

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
JOHN J. WINKLER
(1943 - 1990)

John J. Winkler, Professor of Classics, a leading interpreter of ancient Greek and Roman culture and an indefatigable activist for feminist, gay, and minority causes on college campuses, died April 25, 1990, in Stanford, California, of complications arising from AIDS. He was 46 years old.

Born August 11, 1943, in St. Louis, Missouri, Jack (as he was known to his friends) attended St. Louis University from 1960 to 1963, where he produced a text and translation of the *Carmen de Algorismo* from a study of five Vatican Library manuscripts. Upon graduation he declined a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to join the Benedictine order. He trained at St. Lawrence's Abbey in Ampleforth, England, until 1966, returning to teach at the St. Louis Priory until 1970. In that year he left the Benedictines and entered the doctoral program in Classics at the University of Texas, Austin, where a revolt against the exclusively philological study of classical texts was then in progress, centered around the counter-cultural classical journal *Arion*. Jack's 1974 dissertation entitled *In Pursuit of Nymphs: Comedy and Sex in Nonnos' "Tales of Dionysos"* earned him a Ph.D. from Texas and an assistant professorship at Yale. In 1979 he left Yale for Stanford University. He was the first Stanford faculty member to hold two Internal Fellowships at the Stanford Humanities Center; he also received Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

Jack's publishing career lasted barely a decade, but in that time he wrote three books and nineteen articles, co-edited and co-authored four other books, and translated a late Greek novel and assorted fragments. His work revolutionized several fields of classical studies, promoted a variety of feminist, anthropological, narratological, and theoretical approaches to the study of Greek and Latin texts, and made a major contribution to both lesbian and gay male studies. Many classicists regard him as the most brilliant and original classical scholar of his generation.

Jack's work distinguished itself from traditional classical scholarship by its avoidance of a high-culture approach to the ancient texts and by its refusal of an authoritarian or mandarin style of academic writing. He was interested in popular, marginal, and non-canonical literature, such as folk narratives, melodramas, magical spells, and dream-books. Even his interpretation of the more dignified literary forms emphasized the different meanings they held for various groups within the local communities which produced them. "Our current intellectual interest," he once wrote, "is not to pay allegiance to the values of [the classical Athenian male elite] (and thus indirectly to support its equivalent in our own society)... Rather, we would like to make some statements about [the] social conglomerate which manage both to

characterize the fundamental conventions or protocols [of personal behavior in classical Athens] and to show the limits of their application to real lives." To that end, Jack tried to substitute for the history of ideas a semiotic and anthropological history of social practices.

His first book, a collection of essays on later Greek literature co-edited with Gordon Williams, appeared in 1982. In *Auctor & Actor* (1985), he proposed to read Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, a tale of religious conversion, as one might read a detective story in which the author's literary gamesmanship valorizes the reader's ingenuity. "If I am right in my contention that *The Golden Ass* deliberately lacks key elements of authorization," he concluded, "and that it resembles a set of games for readers to play, provoking them to decide, and if my *Auctor & Actor* has in its own ludicrous way aided you in playing those games, then the last word belongs neither to Apuleius nor to me but to you." The book gave rise, in fact, to an entire school of interpretation of the ancient novel and of late antique religion, and in 1989 it won the Goodwin Award of Merit—the American Philological Association's annual award for the best book in the field of classical scholarship published in the preceding three years.

After learning in the spring of 1987 that he had contracted AIDS, Jack somehow increased the pace and intensity of his work. His next book, *Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990), a collection of essays, championed an ethnographic approach to Greek sexual conventions, an approach informed by recent theoretical and practical advances in feminist anthropology. Jack sought to demonstrate the limited scope and selective enforcement of Greek sexual morality and to document the element of bluff that accompanied many ancient pronouncements about sex and gender. He wrote a detailed study of Sappho's lesbianism and he showed how Greek woman resisted or evaded the brutal pressures of ancient patriarchy, sometimes managing to claim for themselves and their lives a measure of real or spiritual autonomy. Finally, in *Rehearsals of Manhood*, which Jack completed a few weeks before his death and which may prove to be the most influential of all his works, he advanced a major reinterpretation of the social meanings of classical Athenian drama, arguing that tragedy and comedy should be seen alongside cockfighting, hunting, dancing, and martial arts as social performances through which the Greeks fashioned, codified, compared, and criticized styles of masculinity. Two collections of essays which he co-edited, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* and *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, appeared in 1990; an edition and translation of the extant fragments of the ancient Greek novels, done in collaboration with his Stanford colleague Susan Stephens, is scheduled to be published in 1991.

Jack was not only a scholar. He was also a tireless, intrepid, and effective political activist, especially for feminist and gay causes within the academy. While an assistant professor at Yale, he helped to found a women's studies program at the university, and in 1977 he was one of the chief organizers (and the only faculty

organizer) of Gay Rights Week, one of the first week-long campus programs addressing lesbian and gay concerns that have now become common on the nation's campuses. Jack continued to work for a variety of women's and minority interests while at Stanford. When the George Segal sculpture representing "Gay Liberation" was vandalized and removed from its location, he and three others posed together, imitating the postures of the missing plaster figures. When he was diagnosed with AIDS, he used his own case to educate the Stanford community about the disease through a series of public interviews in the *Stanford Daily*. He proposed establishing a Lesbian and Gay Caucus within the American Philological Association (it was founded in December, 1989) and, when he was dying, he specified that a portion of his estate be used to endow a prize in his memory for the best undergraduate or graduate paper in a risky or marginal field of classics. He donated half of the royalties from *Constraints of Desire* to the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

It is not easy to convey what Jack was like as a person to those who did not have the pleasure of knowing him. Still harder to convey is the magical quality of his presence, which led people who had met him only once and very briefly to remember him thereafter with vividness, affection, and even awe. His complete openness, his warmth, his personal humility, his gutsy, direct, and unapologetic advocacy for his beliefs, his love of storytelling, his playfulness, his vast erudition, his total lack of pretentiousness, and an utter transparency of motive that seemed to collapse any distance between surfaces and depths of his personality, making you feel whenever you were talking to him that you were in the full presence of the whole person – all these qualities emerge to varying degrees in his writing, and that is where both those who knew him and those who did not can still find refreshment in the magic of his presence.

Though his life was tragically short, Jack's achievements as a scholar will have a powerful influence on many areas of classical studies for generations to come; and both his discipline and the larger world of university life are the better for his enlightened and effective social activism. He will not be forgotten.

Mark Edwards
Marsh McCall
Susan Stephens

A John J. Winkler Memorial Trust has been established. Donations to the trust may be sent to Prof. David M. Halperin, Trustee, Department of Classics, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305-2080.