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A NEW TRANSLATION OF 'THE ODYSSEY' COMES TO THE CORE CURRICULUM

By Eve Glasberg

Emily Wilson first encountered *The Odyssey* as an eight-year-old, when she played the goddess Athena in a kid-friendly production of Homer's epic Greek poem in Oxford, England.

She was captivated by Odysseus' struggle to survive after the Trojan War and return home to his long-suffering wife, Penelope. At Oxford University she studied classics and philosophy and earned her Ph.D. in classics and comparative literature at Yale. She is now a professor of classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

Her decades-long passion for the second-oldest foundational poem in the Western literary canon culminated in her becoming the first woman to translate it into English.

"All translations are interpretations, so of course it matters that I'm a woman."

And last fall, her decidedly feminist and modern take on the classic text, published in 2017, was added to Columbia's Core Curriculum, which will celebrate its centennial in the 2019-2020 academic year.

"All translations are interpretations, so of course it matters that I'm a woman," said Wilson. "Social identities, including gender identities, matter for any kind of interpretive work. Being a historian, a scholar, a journalist or a translator is a development of who you are, what your embodied state is, what your personal histories might be."

There have been more than 60 English translations of the Homeric work since the first, in 1615, by poet and dramatist George Chapman. Since 1967, Columbia students used a version by Richard Lattimore.

"Wilson's translation is utterly fresh, exciting, moving and new," said Julie Crawford, the Mark Van Doren Professor of Humanities, who was involved in the decision to use the new translation in the Core Curriculum.

"Why is it so important that Wilson is a she?" asked Joanna Stalnaker, the Paul Brooke Program Chair for Literature Humanities. "There's a sense of the epic as a masculine genre and Homer's status as the pinnacle of that genre. With Wilson, it's a question of whose stories get told, whose voices are listened to. This is all so central now, not only to the *Odyssey*, but also to our own political moment with the Me Too movement."

Wilson's version stakes out new territory from its very first line. The poem starts, "Tell me about a complicated man." The Greek word that she translated as "complicated" is *polytropos*, one of Homer's regular epithets for Odysseus, which literally means "many turned" or "much turning." It connotes his duplicity, his cunning and suffering, his wanderings, what he does and what is done to him on his journey home.

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'THE JUSTICE IVY'



Professor Bernard E. Harcourt Is at the Center of Columbia's Focus on Justice

By Sabina Lee and Gary Shapiro

When Bernard E. Harcourt, the Isidor and Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science, was introduced at a book launch event on campus last year, one participant quipped: "We wonder how much sleep he gets," recalls Seyla Benhabib, a Yale philosophy professor who is currently a visiting professor at the Law School.

"This year I've been doing it in reserve shifts," Harcourt said later. He recently postponed an overdue academic leave.

Harcourt, who joined Columbia in 2014, is per-

petually busy. He has just published a new book—his seventh in English; two more are in French,

"There is an amazing critical mass across all the departments and schools that really has the potential to make us the justice Ivy."

which he speaks fluently. In 2017, he assumed leadership of the Eric H. Holder Initiative for Civil and

Political Rights at Columbia College, a post he holds while simultaneously running his own Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought.

He travels regularly to Alabama, where he has represented a death row inmate in a long-running capital punishment case and another prisoner serving life imprisonment without parole. And then there's his teaching at the Law School, the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, and the College, as well as blogging and advising his students.

"There are a lot of moving pieces," he said. But the clear through line is his deep commitment to social justice and critical theory.

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BRAIN SCIENCE MAY REINVENT CRIMINAL LAW

By Carla Cantor

Are psychopaths with damaged brains responsible for their crimes? Can neuroscience support alternative and less punitive responses to crime?

These are the questions of neurolaw—an emerging field at the intersection of neuroscience and law—that Federica Coppola, one of the Presidential Scholars in Society and Neuroscience at Columbia, has made the focus of her work. A former criminal lawyer in her native Italy, she investigates how neuroscience research has been applied in the past and could be used to revise criminal law doctrines, theories of punishment and correctional practices.

"New technologies, such as neuroimaging and other techniques, have advanced our understanding of how the brain shapes human behavior," said Coppola, who is in her second year of the three-year University fellowship. "These tools already have entered the legal system, but with them come complex questions about the value of using brain-based evidence to determine criminal responsibility, sentencing and an individual's capacity for rehabilitation."

Coppola is exploring how neuroscientific links between the brain, emotions, social influences and behavior might be used to reform restrictive and retributive approaches to crime.

"Scientific research demonstrates that the human brain is plastic, that it can change even in adulthood in response to new stimuli and changing environments," she said.

Conversely, social isolation has been found to suppress the growth of new



Federica Coppola

brain cells. Coppola cites studies in which mice placed in isolation underwent severe structural and functional brain changes that led to high levels of aggression and detachment from their environment. Such findings, she said, may provide critical empirical support for challenging correctional practices like solitary confinement and other harsh forms of incarceration.

Coppola's cross-disciplinary approach fulfills the vision of the Society and Neuroscience program. Started by Columbia President Lee C. Bollinger in 2014,

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FACULTY Q&A

BERNARD E. HARCOURT

POSITIONS

Isidor and Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law, Professor of Political Science, Executive Director of the Eric H. Holder Initiative for Civil and Political Rights, Founding Director of the Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought, Member, Columbia Committee on Global Thought

JOINED FACULTY

2014

HISTORY

Visiting Professor, Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, 2016-2017

Julius Kreeger Professor of Law and Political Science, University of Chicago 2003-2013

Chair, Political Science Department, University of Chicago, 2010-2013

Senior Attorney, Equal Justice Initiative, 1990-1994

Ph.D. Harvard University, 2000

J.D. Harvard University, 1989

A.B. Princeton University, 1984

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Harcourt with Nelson Mandela at the headquarters of the African National Congress in August 1993 for presentation of the findings of the Motsuenyane Commission. The commission was appointed by Mandela to investigate allegations of human rights abuses by members of the ANC during the struggle against apartheid, in what was a remarkable act of self-scrutiny. Harcourt served as the legal assistant to the commission.

Q. Tell us about your moving pieces, where is the best place to start?

A. At the top of the list right now is co-chairing the Provost's Just Societies Faculty Task Force with a brilliant colleague, Farah Griffin [the William B. Ransford Professor of English and Comparative Literature, who has just been appointed inaugural chair of the University's new Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies]. Columbia has more than 30 initiatives, centers, institutes and other efforts around campus related to criminal justice reform, justice-in-education, eliminating mass incarceration and the death penalty, fighting racial and gender injustice and inequality, as well as addressing citizenship and democracy issues. There is an amazing critical mass across all the departments and schools that really has the potential to make us the justice Ivy.

Q. What is the Just Societies Faculty Task Force's mandate?

A. One of our aims is to change the punishment paradigm in this country—no small feat! That means efforts such as the Justice-in-Education Initiative with workshops and classes in jail and prisons around New York City, the new Justice Lab working to eliminate solitary confinement, closing Rikers and ending incarceration for petty parole violations in New York State, law clinics to challenge mass incarceration and immigration detention, my death penalty work, and so much more. Another category involves citizenship, inclusion and democratic reform, and it seeks to activate participation, leadership, and voting. And a third revolves on notions of equality writ large, so that includes race and gender and LGBTQ rights, and questions of poverty. There are so many people at Columbia working on these issues, so the project of the Faculty Task Force is to connect all these efforts and turn all this potential into a connected reality.

Q. You're now in the second year running the Holder Initiative [named for former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder (CC'73, LAW'76)]. How is that going?

A. The ambition there is to create a special concentration in justice studies at the College, so that students can tie the Core Curriculum to current issues of social justice. So much of the material in the Core is about exactly that, whether it's Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, or Mary Wollstonecraft on the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. The students have been steeped in these questions from a more academic and great books tradition, and the idea is to connect that to current issues in social justice, such as immigration reform, over-incarceration, or problems of race discrimination, limits on voting and such.

Q. What does your own initiative, the Center for Contemporary Critical Thought, concentrate on?

A. I seek there to bring together critical theory and social-justice engagement, to figure out how we can

enrich and augment our justice efforts by looking at problems from new perspectives. I want to explore how we can change the world, really. I realize that's a big ambition, but these times are especially critical and we have to engage in political practice better. That's the goal of the center, to bring the best critical thinking to bear on our problems of justice.

Q. What courses are you teaching?

A. Last semester I taught "Power, Rights, and Social Change: Achieving Justice" to our brilliant undergraduates. It ties together everything the students are learning in the Core Curriculum with contemporary problems and their own desire to address them. It's a precursor to the spring seminar I'm teaching on "Just Societies," which looks at very contemporary texts, published in the last two to three years, on how best to engage in social change. Throughout the year, I teach a graduate seminar on contemporary critical thought, which this year is on "Praxis," a term intended to capture how best to engage in critical political practice. At the Law School, I'm teaching a course on criminal law that integrates a lot of actual practice, sociology of prisons, and punishment theory.

Q. You've been working on death penalty cases, and one case in particular, for many years. Can you talk about that?

A. One of the first things I did after law school was move to Montgomery, Ala., to work with Bryan Stevenson at a project that represents death row prisoners. It is now called the Equal Justice Initiative. I first met Doyle Hamm 29 years ago; he was convicted of killing a motel clerk during a robbery. I promised him I would stick with him until the end, and I plan on keeping that promise until only one of us is left. The case erupted into national headlines last year when the state of Alabama attempted to move forward with his execution, but the procedure was ultimately halted. I can't talk about it in any more detail because of an agreement with the state, but it was for me a formative human experience.

Q. What do you do when you aren't teaching at Columbia?

A. I teach at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris on subjects ranging from democratic governance in the digital age to what I call "counter-critical theory." I'm particularly concerned about the way the digital age is reshaping our society and, more specifically, enabling new forms of surveillance that have given major corporations, social media, and the intelligence services total information-awareness about our personal lives. The new digital platforms and social media seduce us into giving away our most intimate information. This is a new and extremely powerful way of gaining all our information—much more powerful because it works via our own desire, rather than through coercion. We willingly expose ourselves. We're now living in what I call an "expository society." I think this is having fundamental and troubling effects on our democracy.

Q. If you had to rank your projects, what would come first?

A. Most important is my books. My latest, *The Counterrevolution: How Our Government Went to War Against Its Own Citizens*, came out a year ago. It's about how the counterinsurgency strategies used by the U.S. military in such places as Vietnam and more recently in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were brought back to the United States and ultimately used on our own citizens. Take, for example, the hyper-militarized police in Ferguson, Mo. You can see the disparity between protesters in t-shirts facing tanks that look like they are literally going to storm a moat in Afghanistan. Indefinite detention in Guantanamo, torture, military-style policing, drone strikes, NSA surveillance, and the Muslim ban are not isolated phenomena. The logic and strategies go back to the Cold War and the struggle against communist insurgencies, but they are now being used on our own citizens.

Q. You've always had a sense of urgency, but has that picked up more recently?

A. Yes, yes, yes. At some point last summer I realized that I don't feel as if we've ever been in as unstable a crisis moment as we are in now. I was a young adult during the Cold War and nuclear build-up and theories of mutually assured destruction, and I was very active against the arms race when I was in college. I also lived at a time of apartheid and Latin American wars. In fact, I participated in human rights missions in South Africa and Guatemala. But somehow I always felt that we were on a course that had some steadiness. In the last year or two, I have felt that we could easily find ourselves in a global crisis or authoritarianism at home, here in the U.S., which I never feared before. These are critical times. I am starting to feel that democracy has been eclipsed in America.

Q. Are there bright spots out there?

A. The vote on felon disenfranchisement in Florida was really very encouraging. [In a referendum last November, Florida voters overturned a 150-year-old law that disenfranchised people with felony convictions, even after serving their parole and probation terms.] I think it reflected something about the scale of mass incarceration. Millions of people are affected by it, not just those in prison, but all of their family members and extended friends and neighbors. What Floridians did is encouraging, it reflected an appreciation of the magnitude of the problem. And the recent California moratorium on the death penalty is also encouraging. It is a real act of moral conscience on the governor's part, given the popular support for the death penalty in California. But I think it does reflect an overall movement away from capital punishment in this country, demonstrated also by fewer executions and sentences of death being meted out, and the consistent growth in the number of states abolishing the death penalty.

Q. How do you manage all of this?

A. Deadlines are key. At this point, without deadlines, I'm not sure how I could get it all done!

