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Ancient to Modern; The Loeb Classical Library goes digital

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Chemistry and Physics Get Million from Loeb, blared the Harvard Crimson headline. Funds will modernize laboratory facilities and establish chemistry chairs. The donor: scientist Morris Loeb '83. A million dollars is indeed generous. But on the Harvard scale, did it really warrant a Crimson headline?

The answer is yes given that Morris Loeb graduated not in 1983 but in 1883. In today's dollars, his gift (received in 1953, upon the death of his widow) would be worth almost \$9 million. A distinguished chemist and scion of a wealthy New York banking family, he was a philanthropist of both Jewish and non-Jewish institutions. Although wildly generous, he had some odd habits, such as hiding thousand-dollar bills under the wallpaper. Sadly, he died at 49 of typhoid, contracted from an oyster he ate at a chemical society convention. Reform Jews especially of this period, and especially those born in Cincinnati had no restrictions against eating shellfish.

What is the connection between Morris Loeb, the eccentric but brilliant scientist, and the Loeb Classical Library, a collection of more than 520 Greek and Latin volumes published by Harvard University Press and now entering its digital age? Morris's strong-willed decision to go into chemistry instead of joining the family investment-banking business reportedly led to increased pressure on his younger brother James (Harvard '88) to become part of Kuhn, Loeb & Co. with their father, Solomon. James, a sensitive lover of literature and music and a gifted cellist, reluctantly gave up a potential career as an archaeologist or a classicist to join the family business. But he never lost his love of Greek and Latin. And one result of his thwarted passion for antiquity was his decision to create the Loeb Classical Library in 1911.

He provided the inspiration for the series the idea of having a facing page of English translation for each page of Greek or Latin text and the financial backing, putting together an international team of scholars to move the project forward. The first 20 books appeared in 1912.

The Loeb Classical Library, spanning the classical corpus from Homer in the eighth century b.c.e. to Boethius in the sixth century c.e., has long been useful for several purposes. First, for scholars who need or want to read a Greek or Roman text but may not have the time or training to wade through the original, the presence of the Greek or Latin on the left side of the page makes it possible to see at a glance the exact terminology used by the author. Second, if someone is researching a broad topic, the Loeb's are handy for looking up a geographical, grammatical, or mythological reference in an obscure ancient author's works. Third, for students doing their Greek or Latin homework, the Loeb's provide a shortcut way of translating a difficult passage without looking up all the vocabulary and parsing all the grammar.

Now, the Loeb Classical Library is about to become much more useful, having taken a great step forward: The entire

collection has been digitized. You can now read any Loeb text online. You can view the Greek page, the Latin page, and the English page. You can search for specific English, Latin, or Greek words in a single author, multiple authors, or across the entire corpus. Do you want to know where the word tyrant appears in classical literature? You can search for the English word, the Greek word tyrannos, or the Latin word tyrannus. For searching Greek texts, the site is equipped with a virtual Greek keyboard that easily drops down on the screen. The user can make notes, highlight passages, and share them with others.

The digital Loeb Classical Library will be a transformative experience for professionals doing research and provide everyone else with a wonderful buffet of reading to browse.

Here is an example. In the summer of 1976, while my husband was working for the senatorial primary campaign of Daniel Patrick Moynihan against Bella Abzug and others, I was researching the topic of bee and honey imagery in Greek and Latin poetry. Because we had moved to New York temporarily, subletting an apartment with a mouse who lived next to the toaster, I had lost access to my university library and had to borrow a relative's library card to sneak into the NYU library. To find references to the words bee and honey in ancient texts, it was necessary to search laboriously through indexes and concordances of individual authors in actual books. If the book was not on the shelf, I would have to go to the public library on 42nd Street and submit requests for the book to be brought to me that is, if the librarians could find it.

Today, I would sit down at a computer, go to the Loeb Classical Library's website, input my account information, and simply type in the search terms. Then I would read the passages on my computer monitor. This would not guarantee a brilliant analysis of the material, of course, but it would grant me access to texts I don't own and might never have thought of searching.

Digitization is great, but I suspect that more than a few Weekly Standard readers number among those book lovers who say, I have trouble reading books on a screen, and I miss the tangible experience of turning the pages of a real book. So, as we salute the digitization of the Loeb Classical Library some 102 years after its first volume appeared (Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*), let's pause to reflect on the physical aspects of the books themselves, qualities that have made the brand so recognizable and uniquely appealing. Even with their new online life as searchable texts, the Loeb's will continue to be produced as hardcover books, suitable for gifts: \$26 each (or take advantage of the 25 percent discount and buy the complete set for \$10,140!).

The Loeb's are a conveniently small size, originally conceived by James Loeb as the right shape to fit into a gentleman's pocket. With their bright red and green dust jackets and cloth bindings red for Rome, green for Greece the Loeb's are easy to spot from a distance. Indeed, they have become something of a design statement, having appeared as part of Mr. Burns's library in *The Simpsons*, in Pottery Barn ads for bedroom decor, and as part of a red-themed room designed by Martha Stewart, stacked next to a 1930s Chippendale-style fish tank.

Years ago, as I was browsing in a magazine with photos of a beach cottage designed by Martha Stewart, I saw a white room with low shelves containing uniform rows of green-jacketed Loeb's. It was beautiful, although a waste of good literature that would never be read by the home's owners. I tore out the magazine page and sent it to one of my favorite professors in the Harvard classics department, Zeph Stewart. I suspected that he would be interested, not only because he shared a last name with Martha (no relation, he said) but also because among his many other appointments Stewart was executive trustee of the Loeb Classical Library.

During his trusteeship (1973-2004) Stewart also served as master of Harvard's Lowell House for 12 years, department chairman for 5 years, president of the American Philological Association (now the Society for Classical Studies) for 1 year, and director of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington for 7 years. He was the younger brother of Justice Potter Stewart and, as I was to learn in 2007 from his obituary, had served in Army Intelligence during World War II, using his knowledge of Japanese to work on code-breaking. Of course, he was too modest to discuss this with his students.

Zeph Stewart's stewardship of the Loeb Classical Library for more than 30 years was recognized during his lifetime in a particularly appropriate way, by naming a typeface after him. Harvard University Press (HUP) discusses this on its website:

These fonts have been used in all volumes produced since 1995, and also on the new digital site. Yet I wish Stewart were still alive to explain a small mystery: While the green and red dust jackets feature a tasteful black-and-white meander pattern on the front, there are some older volumes that were produced with a light-colored dust jacket. Instead of the meander, these dust jackets display a border of tiny swastikas, pointing in the clockwise, Nazi direction.

I haven't been able to ascertain when these particular volumes were first printed. My own collection of Loeb's includes three of these oddball editions: a Horace printed in 1952, a Xenophon from 1956, and a Plato from 1962. I had never looked closely enough to notice the swastikas until I began research for this essay. There are at least 10 different volumes with this type of dust jacket advertised on used-book websites, with print dates as early as 1928 (a volume of Cicero) and continuing on through the 1930s and '40s and into the '50s.

Current HUP representatives are not sure when or why there was a switch to the covers with the swastika pattern, although it clearly happened during the long period when the London publisher, Heinemann, was in charge of production. The design was probably just chosen to evoke the theme of classical antiquity. One must keep in mind that the swastika was widely used in art for more than 5,000 years and regarded as a symbol of good luck in late-19th-century and early-20th-century Europe, particularly after Heinrich Schliemann discovered it on objects unearthed in the ruins of Troy. The Nazis adopted the symbol in 1920 as a way of asserting their connection with the hypothetical Aryan race of early Europe, but the swastika was used in Europe as a respectable symbol for a while after that, appearing, for example, on the British Boy Scouts' Medal of Merit until 1934, when protests led to its being removed. Rudyard Kipling also prominently displayed the swastika as a good luck symbol on his books until the Nazi era, at which point he requested that it no longer be employed.

Given the heightened awareness of who the Nazis were, at least by the mid-1930s, why was this dust-jacket design used for decades? And as for HUP, although it did not completely take over production of the Loeb's till 1989, did they not notice, as late as 1962, that they were still selling books with swastikas on the dust jackets?

This small enigma illustrates how much interesting history the Loeb Classical Library has seen in its lifetime of more than a century. World War I broke out just two years after the founding of the series, but the hostilities seem not to have had a measurable effect on the production of editions, with 54 volumes published during 1914-18. James Loeb, who had recurring episodes of depression and reportedly was treated by Sigmund Freud, suffered a breakdown between 1917 and 1921. He later married the widow who had been his nurse during this period. Upon his death in 1933, he left a \$300,000 bequest to Harvard (\$5 million in today's dollars) to complete the collection and support classical research. Harvard designated HUP to oversee the series, which in turn chose Heinemann in London to continue manufacturing and distributing the volumes.

New editions continued to be created at a slow pace during World War II, but for obvious reasons, it wasn't easy to ship them across the Atlantic to the United States. HUP details the hardships suffered by the series during the war drama only a bibliophile could truly appreciate: As prospects for England looked increasingly grim, the press's business manager ordered 122,675 volumes to be shipped to America. A U-boat sank one ship with more than 9,000 books on board. The rest arrived safely, yet danger remained for those volumes left behind:

Following this near-death experience something that the digitization process will make almost unimaginable the series went into a period of torpor and decline. Heinemann withdrew from its arrangement with Harvard, and the original chief editors retired. With few new editions coming out (35 were published in the 1950s and 32 in the 1960s, but only 18 in the 1970s and 11 in the 1980s), it must have been at this time that the library began to acquire its reputation as something of a laughingstock among classicists.

Although helpful in a pinch, the translations were often woefully dated, with English that belonged to what one might call the damsel school of discourse. Poetry fared worst. Take these lines from the World War I-era translation of Euripides by A.S. Way, not revised until the 1990s:

And the response: Dull-witted are we clowns, I gainsay not: / Yet none the less I bring thee welcome news.

As you can imagine, this type of dialogue did not encourage students to choose to read Euripides in the Loeb edition. Thankfully, David Kovacs now a professor at the University of Virginia but, coincidentally, during his graduate school years, the high school Latin teacher of the editor of this magazine has completely reworked the six Loeb volumes of Euripides' tragedies. Aristophanes' comedies have been freshly edited and translated by the accomplished scholar Jeffrey Henderson, who is also the general editor of the Loeb Classical Library. Likewise, the other Greek and Roman tragic and comic plays have been overhauled.

Then there was the problem of expurgated texts in the older volumes originally prompted by obscenity laws in the United States and Great Britain but not revisited for far too long. Revisions began in about 1968 for some authors, but Aristophanes' explicit language had to wait 30 more years to be translated properly. Suetonius' account of the Emperor Tiberius' amorous exploits with children the infamous minnows was not even rendered into English lest it sully readers' minds. The English translation in my 1914 Loeb Suetonius suddenly (and without comment) switches to Latin for a page-and-a-half until the objectionable passages are over. (I refer the curious to sections 43 and 44.) This volume, too, has recently been revised for modern audiences, and the sordid details have been revealed in English.

In 1989, the series began to shake off its fusty past. Its guiding scholars ramped up the publication schedule with a goal of adding additional authors to the Loeb list and revising or completely revamping both the texts and translations of many previously published volumes at a pace of approximately four to five volumes a year.

Now is the crowning moment. The digitized Loeb Classical Library will enable anyone with a computer or proximity to a public, academic, or even secondary school library to have access to its entire scope of classical literature. For a reasonable price (\$195 a year for the first year and \$65 for succeeding years), individuals can set up a private account. You no longer need to be a member of that exclusive class a university student or a professor with access to an academic library to be able to look up passages in a random speech of Cicero, or to find an obscure archaeological reference in the travelogue of Pausanias.

Most public libraries in larger American cities have been doing their best to provide readers with books from the series, generally listing between 200 and 300 volumes of Loeb's in their catalogues. New York's system boasts 528 a high and Washington, D.C., clocks in as a loser at 35. It's understandable that a library with a limited budget might hesitate to invest in many Loeb volumes; but now, digitization will allow them to take the plunge and make the entire corpus of classical literature accessible.

Accessibility and inclusion would be pleasing words to James Loeb. In his lifetime, he championed inclusiveness at what would become the Juilliard School of Music, where his 1904 endowment required that students of both sexes be accepted without regard to race, color, or creed a more liberal approach than was common in conservatories at the time.

Even for a wealthy Jew of German origin, the academic world wasn't particularly welcoming around the turn of the 20th century: One source describes Loeb as having been discouraged from pursuing an academic career by a well-meaning mentor who made him aware of the difficulty for Jews to succeed in archaeology.

Whether or not that story is accurate, it is certainly true that Harvard didn't hire any Jewish full professors until Harry Levin in 1939 some 300 years after the school's founding. The near-exceptions prove the rule: Judah Monis, who taught Hebrew at Harvard from 1722 to 1760 but was not allowed to join the faculty until he converted to Christianity, and Harry Wolfson, for whom the condition of becoming a professor was to find funding for his salary from outside sources. Wolfson was able to join Harvard as a tenured professor in 1925 only because of an endowment from a fellow Jewish alumnus of a previous generation, Lucius N. Littauer.

Elsewhere in the Ivy League, another Jewish classicist, Harry Caplan of Cornell, did persevere in his quest to become a classics professor despite a letter from four professors written in 1919, found in his desk years later, after his death:

While the absence of Jewish professors at Harvard continued, the percentage of Jewish students grew from about 7 percent in 1900 to 21 percent in 1922. In reaction, President A. Lawrence Lowell proposed setting a quota of 15 percent for Jewish admissions. Like the professors who wrote the letter to Harry Caplan, Lowell was supposedly motivated by solicitude for the Jewish students themselves, as he explained: The anti-Semitic feeling among the students is increasing, and it grows in proportion to the increase in the number of Jews. If their number should become 40 percent of the student body, the race feeling would become intense. Although the direct quota proposal failed, Lowell did succeed in decreasing the number of Jewish students by changing entrance requirements and imposing geographic quotas for admission.

Despite the aura of exclusion that had surely increased since his time at Harvard, James Loeb somehow retained his love of his alma mater and of the classics. After retiring young, he moved to Europe, where he lived for most of his life. His debilitating periods of depression did not prevent him from remaining active in the world of the arts and sciences: Besides his benefaction to the future Juilliard, he also gave generously to the Harvard music department, the New York Philharmonic, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, a psychiatric research institute in Munich, and that city's State Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, to which he donated roughly 800 bronzes and vases. He also gave a collection of pottery to Harvard's Fogg Museum and founded the Charles Eliot Norton Memorial Lecture Fund.

For the first volumes of the Loeb Classical Library, James Loeb wrote A Word About Its Purpose and Its Scope. The mission is notably one of inclusion:

General editor Jeffrey Henderson predicts that the digitization project, which has cost the Loeb Classical Library Foundation \$1 million, will serve as a model for the digitization of other HUP series, noting, It's strange that the oldest literature becomes the model for the digital age. All 521 volumes of the digital series, Henderson points out, will now fit into one coat pocket. James Loeb would be happy.

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