903, eighteen different institutions put on twelve different Greek plays in forty-eight productions.²⁶ At least sixteen of these productions were performed in Greek.²⁷

The *Acharnians* also enjoyed the very American advantage of being a charity event, so that audiences could feel that they were promoting culture and virtue simultaneously. Profits from the Philadelphia performances went to the benefit of the library of the University of Pennsylvania; the New York performance was a fund-raiser for the new building of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Neither the vogue for academic productions of Greek drama nor the impulse to combine edification and civic benefaction, however, accounts for the popular success of the Philadelphia *Acharnians*.

Contemporary accounts of the Harvard *Oedipus* and the Pennsylvania *Acharnians* make it clear that these Greek plays were social occasions. Newspapers often devoted as much space to listing prominent members of the audience as to describing the production itself. Especially in Philadelphia, where a mere name is often enough to

²² See Pepper (above, n.9) 39.

²³ Unlabeled newspaper clipping, Richards Papers, folder 1.

²⁴ Norman (above, n.1) 16–17.

²⁵ The success of the Harvard Greek play led a Mr. Daniel Frohman to organize a professional production of the *Oedipus* in English translation, which had a two-week run before large audiences in New York and Boston (Pluggé [above, n.21] 5).

²⁶ Pluggé (above, n.21) 14–16.

²⁷ Pluggé (above, n.21) Table XI, 149.

stake a claim in upper or upper middle-class society, the newspaper accounts relish the gradations of status and seating. One account immediately follows its lead paragraph with a box-by-box listing of the occupants of the stage boxes at the Academy of Music. To a Philadelphian, many of the names—Ridgway, Agnes Irwin, Tilghman—still have resonance at the beginning of the twenty-first century.²⁸

With more time to think about what it meant to produce and witness a Greek play, the middlebrow weeklies explored deeper motivations behind the audiences' enthusiasm. *Harper's Weekly* began its coverage of the play by connecting the social prestige of the play with the academic fortunes of Greek and the vogue for Greek culture:

When eight or ten colleges, through their presidents and professors, unite in getting up a Greek play more than two thousand years old, and the *beau monde* and *haut ton* flock to the performance, it does not look very much as if Greek were going out of favor. The fact seems to be that the paramount excellence of everything Greek was never so generally and so intelligently recognized as now.²⁹

The *Harper's Weekly* column went on to analyze the reasons for the appeal of the *Acharnians*. Audiences, the writer suggested, did not attend the Greek play to savor the language of ancient Greece or to gain deeper knowledge of a literary text or historical document. Instead, their motives might be called aesthetic and anthropological. They hoped for an example of Greek art and for insights into the human details and realities of life in ancient Greece:

A generation has come up to which art is as real a thing at least as literature, history, or language. We know, indeed, as little of Greek history as of any, and Greek literature is to most people only a name, and with the language they have by no means a speaking acquaintance, knowing it only to bow to, so to say. But Greek art is something tangible, and its supremacy is so transcendent that we gladly welcome any new chance better to understand the civilization from which it sprang. . . . [T]he real interest of the performance lies in its bringing the spectator, as has been said, right into the life of antiquity. One seems for the moment transported back to a time before time was,

²⁸ In 2003, Philadelphians will think of the Ridgway Library building (now part of The University of the Arts), the Agnes Irwin School, and a local legislator.

²⁹ *Harper's Weekly* (Nov. 20, 1886) 747. For an account of the development of this connection between Greek studies and a cultural and social elite, see C. Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (Baltimore 2002), esp. 98–157.

when all modern history and most of ancient history
was still an unopened book.

To Provost Pepper, Professor Easton, Dr. Klapp, Dr. Clarke, and the other leaders of the production, the Philadelphia *Acharnians* may have been a reproduction of an ancient Greek play "as archaeologically correct" as possible, "except where palpable departures are adopted, which the needs of the modern stage demand";³⁰ to the readers of *Harper's*, however, the details of archaeological reproduction mattered less than the experience of the play as a whole and the feeling that their dim notions of ancient Greece had suddenly become vivid. They cared little about whether the roof of the ancient stage building had been an acting area, or that the interior of Euripides' house was based on Roman interiors from Pompeii.³¹

It is hard to separate the motivation of those who came to be seen from that of those who came to see. The cultural prestige of neo-classicism, reinforced by the architecture, decoration, and popular literature of America after the Civil War, contributed to the attraction and success of the 1886 *Acharnians*.³² That cultural prestige is enough to account for the popular success of the production, but three lesser factors specific to the Gilded Age played a part.

Although classical learning had always been part of American high culture, in 1886 a new respect for professional classical scholarship added to the social cachet of the Pennsylvania students' production. Universities and the new institutions of scholarship were much in the news. *The Nation* reported on meetings of the American Philological Association, and *Harper's Weekly* covered events at the new American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The audiences for the *Acharnians*, also, or at least the college-educated gentlemen in them, could come to the play with some sense of familiarity with its language, which was a compulsory part of the undergraduate curriculum of nearly every college in the country.³³

Rivalry with European neo-classicism may also have been a factor. Reviewing a production of *Agamemnon* at Oxford six years

³⁰ W. H. Klapp to W. W. Goodwin, undated draft letter (Box UPS 68.2, folder 17, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania).

³¹ It was; Klapp to R. Smith, who painted the scenery (Box UPS 68.2, folder 17, Archives of the University of Pennsylvania). Persistent legend in Philadelphia has it that Thomas Eakins painted the scenery for the 1886 *Acharnians* and that Eadweard Muybridge did the cast photographs. I have found no evidence to support either claim. On the increasing importance of ancient art in American neo-classicism after 1870, see Winterer (above, n.29) 125–31.

³² See the essays collected in the Brooklyn Museum's *The American Renaissance 1876–1917* (New York 1979).

³³ Greek ceased to be required at Williams, for example, in 1894, at Columbia in 1897, at Yale in 1903, and at the University of Pennsylvania only in 1914. See L. R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago 1965) 118, 195, 234; and Cheyney (above, n.11) 366–67.

earlier, Basil Gildersleeve expressed the hope that the Oxford *Agamemnon* would "incite some of our young Grecians to a similar effort to make Greek life more truly our own."³⁴ Although one veteran of the Harvard *Oedipus* acknowledged that "had there been no *Agamemnon* at Oxford there would have been no *Oedipus* at Harvard,"³⁵ rivalry with British dramatic revivals does not seem to have been as strong a motive for the Philadelphia *Acharnians* as rivalry with Harvard. I can find no mention of the Cambridge *Birds* of 1883 in the documents surviving from the Philadelphia production. In the popular press, however, emulation of Britain remained a factor in the reception of the Philadelphia Aristophanes. "Only in a few instances," one paper said, "have such attempts been made in England, where classic traditions have more force than with us."³⁶

Finally, the play itself may have set a specifically political chord resonating with the audience of 1886. On May 6 Gildersleeve, again writing in *The Nation*, heralded the play and offered a suggestion:

If our civil war had left us much heart for joking while it was going on, we, too, might have had our "*Acharnians*," in which some Federal or Confederate borderer might have made a separate peace with the enemy and have regaled himself with tobacco or coffee, while his languishing countrymen had to put up with cabbage leaves or rye.³⁷

The same comparison occurred to a writer for a Philadelphia paper,³⁸ and the reviewer for *Harper's* followed suit:

It is much such a play as if an impresario of Copperhead predilections had chosen to bring upon the stage substitutes and contrabands, political major-generals and foreign emissaries, to discredit the national cause, to show up to the voting population the comforts of a state of peace and the inconveniences of a state of war.³⁹

Many in the audience of 1886 would have remembered the elements of these images; some, like the Confederate cavalryman who became Professor of Greek at the Johns Hopkins University,

³⁴ "The '*Agamemnon*' at Oxford," *The Nation* (June 24, 1880) 472.

³⁵ Norman (above, n.1) 17.

³⁶ Unlabeled newspaper clipping, Richards Papers, folder 1.

³⁷ *The Nation* (May 6, 1886) 379.

³⁸ "The hero of the comedy, '*Dikaiopolis*,' may be described as a 'Copperhead' of the period" (unlabeled newspaper clipping, Richards Papers, folder 19). During the American Civil War, the term "Copperhead" was used for a Northerner who sympathized with the Confederacy.

³⁹ *Harper's Weekly* (Nov. 20, 1886) 747.

would have remembered them well.⁴⁰ If they had forgotten, the famous cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg was just down the street.⁴¹

Neo-classicism can take various forms. In America of the 1880s, its manifestations ranged from Thomas Eakins' *Arcadia* reliefs and classically posed photographic experiments to the Kiralfy brothers' *Nero, or the Destruction of Rome*, a "gigantic, historical, biblical, dramatic and musical spectacle" produced on Staten Island to popular acclaim.⁴² Aristophanes, similarly, can serve diverse cultural purposes. Less than twenty-eight years before the *Acharnians* was revived in Philadelphia, two plays of Aristophanes were presented in Athens. One, a *Plutus* in Demotic translation produced by the impresario Sophokles Kanyades, was an instant commercial success and enjoyed a long run. The other was a student production of *Clouds* in Rankaves' formal Katharevousa translation. This production was intended to be a grand cultural event, part of the festivities surrounding the wedding of George, King of the Hellenes, and the Russian Princess Olga. The student cast was bolstered by professional actors, and an orchestra supplied Mendelssohn's music. The producers published a libretto so that the audience could follow the Katharevousa dialogue, which was "as unintelligible to them as the original ancient Greek."⁴³ Things did not go well. At the first and only performance on May 12, sheer boredom led the audience to riot, and police had to be called in. The disgruntled audience may have been expecting a comedy, not a reconstructed ancient monument.

The utter failure of the 1868 *Clouds* in Athens and the complete success of the 1886 *Acharnians* in Philadelphia measure the distance between the neo-classicisms of Othonian Greece and Gilded Age America and illuminate the reasons for the triumphal reception given the *Acharnians*. Everything that made *Clouds* a failure in Athens in 1868 made the *Acharnians* a success in Philadelphia eighteen years later. Middlebrow audiences in Philadelphia and New York could applaud what led a similar audience in Athens to riot: amateur actors, speaking a language known, if at all, only as the ghost of a memory from school, representing action that, as even a favorable review said, "has none of the features of comedy proper . . . scarcely a thread of human interest . . . and none of that dramatic quality which makes 'Antigone' or any other of Sophocles'

⁴⁰ On Gildersleeve's service in the Civil War, see W. W. Briggs, "Basil L. Gildersleeve," in W. W. Briggs and W. M. Calder III, eds., *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1990) 93–118, esp. 99.

⁴¹ Above, n.3.

⁴² M. Malamud, "The Imperial Metropolis: Ancient Rome in Turn-of-the-Century New York," *Arion* 3rd ser. 7.3 (2000) 63–108.

⁴³ G. A. H. Van Steen, *Venom in Verse: Aristophanes in Modern Greece* (Princeton 2000) 71.

tragedies, a perennially inspiring or absorbing play.”⁴⁴ Philadelphia was not Athens, after all, but only the Athens of America. In nineteenth-century Athens, neo-classicism came from Bavaria and seemed a foreign growth clumsily trained to imitate native stock. The Athenian audience in 1868 came to the official *Clouds* prepared for an alien experience, and their alienation led them to riot. In Philadelphia, revived, reconstructed Greeks are the only ones we have ever had. The Pennsylvania students’ *Acharnians* was as familiar, as artificial, and as respectable as the tricolons of the Gettysburg Address or the Corinthian columns on Old Christ Church.

III. Amateurs, Professionals, and the Invention of Classical Scholarship in America

To an American teacher or scholar of Greek at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Philadelphia *Acharnians*, especially in its New York manifestation, may seem to be some phenomenon of a lost golden age of classical studies. Imagine an audience of literati, glitterati, and power players, Harvard’s classics department, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Rudy Giuliani, trooping into Circle on the Square for an evening of anapests and aorists. It seems so unlikely. Where did we go wrong, to be expelled from this Eden of classical innocence and influence?

The answer is, of course, that American classical studies did not go wrong, because in 1886 they had hardly gone anywhere at all. The producers of the *Acharnians* were engaged in a fundamentally different enterprise from the professional classical scholars of today’s universities.

In 1886 the disciplinary apparatus of classical studies and modern professional academic life was only in its infancy, if indeed it existed at all. In the quarter-century following the Civil War, the idea of a research university organized along disciplinary lines emerged only gradually from debate about the appropriate place of collegiate studies in American life. Of the older universities, only Harvard under Charles W. Eliot seemed in 1886 to be moving toward the modern pattern. Yale under Noah Porter, Princeton under James McCosh, and Columbia under Frederick A. P. Barnard still adhered in varying degrees to the British traditions and amateur, humane, fundamentally classical curriculum of the old colleges. Daniel Coit Gilman’s ideas for a research-oriented, graduate institution, the Johns Hopkins University, remained an experiment anxiously watched and debated since its foundation in 1876. Stanford and the University of Chicago were still in the future when the *Acharnians* went on in Philadelphia. Departments and graduate schools came into being only gradually during the late 1880s and 1890s, although

⁴⁴ The New York *Tribune*, quoted in *The Philadelphia Press* (Nov. 20, 1886), Richards Papers, folder 19.

a few autonomous departments existed at Cornell and Johns Hopkins as early as 1880. (At the University of Pennsylvania in the 1880s, "department" referred to what nowadays would be called a school, like the "Department of Law," "Department of Medicine," or "College Department." The earliest department in the modern sense seems to have been the Biological Department, founded in 1882 as an outgrowth of the Department of Medicine.) Harvard's graduate school, founded in 1875, may have been as much an attempt to preempt graduate-oriented Johns Hopkins as a reflection of enthusiasm for advanced study and research; Penn's graduate school followed in 1882.⁴⁵ The American Philological Association, the nation's oldest learned society linked to an academic discipline, was only seventeen years old in 1886, and its original concept of "philology" still covered far more than what we now think of as classical studies.

It is thus not as remarkable as it may seem that no one connected with the Philadelphia *Acharnians* was what now would be recognized as a professional classicist. William Pepper and William H. Klapp were medical doctors, though neither practiced medicine, and academic administrators; Morton W. Easton was trained as a physician, taught French and Greek, and became Professor of English and Comparative Philology; Hugh Clarke was a musician. No one in the cast was a Greek major because there were no Greek majors, no department of classics, and indeed hardly any differentiation of undergraduate studies according to discipline, at the University of Pennsylvania in 1886.

After the New York performance, one headline described *Acharnians* as "a funny thing in short clothes—distinguished scholars in the audience." A distinction can in fact be drawn between the producers of the Philadelphia *Acharnians* and the scholars that they were careful to invite to their play. Gildersleeve, Harkness, Goodwin, and White all had taken their doctorates in Germany. In an important overview of the history of classical studies in America, William M. Calder III observes that "Gildersleeve's Göttingen doctorate of 1853 provides a date that changes things."⁴⁶ So it did, but the change did not take institutional form until Gildersleeve had returned to America, survived the Civil War, and been appointed Professor of Greek at Johns Hopkins. Between 1885, when Gildersleeve published his edition of Pindar's *Olympians*, and 1914, when John Williams White's edition of the scholia to Aristophanes' *Birds* appeared, German *Altertumswissenschaft* transformed classical studies in America.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ L. R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago 1965) 96.

⁴⁶ "Classical Scholarship in the United States: An Introductory Essay," in W. W. Briggs, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of North American Classicists* (Westport, Conn., 1994) xxvi. Harkness took his Ph.D. at Bonn in 1854, and Goodwin took his at Göttingen in 1855.

⁴⁷ Winterer (above, n.29) 152–57.

The effects of this transformation were both good and bad. Classical studies moved away from the dilettantism and gerund-grinding that had characterized American colleges before the Civil War. In 1819 Joseph Green Cogswell had compared American colleges "in all that relates to classical learning" to Prussian secondary schools, including the academy that would later educate Wilamowitz and Nietzsche: "[T]here is not one, from Maine to Georgia, which has yet sent forth a single first rate scholar; no, not one since the settlement of the country, equal even to the most ordinary of the thirty or forty, which come out every year from Schule Pforta, and Meissen."⁴⁸ Half a century later, this indictment was still true, but by 1900, American graduate schools were training Ph.D.'s whose accomplishments equaled those of their colleagues in Germany, and many American scholars had earned European reputations.

It is unfortunate, however, that the period of Germany's greatest influence on American classical studies coincided with the scholarly generation between August Böckh (1785–1867) and Wilamowitz (1848–1931), and that the dominant strand of German influence in that era can be traced to Göttingen, an institution that emphasized specialized study of minor details and neglected the comprehensive tradition of Böckh. From the 1880s until World War I, American classical scholars concentrated their efforts on concordances, editions of minor works, and narrowly focused grammatical study. Gildersleeve, who had heard Böckh's final lectures, is the exception that proves this generalization. The 1886 *Acharnians*, with classically educated gentlemen on the stage and specialized classical scholars in the audience, defines a moment of transition in American classical education.

In his review of the Oxford *Agamemnon*, Gildersleeve had suggested that such productions might heal the growing rift between "the hold that the great poets of antiquity have on the popular mind" and classical philology, the "deeper knowledge . . . vouchsafed only to those who make it a special study."⁴⁹ In 1886 that gap had just opened, but narrow though it was, it was not to be bridged. The mere presence of Gildersleeve, Goodwin, or Harkness added to the attractions of the evening for the society audiences of the *Acharnians* but did not induce many to ponder Dindorf's text or Dörpfeld's excavations, or to subscribe to *AJPh*. The classical specialists, on the other hand, were not moved to use their learning to create deeper understanding in the public mind of the hold that antiquity had, and continues to have, on our lives.

The early 1890s saw an academic boom. Enrollments expanded in existing colleges, and increasing numbers of colleges and uni-

⁴⁸ M. Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit 1984) 181. See also Winterer (above, n.29) 156.

⁴⁹ "The 'Agamemnon' at Oxford," *The Nation* (June 24, 1880) 472.

versities oriented toward research were founded; Clark, Stanford, and the University of Chicago, all founded between 1889 and 1892, exemplify this trend. The new institutions filled with undergraduates of a different kind, the sons—and increasingly, the daughters—of families who viewed collegiate education as a path upward in society and as preparation for success in business or professional life, not as an entitlement or as a necessary first step toward an assured social position, to which one's profession was an adjunct. By 1900, the old classical curriculum and its distinctive feature, compulsory Greek, had given way to the elective system, which served this new population and, coincidentally, allowed its teachers to focus their efforts on specialized research.⁵⁰ In the newly specialized, departmentalized American university, with its elective curriculum and prestigious graduate school, classical studies became one specialty among many. Its practitioners became specialists themselves, philologists or historians or epigraphists or papyrologists. The gap that Gildersleeve saw grew wider, as those with the “deeper knowledge . . . vouchsafed only to those who make [classical antiquity] a special study” talked more and more among themselves, and less and less to the “popular mind.”

As time passed, the audience of 1886, in which “every man . . . who in his youth ever groaned over a Latin or Greek grammar looked upon the faces of Professors Goodwin and Harkness and was awed,” as the reviewer put it,⁵¹ ceased to exist. Between 1904 and 1914, thirty-two American colleges or universities gave fifty-one revivals of ancient Greek plays; sixteen of these productions were given in Greek, at ten different institutions. Between 1915 and 1925, only three institutions gave six productions in Greek; seventeen others gave twenty-four plays in English translation.⁵² The University of Pennsylvania put on *Iphigeneia in Tauris* in 1903. To the best of my knowledge, its students have not produced a Greek play in Greek since. The 1886 *Acharnians*, played in Greek, infused by careful attention to philological detail and archaeological accuracy, produced by amateur actors who had been made to study Greek and amateur classicists who loved their subject and knew it well, represents the end of one era and the beginning of another in American classical education.

The Episcopal Academy
Classical World 96.3 (2003)

LEE T. PEARCY
 lpearcy@ea1785.org

⁵⁰ Veysey (above, n.45) 264–68.

⁵¹ See above p.300 and n.5.

⁵² Pluggé (above, n.21) 107–10.