



GROWING UP IN PARADISE
KATHLEEN M. COLEMAN

Kathleen Coleman was born in Zimbabwe in 1953. She studied Classics at the Universities of Cape Town (B.A. 1973), Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe: B.A. Hons, 1975), and Oxford (D.Phil. 1979). She taught at the University of Cape Town (1979–1993), before taking up the chair of Latin at Trinity College Dublin (1993–1998), then moved to Harvard, becoming the James Loeb Professor of the Classics. In between, she spent two glorious years in Munich as a Humboldt Fellow (1987–1988; 1992). She has written commentaries on two works of Latin poetry from the Flavian period, *Statius, Silvae IV* and *Martial, Liber Spectaculorum*, both published by Oxford University Press, and a long series of articles on the staged violence of the Roman amphitheatre. In her work, she tries to deploy all the surviving evidence of Roman culture: literature, documents, inscriptions, coins, sites, monuments, and works of art. She has also published articles on a variety of classical authors and on the use of classical motifs in modern South African poetry. In 2011 she was President of the American Philological Association. She is an Honorary Member of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies and a Corresponding Member of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften. – Address: Department of the Classics, Harvard University, 204 Boylston Hall, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. E-mail: kcoleman@fas.harvard.edu

Beauty; serenity; companionship; plentiful nourishment, both physical and intellectual; and unobtrusive efficiency. If that sounds like paradise, I know the address: Wallotstraße 19, 14193 Berlin. I grew up there, in a sense, even though I am decades past my childhood.

Upon entering my apartment in Villa Jaffé on August 30, 2013, I was astonished to discover a little refrigerator stocked with all that I would need for the first twenty-four

hours: salmon, tomatoes, wine, orange juice, chocolate, and other fundamentals. Then, when I ventured into the bathroom, there was liquid soap beside the basin and shower gel beside the bath. The tiny bar of soap, nicked from a hotel, that I had carefully saved for the first night in a bare apartment suddenly looked mean and foolish. The small and inefficient stapler that I had squirreled away in my luggage at the last moment looked like that, too, as soon as I investigated the drawers beside the desk, where I found a ruler, sharpener, stapler, scissors, pens, punch ... the forethought was incredible. And that was a harbinger of what was to come. Everything that we needed to make us happy and productive the whole year long was supplied, without fuss or fanfare. The Wiko staff do their jobs with consummate professionalism and sensitivity, and they are among the most cultivated, charming, and open-minded people I have ever met.

Looking back on it, my decision to arrive early to take the intensive German course was more significant than I could possibly have anticipated. In those first three weeks, I not only learnt a lot of German from Eva von Kügelgen and my classmates; I also forged friendships that will endure for the rest of my life. And, thanks largely to the guided walks that were laid on for us and the texts that we studied in class, I gained a knowledge of the topography and history of Berlin that was to anchor my entire experience in that tragic, inspiring, and addictive city. I was charmed to discover the benefits of a “10-Uhr-Monatskarte” on the remarkable public transport system that knits together what, until 1920, comprised nearly one hundred separate communities. For €57, that card enabled me to go *anywhere at all* between 10:00 a.m. one weekday and 3:00 a.m. the next, and all day – and (theoretically) all night – on Saturdays and Sundays. Freedom, however, can be daunting: every ride on the S-Bahn or the M19 bus in those early days required anxious consultation of the map beforehand and intense calculation as to the estimated time of arrival, until one day I realized that *I knew how the system worked*; I was becoming a Berliner.

The end of the intensive German course coincided with initiation week, which was a blur of information and activity. Then, suddenly, we settled into the routine that was to nourish us for the next ten months: the daily meals and the *Dienstagskolloquium*. I could not have guessed how delicious the meals would be and how solicitously the kitchen staff would cater to our individual needs, nor could I have anticipated the lively and unpredictable conversations that developed among as congenial a group of Fellows as one could ever hope to assemble in one place. And I could not possibly have guessed how much I would enjoy the weekly opportunity to hear the others talking about their work for an

hour and then fielding the questions fired at them in the intense discussion that ensued. Some unexpected collaborations grew out of that regular exchange of ideas, such as gender in Wolof, one of the languages of Senegal (by Michele Loporcaro, a linguist, and Cheikh Babou, a historian), or the exploitation of African animals in imperial projects (by Pippa Skotnes, an artist, and me, a classicist), and it was clear that the Wiko staff were delighted to see the intellectual chemistry among the Fellows producing unpredictable reactions. The freedom granted to us to range as widely as we wished, no matter how far we strayed from our original goals, was extraordinarily energizing.

I admit that I did not complete my own stated project, a book on the spectacles of the Roman amphitheatre. I did, however, deliver a few papers on various aspects of this topic in Berlin and further afield, chiefly the representation of defeat in the gladiatorial arena, for which I found illuminating comparanda in the scholarship on military defeat, both ancient and modern. But I did, thank goodness, manage to finish *something* on a respectable scale: the editing of a collected volume on gardens in Antiquity. This was a task with a very tight deadline that I could not possibly have met, had I been teaching full-time (or had I not been supplied with material on gardens from Mesopotamia to the Hesperides by the Wiko's unbelievably expert and dedicated librarians). I also wrote articles on music in the amphitheatre and on a poem about a plane tree, a high-prestige possession in Italy in the early Empire, and I edited most of another (short) volume of collected papers. One unexpected bonus was to re-discover the stimulation and satisfaction of writing reviews, which I had been too busy to do for a long time (the books were good, hence the satisfaction).

It was also very affirming to be encouraged to initiate different sorts of intellectual exchange without having to go through a committee and/or be told that nobody had time for that sort of thing. Pippa and I set up an informal seminar on visual themes that became a forum for any Fellow, partner, or visitor who wanted to air a "secret project" with a visual component, from Renaissance portraits (by Giovanna Pinna, a philosopher) to the desert mummies of Chile (by Michael Hochberg, a biologist). When, towards the end of the year, it dawned on us that these weekly hour-long late-afternoon sessions could effortlessly morph into a further hour of wine, cheese, and wide-ranging conversation in Villa Jaffé, we regretted the opportunity that we had squandered after all the preceding sessions. Every moment of companionship was tinged with awareness that the stopwatch of paradise was ticking relentlessly towards the moment when we would all disperse, an awareness sharpened by the sense of loss that we experienced each time one of the short-term Fellows departed.

The Wiko made it clear to us in advance that we were expected to be in residence, rather than traveling the globe. So, apart from a couple of brief forays abroad (notably a trip to Sicily in pursuit of bones and mosaics with Pippa and her husband, David Brown), I stayed in Berlin. The Romans themselves never got as far as that; when Varus lost three legions in the Teutoburg Forest in A.D. 9, Augustus abandoned his dream of extending the Empire to the Elbe and retreated instead to the Rhine. But, in the nineteenth century, fabled archaeologists and explorers brought the Romans home with them to Prussia. The re-installation of the classical galleries in the Altes Museum has effected some inspired connections. My favorite is the juxtaposition of the “Grüner Caesar”, the green slate portrait of Julius Caesar, whose piercing stare still chills the onlooker today, with the pale marble bust of his lover, Cleopatra, radiating sovereign power and a calculating and ruthless intelligence. For a student of Roman spectacle, it was a wonderful coincidence that the newly discovered mosaic from Lod in Israel reached Berlin on its world tour in the winter of 2013/14. It is a remarkable artifact, combining animal themes (largely gruesome) with marine scenes of great precision. The most singular representation on it is that of a giraffe, a species very rarely depicted in Roman sources and a virtual mascot at the Wiko this past year, because of Pippa’s project to transcribe an archive onto the skeletons of two of these beasts. The mosaic, which is enormous, was displayed in the rotunda of the museum, mounted on a plinth. This made it impossible to photograph, because the sightlines were too oblique. The Wiko, however, came magnificently to the rescue in the person of the incomparably diplomatic Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, who negotiated successfully with the director, Andreas Scholl. The upshot was that Pippa and I spent an afternoon in the gallery of the rotunda, where access is normally *streng verboten*. Pippa took perfectly angled shots of every detail on the mosaic, while Herr Scholl told us about the carpet underneath the plinth, which had cost a sum equivalent, as it turned out, to almost twice the annual budget for purchases and exhibitions at the South African National Gallery. Berlin is one of the most cultured cities in the world. This takes resources.

Another aspect of my Roman experience in Berlin was not primarily visual but aural: a performance of *Les Troyens* by Berlioz at the Deutsche Oper. I had never seen this opera before, and would not have done so then, had it not been for the urging of a fellow Fellow, Ted Porter, whose prompting (and company) was responsible for so many of the musical events that enriched the year for me. This time, I came away with an overwhelming sense of what the sack of a city, one of the standard tropes of ancient historiography, must have meant in reality: loss of context, home, family, familiarity, *everything*. To see

that opera in that city, where buildings are still riddled with bullet holes from 1945, made me feel that I had suddenly grown up a little bit more. This is something that happened a lot. The presence of two *Stolpersteine* outside the gate of Villa Jaffé was an unavoidable reminder of the horror that engulfed Berlin not even a century ago; I was living in the very house that Georg and Emmy Braun had been forced to flee in 1940. One of our guided walks took us near the Nordbahnhof, one of the few places where the sand beneath Berlin gives way to soil, and therefore the spot where many desperate East Berliners tried to dig their way to freedom underneath the Wall. Once again, the story is carved into the ground: circular brass plaques are set into the sidewalk, bearing the names of those who fled or who died in the attempt; some of the plaques cannot, in fact, name these people, since they are not known, so they say “*unbekannt*”, which is even more poignant. Next time I teach a course in Latin epigraphy, I shall start with the inscriptions of modern Berlin, where beneath one’s feet the trauma of the twentieth century is recorded with stark and eloquent brevity.

It is all so complicated. Georg Kolbe was the most renowned German sculptor of the early twentieth century. But was he also a Nazi pawn? Eva invested enormous imagination in our German classes, which continued on a weekly basis throughout the year, and one of her most inspired suggestions was to abandon class altogether one sunny spring morning and take the S-Bahn to Heerstraße to see an exhibit on “*Vanitas*” at the Georg Kolbe Museum. The exhibit was interesting (lots of withered flowers, and even an exquisitely back-lit network of spiders’ webs, complete with live spiders), but Kolbe’s statues were what made the deepest impression on me. I was profoundly moved by the extraordinary empathy with which he portrayed the guilt and exhaustion felt by the survivors of the Great War, whose centenary Berlin marked this year, along with the rest of the world. After our visit, Eva found material about Kolbe’s philosophical and political outlook, and we discussed the role of the artist in the face of advancing autocracy. The rule of Augustus two thousand years ago, although founded upon the murder and confiscations of the Second Triumvirate, is not in the same class as the Nazi regime; but seeing Kolbe’s house and oeuvre, and reading his story, did make me think anew about the choice between independence or compromise that faced Horace, Virgil, and the other Augustan poets.

Hard questions about war, persecution, ideology, guilt, and other themes that have left an indelible mark on Europe, in general, and Germany, in particular, were also raised in the remarkable series of German films, with English subtitles, that Eva showed for anyone who wished to come, first in the fall and then in a second series after Easter. I got

used to sleepless nights on Tuesdays, when the film we had seen that evening re-played relentlessly and obsessively in my head. My growing up continued. But some of the films were entertaining, too. Indeed, the Wiko gave thought to our aesthetic nourishment as well as the other sorts. In addition to the fragrant floral arrangements that met us at the front door of the Hauptgebäude and the exquisite orchids that graced the restaurant, we were treated to several concerts throughout the year. Some of these were *Gesprächskonzerte* performed by one of our resident musicians, either the composer Klaus Ospald or the concert pianist, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, both of whom taught us, with immense skill and powers of persuasion, how to listen to contemporary classical music. Others were given by visiting ensembles. At the very first of these, a piano-cello duo called the Brooklyn Blues played *Le Grand Tango* by Astor Piazzolla, a piece charged with such energy that to listen to it is to feel almost as though one were flying. On that occasion, as at all the other concerts to which we were treated, I had a fleeting sense of what it must have been like to belong to an eighteenth-century court, being entertained by famous musicians in surroundings of great comfort and elegance. At our very last dinner, when we danced on the lawn to the accompaniment of a jazz trio as the summer sun slipped behind the great trees of the Grunewald, I felt more acutely than at any time during that magical year that I wanted to catch the moment in both my hands and hold it there forever.

Paradise on this earth cannot last, but to go there and back, and to grow up a little in the process, is a singular privilege. I will spend the rest of my life marveling at my luck and feeling tremendous gratitude and affection towards the Wiko, Luca Giuliani and all the staff, and my fellow Fellows and their partners, who became, one and all, such cherished companions. One of the most despised of scholarly sins, however, is to be uncritical, so to end on a suitably abrupt and querulous note I have, with great effort, managed to identify a shortcoming: the Wiko has no cat. The presence of Dennis Grimm's dog, Scarlett, endearing though she is, in no way compensates for this deficit. Even in paradise, the hierarchy of the species should be respected.