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Preface (Special Issue, The Greeks Institute)

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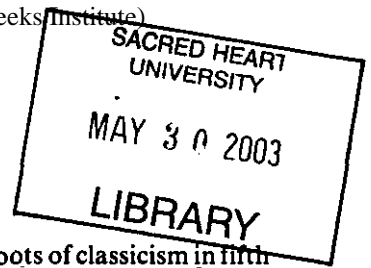
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Cover Page Footnote

Articles based on The Greeks Institute, a series of lectures presented to secondary school teachers in the Bridgeport Public Schools during the spring of 1989. Co-sponsored by the Connecticut Humanities Council, Sacred Heart University, and the Bridgeport Public Schools.



Preface

The essays in this selection explore the roots of classicism in fifth century B.C. Greece. The articles are based on *The Greeks Institute*, a series of lectures presented to secondary school teachers in the Bridgeport Public Schools during the spring of 1989. Co-sponsored by the Connecticut Humanities Council, Sacred Heart University, and the Bridgeport Public Schools, the purpose of the institute has been to provide teachers with an interdisciplinary exploration of classical Greece for the purposes of professional enrichment and curriculum development. The institute will culminate with teachers and their students attending *The Greeks*, a lecture/performance presented by the Humanities Touring Group that brings the glories of classical Greece to life on the stage.

The essays in this collection, drawn from the disciplines of art and architecture, history, literature and drama, philosophy, and religious studies, explore the origins, dominant manifestations, and influence of the Greek classical phenomenon. Representing the implications of current research on our understanding of Greek classicism, the essays are intended to provide a context for a renewed understanding of the period. Taken together, they illustrate the emphasis on the community and the state in the Greek world, as represented by the political structure of the city states, the communal role of sacrifice in religious ritual, and the theme of conflict between the state and the individual in many tragedies such as Sophocles' *Antigone*. The clarity, simplicity, and restraint associated with Greek classicism are brought out in the discussions of philosophy, religion, drama, and art and architecture, providing a rounded view of these qualities at their height in the fifth century B.C.

While Greek classicism has most often been associated with the qualities of excellence, simplicity, restraint, and balance of form, perhaps most invigorating for the modern consciousness is the gusto, the love of life ubiquitous in all of its aspects. The lusty wars and heroic adventures of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the quest for truth and the meaning of life by Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, the life-like sculptures of Phidias, the intensity of the *agon* experienced by Euripides' *Medea* — all speak to us today of an appreciation for this world that somehow still lives.

Indeed, the essays bring out what is perhaps one of the most astounding characteristics of the Greek classical period: its continued presence in and influence upon subsequent cultures. This is perhaps most obviously present in art and architecture; Roch-Josef di Lisio's essay on that subject traces a recurring cycle of classical impulses from the fifth century B.C. through the Renaissance, the eighteenth-century neoclassical or Augustan period, and the early nineteenth-century Classic Revival encouraged by Napoleon, to the present. Buildings with the classic Greek columns and pediment can be found in most American cities such as Bridgeport to this day. Thomas Curran's essay also points out the classical Greek influence latent in the American political structure, in questions of educational philosophy, and in the Judeo-Christian western religious sensibility as well. Furthermore, literature today still utilizes terms and genres first developed by the Greeks and codified by Aristotle and other Greek literary theorists. Even as we struggle to cope with the modern world and express its ambiguities and complexities in our own terms, Greek classicism remains as an enduring human cultural impulse. Thus, it is appropriate that the final essay, by Dale Woodiel, discusses the techniques of communicating an understanding of this phenomenon to today's high-school students.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Sidney Gottlieb, editor of the *Sacred Heart University Review*, in giving over an entire issue to *The Greeks Institute*. I am grateful for the participation of the Institute's lecturers: Thomas Curran, Roch-Josef di Lisio, Sidney Gottlieb, Richard Grigg, John Jalbert, Robin McAllister, and Dale Woodiel. Co-director James Betz, Supervisor of English for the Bridgeport Public Schools, has exemplified for me the qualities of cooperation and enthusiasm, and the lectures would not have moved forward as smoothly and productively as they have done without his efforts. As always, however, the key component in the success of the institute has been the teachers who have participated in it. To them and to their students, who will carry forward the classical impulse in whatever its newest manifestations turn out to be, this issue of the *Sacred Heart Review* is dedicated.

Judith Davis Miller
Director, The Greeks Institute