

The goal of this lecture series, established in 1985 to honor Dr. Bernice L. Fox, is to illustrate the continuing importance of Classical studies in the modern world and the intersection of the Classics with other disciplines in the liberal arts.

Previous Fox Lectures

- 1985-86 **Bernice L. Fox** "Living Latin: Twentieth Century Literature in Latin"
1986-87 **Robert Ketterer** "A Monkey on the Roof: Comedy, Rome and Plautus'
Boastful Soldier"
1987-88 **Mary R. Ryder** "The Universal and True: Myth in Willa Cather's
O Pioneers!"
1988-89 **Andrew J. Adams** "Off the Beaten Track in Rome"
1989-90 **Nelson T. Potter, Jr.** "Pirsig's and Plato's *Phaedrus*"
1990-91 **Raymond Den Adel** "Hadrian: Emperor and Builder"
1991-92 **Richard Lederer** "*Latina Non Mortua Est*"
1992-93 **Jeremy McNamara** "Ovidius Naso Was the Man: Shakespeare's Debt to
Ovid"
1993-94 **LeaAnn Osburn** "Classics Across the Curriculum: A Practitioner's View"
1994-95 **Thomas H. Watkins** "Imperator Caesar Augustus and Duce Benito
Mussolini: Ancient Rome and Fascist Italy"
1995-96 **Albert Watanabe** "Into the Woods: The Symbolism of the Forest"
1996-97 **Deborah Rae Davies** "Myth, Media, and Culture: Odysseus on the Baseball
Diamond"
1997-98 **Anne Groton** "Goofy Gods and Half-Baked Heroes: Comic Entertainment in
the Ancient City"
1998-99 **Kenneth Kitchell** "Always Something New From Africa: Ancient Africa and
its Marvels"
1999-00 **Alden Smith** "Looks Count: Erotic Glances in Roman Art and Poetry"
2000-01 **Michele Ronnick** "Evidence Concerning Fishing in Antiquity and Its Later
Influence"
2001-02 **Gregory Daugherty** "Her Infinite Variety: Cleopatra in Twentieth-Century
American Popular Culture"
2002-03 **James E. Betts** "'*Che Faró Senza Euridice?*' The Role of Greco-Roman
Culture in the Creation and Development of Opera"
2003-04 **Anne Browning Nelson** "Education in Fourth Century Alexandria: Didymus
the Blind's Commentaries on the *Psalms*"
2004-05 **James DeYoung**, "'Let the Tears Fall': On Producing Euripides' *Trojan*
Women for a Modern Audience"
2005-06 **Mark Golden**, "Olive-Tinted Spectacles: Myths in the History of the Ancient
and Modern Olympics"
2006-07 **Carol Goodman** "A Classical Muse: Creative Writing and the Classics"
2007-08 **James M. May** "Re-constructing and Rowing on the Trireme Olympias"
2008-09 **Monica S. Cyrino** "Power, Passion and Politics: the Women of HBO's
Rome"
2009-10 **Timothy Moore** "Musical Comedy: Roman and American"
2010-11 **John Gruber-Miller** "Peeking into a Periegete's Mind: Probing Pausanias'
Description of Greece"
2011-12 **Daniel B. Levine** "Tuna in Ancient Greece and Modern Tuna Population
Decline"
2012-13 **Georgia L. Irby** "Mapping Vergil: Cartography and Geography in the
Aeneid"



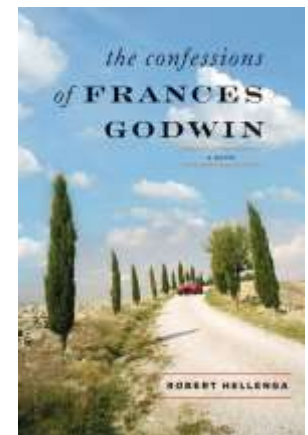
The Monmouth College
Department of Classics
presents
the Twenty-Ninth Annual
Bernice L. Fox Classics Lecture

Confessions of a Fictional Classicist

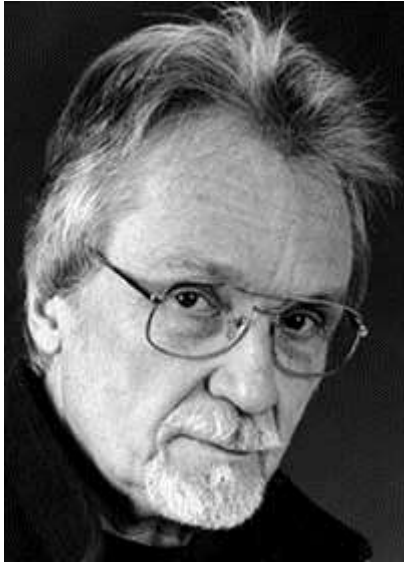
Robert Hellenga
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Monday, March 3, 2014
7:30 P.M.

Pattee Auditorium
Center for Science & Business 100
Monmouth College
Monmouth, Illinois



About the Lecturer



Robert Hellenga grew up in Three Oaks, Michigan, a typical Midwestern small town, but spent summers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his father, a commission merchant with a seasonal business, handled produce that was shipped there from what was then the world's largest farmers market, in Benton Harbor, Michigan. The men who worked for his father were almost all Italians, and in retrospect he sees that this is how he got his first sense of Italy as something opposed to small-town Midwestern Protestant culture—a theme that has shaped much of his writing.

He met his wife, Virginia at the University of Michigan, spent the first year of their marriage in Belfast, Northern Ireland, followed by a year in North Carolina. They started having children when he was in graduate school at Princeton. Like King Lear,

they have three daughters, but unlike the Lears, they all get along. Rachel is entrepreneuring in Chicago; Heather teaches fifth grade in Galesburg, IL; and Cairtrine is a veterinarian in Glen Carbon, IL. His wife taught Latin at Monmouth College from 1994 to 2010.

Hellenga began teaching English literature at Knox College, in Galesburg, IL, in 1968. During his tenure at Knox he has directed two programs for the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, one at the Newberry Library in Chicago and one in Florence, Italy. He also spent a year at the University of Chicago on a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship. He and his wife have spent quite a bit of time in Florence and Bologna, and in 2009 they spent six weeks in Verona, where he was a visiting writer at the university.

He started writing fiction at Knox and published his first story in 1973. His first novel, *The Sixteen Pleasures*, was published in 1994 (after 39 rejections!). His more recent novels are *The Fall of a Sparrow*, *Blues Lessons*, *Philosophy Made Simple*, *The Italian Lover* and *Snakewoman of Little Egypt*. Another novel, *The Confessions of Frances Godwin*, will be published in Spring/Summer 2014.

In “Confessions of a Fictional Classicist” he speaks not as a classicist but as a novelist, someone who makes things up. He addresses the challenges he faced in writing about a professor of Greek at a small liberal arts college (*The Fall of a Sparrow*) and the very different challenges he had in writing about a retired high school Latin teacher who murders her abusive son-in-law (*The Confessions of Frances Godwin*). He says that in his first novel he started with a good knowledge of Homer and of Greek mythology but that in *The Confessions of Frances Godwin* he had to start from scratch.

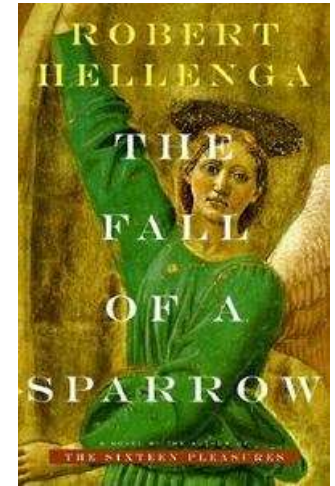
About the Lecture

In Plato's early dialogue, the *Ion*, Socrates interrogates Ion, a Homeric rhapsode, and comes to the conclusion that poets and their interpreters don't know what they're talking about. Over and over again he asks Ion the same question: who knows more about chariot driving, a chariot driver or *you*? Who knows more about fighting a battle, a general or *you*? Who knows more about healing the sick, a doctor or *you*? Who knows more about piloting a ship, a ship captain or *you*? The answer is always the same, and it's never *you*. It's never the rhapsode or, as Socrates makes clear, never the poet.

So how do poets or writers do that they do? How do they write beyond their means? How do they go beyond their limited expertise?

Socrates explains this ability by invoking divine inspiration—a chain that starts with the Muse and then goes down to the poet (or writer) and from there down to the rhapsode or “interpreter,” and then to the listener or reader. Today we might be more inclined to invoke a chain that begins with the world wide web.

The two novels pictured on the program, *The Fall of a Sparrow* and *The Confessions of Frances Godwin*, represent two very different attempts to use the world of classical antiquity to frame modern stories. *Fall* is based on pretty solid knowledge of the Homeric epics and on two months of on-site research in Bologna, Italy, where most of the story takes place. *Confessions* is based on a wing and a prayer. How obvious are the differences?



About Bernice L. Fox

From 1947 until 1981 Bernice L. Fox, Professor of Classics, served Monmouth College tirelessly as professor of English, Latin and Greek. In 1956 she founded the Gamma Omicron Chapter of Eta Sigma Phi, the National Classics Honorary Society, and for over a decade was chair of the Department of Classics. She had a special love for the Latin language and was well known for her Latin translations. One of her earliest translations was *Fabula de Quarto Mago* (Van Dyke's *Story of the Other Wise Man*). In 1990 she published *Six Fabulae Breves*, a collection of Latin translations of six short stories including Maupassant's “The Necklace” and O. Henry's “The Gift of the Magi.” In 1991 *Tela Charlottae*, her translation of E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, was published by Harper Collins. In 1985 the college named this annual lectureship in her honor, and in 1991 the college awarded her an honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. She died in 2003.