

Greek literature offers tragedy, sex, drama, war

Why are "The Iliad," "The Odyssey," and "The Aeneid" worth reading? Why, out of all the books in our many Eugene bookstores, should the works of Homer and Virgil be bought over Tom Clancy or Stephen King's latest bestsellers?

Ultimately, ancient epics are menus for all tastes. They have the elegance of Jane Austen with the scandal of Jerry Springer. They wield the grace and suspense of Hitchcock with the gore of "Braveheart" and "Saving Private Ryan." They tell one story and yet encompass every story ever told. They are masterpieces and have lasted this long for a reason.

When I first read "The Iliad," between the words, in the white of the pages, I saw greedy Agamemnon and proud Achilles argue in the firelight over a woman. The thick clouds of dust on the battlefield made me choke. The gross, festering spear wounds made my stomach clench. And my eyes squinted under that merciless blaze of the sun that beat down on the men of Ilium. The imagery alone is worth reading these epics, but there is so much more.

Imagine a man well in his 40s, wealthy and famous, who bemoans a fate of adventure-hopping around the world, constantly being seduced by goddesses who

GUEST COMMENTARY

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make Victoria's Secret underwear models look plain — and all because the one he really wants is his wife at home.

This is Odysseus.

Imagine a war as horrific and terrible as any other, lasting 10 interminable years. And how does this war begin? Because one of bin Laden's groupies abducts Dick Cheney's wife, who in this scenario just happens to be the most beautiful woman in the world.

This is the beginning of "The Iliad."

Imagine a strong, intelligent and beautiful woman. She is the founder and leader of an empire, and she torches a massive pile of the things her boyfriend forgot to pack on his way out the door, all because his excuse is, "But baby, I gotta go or else Zeus is gonna get ticked."

This is Dido.

One of the greatest tragedies of life is when we begin to view things as either beneath or beyond us. The world is too fascinating and our minds are too capable for either.

Yet, so many people look at the stories of Ancient Greece and

Rome as boring, dated or too difficult to decipher. The language is a path, not a wall, and for each of the epics there are many different translations to fit personal reading style preferences.

As unlikely as it may seem, there may come a time when many of the brightest literary stars of our age will fade. While Jack Ryan slowly disappears to the land of "unheardof" and even the mighty towers of Hogwarts begin to crumble, Achilles will still shout his war cry over the din of battle.

Odysseus will still chill on the beach with the lotus-eaters, and Aeneas will time and again mesmerize his African queen. These epics have lasted for thousands of years, and they will last much longer. Ultimately, it is an eerie and humbling feeling to know that the stories and characters in these classics endure before and after this age.

The classics are worth reading because they existed before my life, my family, my country and the world as I know it came to be. The classics are worth reading because they will no doubt still exist after my life, my family, my country and the world as I know it all end.

Georgia Billingsley is a freelance columnist. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Readings

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holding its Women's Poetry Slam at 7 p.m. Aug. 5. This is an opportunity for those who like to read their own works aloud while also getting to listen to the poetry of other local authors.

Chinosole and Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown are also scheduled to visit Mother Kali's.

Chinosole, a San Francisco scholar, activist and author of

"African Diaspora and Autobiographies," is scheduled to come to the bookstore for a reading, discussion and slide show 7 p.m. Aug. 6.

Scheduled for the same time, Billingslea-Brown, civil rights movement veteran and author of "Crossing Borders Through Folklore: African American Women's Fiction and Art," will also read.

Addressing controversial issues with flair, Arlene Stein will hit the highlights of her book, "The Stranger Next Door," 7 p.m.

Aug. 20, which details the struggle between local community members and the OCA.

For the pleasure of a poetry reading along with the delight of music, drinks and food, Cozmic Pizza presents the Celtic Jam every Thursday. Today's event features the Fiannel Cats' music from 6:30 to 8 p.m. followed by Claudia Lapp's poetry reading and an open mic. The event is free.

Contact the reporter at jillandaley@dailyemerald.com.



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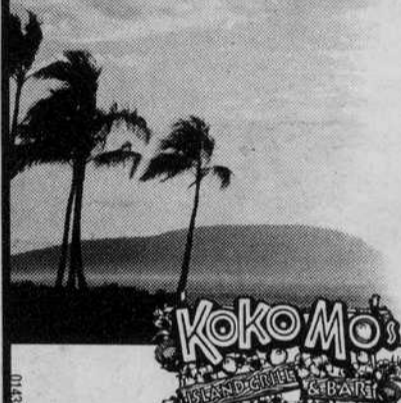
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