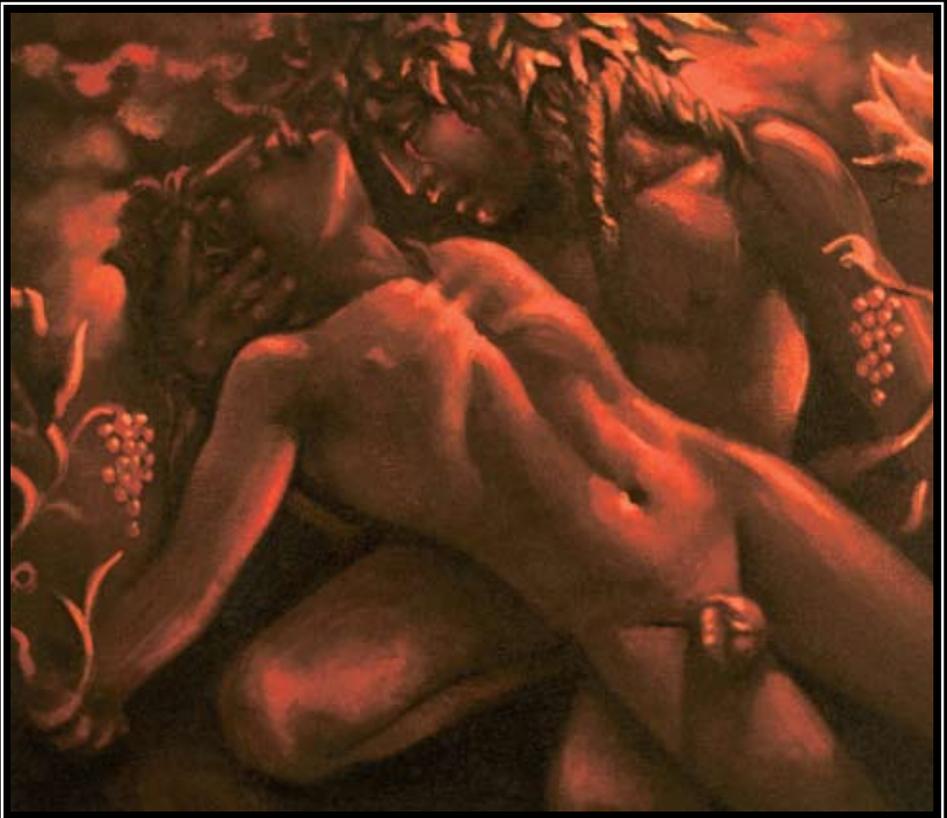


THE LESLIE/LOHMAN GAY ART FOUNDATION

And Lo! The Old Gods!

Restored Interpretations of Old Myths

compiled and edited by
Charles W. Leslie



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curator

Includes Catalog of Exhibition

April 3—June 2, 2001

The Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation

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Designed by Tom Saettel

FRONT COVER

Josef Kozak

*The Death of Ampelos
or Dionysius Mourning Ampelos*
Acrylic on canvas

11" x 14"

2001

BACK COVER

Paul Wirhun

Kalos

Batiked Ostrich shell

Height 6"

2001

And Lo! The Old Gods!

Charles W. Leslie

INTRODUCTION

As you may infer from the title the theme of the show—which constitutes an homage to the oldest art tradition in the Western World—is, of course, Greek Art.

Although homosexual love and eroticism was not only integral to, but indeed rife in ancient Greek mythology, visual arts, and civil society,—it was for centuries thereafter ruthlessly suppressed and hidden (the work of “pagans”) until the Italian Renaissance rediscovered our shared classical and humanist past.

But even then, the homosexual nexus had to be carefully finessed, somehow disguised by the artists of the day...Think of the innumerable images of Ganymede giving drink to an eagle.

In ancient times everyone understood that Zeus kidnapped the beautiful prince—not because he wanted him to pour wine for him on Mount Olympus, but because he fell in love with him and wanted to fuck him and keep him with him forever...

For all the paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures of a beautiful young man (usually nude to be sure) giving an injured eagle a bowl of milk, there are very few of a virile mature man, muscled and bearded, carnally embracing the younger man—which is the heart and soul of the story.

In the following pages you will find short sketches of some of the great homosexually themed myths (and some of real people and actual events) of the ancient world, as well as lesser known legends, and a necessarily limited selection of surviving epigrams, poems and fragments.



Darold Perkins (Perk)
Greek Revival
Oil on board
36" x 24"
2001

A NOTE TO THE READER: *These brief recapitulations of homosexual Greek myths were originally sent to artists in the form of a letter to provide them with subject matter on which to base work produced for the exhibition—AND LO! THE OLD GODS!—which took place at Leslie/Lohman Gallery in New York City from April 3—June 2, 2001.*

SOME GREEK MYTHS, LEGENDS, POEMS, EPIGRAMS AND FRAGMENTS

Nearly everyone with a modicum of education knows the title of the greatest Greek epic which has come down to us, The Iliad, which is also the most monumental ancestral work of all Western literature. This epic poem was created by an agglomeration of ancient bards who we know of as Homer.

The great poem treats the multi-layered tragedy of The Trojan War, a story far too complex to detail here what with warring royal cities, gods and goddesses taking sides, kidnappings, adultery, and savage revenge.

What has carefully been obscured since the now dominant religion took over the Western world is the centrality of the soul-shaking homosexual love story (Paris and Helen notwithstanding) that propels the brilliant and tragic epic to its denouement; that is, the great love of Achilles and Patroclus, the warrior lovers.

As briefly as possible, it all starts with some heterosexual shenanigans. (It should be noted that to the ancient Greeks most gods, demi-gods, heroes, etc., were AC/DC.) First there was a problem about a girl named Briseis and then an act of adultery; i.e., Helen of Troy, the Greek wife of the Greek King Menelaus—with the Trojan Prince Paris. It involves an argument between Agamemnon, another Greek king, and Achilles, the Greeks' greatest hero and warrior. Agamemnon, asserting his royal right, has taken Achilles' girl Briseis for himself. Achilles is not broken-hearted by this but, rather, deeply insulted. She was his property...In the meantime, the Greeks have started a war with Troy to recover Helen. As the argument between Achilles and Agamemnon goes on the war over the beautiful Helen keeps expanding.

ACHILLES AND THE MYRMIDONS

Achilles, along with other Greek kings, heroes, and princes sails to the war against Troy (which is located in what is now Turkey) at the head of his own personal war host, a sort of personal army. But the Myrmidons were an army with a difference as many legends make clear. They were an army of lovers.

The ancient Greeks believed that a man would rather die than dishonor himself in front of his lover and so it was that men in such units were inspired to legendary feats of heroism. This primordial legend was reflected in historical fact time and again throughout Greek history. The last great troop of warrior lovers was The Sacred Band of Thebes which Alexander The Great finally defeated in the 4th century BCE. Alexander, who himself had a warrior lover—



Richard Taddei
Achilles and Patroklos
Acrylic on canvas
76" x 48"
2001

Hephaestion—was so moved by their bravery (they died to a man) that he raised a great monument to their glory after his victory.

ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS

Now it happens that Achilles, in *The Iliad*, has a young and noble companion in arms—Patroclus—with whom he tents, bivouacs, eats, sleeps, hunts, bathes, and makes love to quite incessantly. At the siege of Troy—because of Agamemnon’s insult—while others are doing all the fighting, including his own Myrmidons, Achilles chooses to stay in his tent making love to Patroclus day in and day out. His Myrmidons, as well as the Greek kings and generals, are often outside his tent entreating him to join the fray. The siege has been stalemated for months and he is, after all, their greatest warrior.

At last, succumbing in part to their pleas and those of Patroclus himself, he agrees to let Patroclus go into battle but insists that he wear his (Achilles’) armor. Because of his anger with Agamemnon he will still not join them. It is inconceivable to him that Patroclus might be killed. But after great heroism and victories Patroclus is killed by the Trojan hero, Hector.

What follows is the story of the towering rage and bottomless grief of Achilles as he throws himself on the body of his dead lover and of the terrible vengeance he wreaks.

Like a demon he pursues and kills Hector and for days, like a madman, tears streaming down his face, bellowing like a wounded bull, he drags the body of Hector behind his chariot, around and around and around the walls of Troy. The Trojans on the wall and his own Greeks in their siege camps stare aghast at this apocalyptic agony. Even the gods are shocked. In spite of the abject pleading of the Trojans he refuses to give them the body for burial; the worst thing possible among the ancient Greek peoples.

Achilles, normally equable and just, simply goes mad with grief, doing terrible things such as burning twelve prisoners, noble Trojan youths, on Patroclus’s funeral pyre.

With Achilles now fully engaged in the war the tide is turned against the Trojans and the city’s doom is sealed even though Achilles is to die before it’s over. (It had been prophesied.)

ACHILLES AND TROILUS

Sometime after the deaths of Patroclus and Hector (the war still dragged on for years) Achilles was in hand to hand combat with a handsome Trojan warrior named Troilus. As the grappling continued Achilles became filled with lust for his Trojan adversary saying,

“I will kill you unless you yield to my caresses!” Troilus, wrestling in sweaty struggle with Achilles and knowing he could not beat him agreed to a secret rendezvous. Achilles then let him seem to escape and later, in the dark of night, met him in the precinct of the Temple of Thymbaeon Apollo which was neutral territory during the war.

Achilles fell upon him passionately but his sexual embraces were so fierce that Troilus, carnally impaled, was crushed to death in his mighty arms. The Trojans mourned his death at the hands of Achilles and Achilles himself was filled with regret.

ACHILLES AND ANTILOCHUS

Still later in the story Achilles takes another lover, a young Greek soldier named Antilochus. It seems that Homer is unable to imagine the chief hero of his epic poem without a male lover.

Achilles is eventually killed by treachery. Off his guard in the neutral temple of Apollo, he is ambushed by Paris who shoots him with a poisoned arrow in his heel; his only vulnerable part. Soon thereafter Antilochus dies in battle.

The Greeks finally get inside the walls of Troy in the belly of a huge wooden horse and overcome the city’s last defenders.

At last the ashes of Achilles, Patroclus and Antilochus are mixed in a single bronze urn and placed in their tomb with great lamentation; a sort of menage a trois in the afterlife.

Along with the tragedy of the destruction of a great city, The Iliad finally represents the greatest kind of hymn to same-sex love. At Patroclus’s death, Achilles’ countless, heartbreaking lamentations—“O never could anything more bitter come upon me! No! Not even if I should hear of my own father’s death!”, and so on—are too numerous to recount.

“This was the language of love, not of friendship, and it was thus that the ancients always regarded their bond.” (Hans Licht, *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece*.)

Oddly, in spite of all the death and destruction, the beautiful Helen is brought back home and is forgiven by King Menelaus. The whole thing, he decided, was not her fault. (Aphrodite made her do it!)



*Campbell Paxton
Eros
Bronze, brown, green, black
patina on marble base
13" x 9" x 3"
1999*

HERAKLES (*Hercules*)

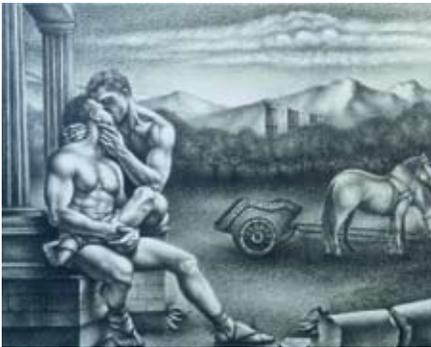
Just as Theseus was the archetypical Hero of the Athenians, Herakles was the archetypical hero of all the rest of Greece. While Theseus was physically beautiful, immensely strong, of magnificent spirit and of brilliant intellect—Herakles has all the same attributes except for the last one. Athenians found intellect important. Country folk found it less so.

Herakles was the son of Zeus and a mortal woman of great beauty; Alcmena. Hence he was born a demi-god and a hero. Upon his death he became a full-fledged god and resides forever on Mount Olympus. He, like most other gods, demi-gods, heroes, etc., (not to mention countless mortal men) had wives, mistresses and numerous male lovers. Of these last, the most important were Iolaus, Hylas, King Eurystheus, and King Admetus.

HERAKLES AND EURYSTHEUS

The major legends of Herakles concern The Twelve Labors. Although many people have some familiarity with The Twelve Labors most have a very uncertain knowledge as to why they were undertaken. And certainly, almost everyone has been made ignorant of the historio-literary fact that all the labors were undertaken by Herakles with Iolaus, his life long lover. Their story as lovers was relentlessly expunged from the legend by centuries of clerics and savants up to and including many 19th and early 20th century “scholars.” In modern recapitulations—be they written, in grade B movies, or on junk television—if Iolaus appears at all (very rarely) he is just Hercules’s buddy...his sidekick.

The real story goes like this...Herakles, in a fit of madness in his youth—(one of the many curses jealous Hera (Juno) was forever visiting on Zeus’s lovers and their offspring)—committed a terrible crime. He killed some of his own and some of his brother Iphicles’s children. When his sanity returned he was in a state of terrible remorse. He went to Delphi to consult the oracle to learn what he must do to purify himself. The Pythoness told him that he must go into the service of King Eurystheus, ruler of Tyrins, for twelve years there to perform one labor a year that the king would prescribe. Doing the king’s bidding was the only way Herakles



James Fetterman
Herakles Seducing Iolaus
Pencil, charcoal on paper
20" x 17"
2001

could expiate his sins. As soon as he arrived at the court of Tyrins the king made it clear that he would also be taking him to bed regularly. There is a renaissance painting of Herakles's arrival at the palace of Tyrins in which Herakles, standing naked in the middle of a throne room, is examined by the king. Eurystheus, in splendid raiment, has the flat of his hand on Herakles's abdomen as if inspecting his new acquisition.

HERAKLES AND IOLAUS *(Moon Boulder)*

Iolaus, the typical, classical Greek “Kalos Kagathos”—a beautiful boy both in body and soul—was Harakles's oldest nephew, son of Iphicles. The young man was allowed to go with Herakles into Eurystheus's service and he became the demi-god's life-long companion, charioteer, and major lover. Iolaus is with Harakles through all the labors and takes a crucial and heroic part in all of them. A shrine to Herakles and Iolaus was a center of worship of “The Hero Lovers” at Thebes for centuries. Soldiers of “The Sacred Band of Thebes”—the most elite military unit of the later Greek world—worshiped them as their “divine patrons.”

Parenthetically, there was a traditional eroto-romantic assumption concerning lordly knights and their charioteers.

HERAKLES AND HYLAS *(Boy of the Woods)*

King Theiodanas was ruler of a savage tribe living on the heights of Mount Parnassus above Delphi. Being barbarians and sacrilegious they frequently raided Delphi and defiled the sacred precinct of Apollo. Herakles was appointed to stop the desecration and he and Iolaus led a small war band from Tyrins to extirpate the savages. The tribe of Theiodanas was virtually wiped out with Herakles doing most of the slaughter. But as the battle ended one lone, beautiful youth fought on in wild nakedness with only his spear to protect him. Herakles, falling in love at first sight, captured the boy, caused him to be spared, and took him as his personal slave. The master-slave relationship soon grew into one of mutual love and Herakles educated Hylas in all the manly arts. He became a second charioteer for Herakles often accompanying him and Iolaus on their endless adventures. Iolaus had no objection to Herakles taking yet another lover and implicit in the story is the suggestion of a heroic “ménage a trois.”

Hylas later became, along with Herakles and Iolaus, one of Jason's Argonauts on the voyage to search for The Golden Fleece and it was during that journey that one of the most famous scenes of Greek legend took place.

The ship of the Argonauts, The Argo, was beached on an uninhabited island and Hylas was sent in search of fresh water.

The Argonauts did not know that the deep spring on this island was inhabited by beautiful and very powerful female water nymphs.

When Hylas leaned down to taste the water to see if it was sweet, the lonely nymphs, seeing how beautiful he was, snatched him into their watery realm to keep him with them forever.

As it grew late Jason said they could wait no longer. Search parties came back saying there was no trace of Hylas. Herakles was desperate, praying to his father, The Father-God, Zeus. But no help came.

Finally, when The Argo sailed Herakles would not go with them, but spent agonized days crashing through the woods, even standing on the edge of the spring crying out for Hylas. But the nymphs held him fast kissing and caressing his beautiful face and form. Herakles wept in the woods inconsolably. Weeks later, he made his way back to the arms of the faithful Iolauus.

HERAKLES AND ADMETUS

The young King Admetus of Therae was an occasional, companionable lover of Herakles. (In modern times we might call them fuck-buddies.) Admetus also had a love affair with the god Dionysius (Bacchus).

Admetus appears and reappears throughout the adventures and wanderings of Herakles. But the most famous incident of their relationship occurred when Herakles—for the love he bore this friend, wrestled Hades (Death) to retrieve the life of Alcestis, Admetus's wife. Herakles, having bested Hades, brought her back from Tartarus (The Underworld) to her over-joyed husband.

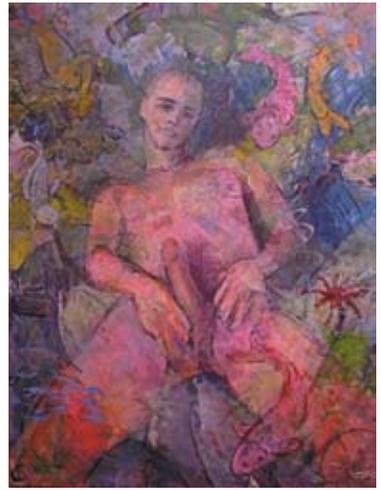
NARCISSUS AND AMEINIUS

In which Ameinius is actually the more important figure...

The Narcissus legend is most commonly known by the popular image of Narcissus fallen in love with his own image reflected in a stream. But that is only a part, indeed only the ending of the legend. In ancient times the legend was often called "The Lovelorn Ameinius." It goes thus;—

A very honorable young Greek, himself a handsome youth, fell hopelessly in love with the semi-divine Narcissus who was the son of the blue nymph, Leiriopé, and the river-god Cephissus. Many before Ameinius had also fallen tragically in love with Narcissus, such as the pretty little doomed nymph Echo. (And we know what happened to her.)

Narcissus, in his vanity and scornful pride, sent a sword to Ameinius as a brutal sign of his rejection. Ameinius, broken-hearted, killed himself on Narcissus's doorstep, crying to the gods for revenge. Now it happened that Artemis (Diana) heard his plea and took pity on him. It was she who cast the spell that made Narcissus fall in love with his own unattainable image. To this day there is a lovely little river in Thespia (the Greek province which legend names the home of Narcissus) which is called The Ameinius, and on its banks narcissus flowers bloom in great profusion.



THE WEDDING OF PERITHOUS OR THE BATTLE OF LAPITHS AND CENTAURS

Perithous, one of the countless semi-divine sons of The Father-God, Zeus (fathered on the mortal priestess, Dia), was a chieftain-king of the semi-barbaric Megnates; a northern frontier tribe who were one of the Lapith peoples in what is now southern Albania.

Once when Perithous and the Greek hero Theseus confronted one another in a cattle-rustling battle they were so struck by one another's beauty and nobility that the battle was cancelled and they founded an everlasting friendship with clearly erotic implications. Sometime later, when Perithous was married to Hippodameia, a huge wedding took place in the Land of The Lapiths with Theseus as "best man." The Olympian gods, demi-gods, nymphs kings and princes were present. However, Perithous had to invite his totally barbaric country-cousins, the Centaurs, as well. They came in great numbers. The shaggy, man-torsoed, horse-bodied creatures came from still further north out of Illyrian Arcadia (which was till recently Yugoslavia). Being barbaric and totally uncivilized, they drank too much unwatered wine, got beastly drunk and went berserk. They started seizing women and maidens, young men and boys and ruined the wedding. Before they could be subdued in the terrible melee that followed they had raped every youth and maiden they could lay their hands on. The Lapiths (mythically representing the civilized peoples of Greece) and the Centaurs (representing the barbarian peoples of the North) remained enemies for ever after.

Some major characters in this culminating battle of this legend are Perithous, defending Queen Hippodameia from the onslaught of the

Wayne Snellen
The Revenge of Ameinius
(Narcissus transfixed in the pool)
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 50"
2001

drunken Centaurs, Theseus, doing mighty battle with the chief Centaur, Eurytion, and Caeneus, a young Lapith warrior raped and finally killed by a group of lust-crazed Centaurs.

This legend is the one carved into the pediment of the great temple on the acropolis at Athens,—The Parthenon. Most of it now reposes in The British Museum and is known as “The Elgin Marbles.” This is a terrible misnomer because the only thing Lord Elgin had to do with them was to bribe the Turkish Pasha at Athens in order to steal them.

DIONYSIUS *(Joy Giver)* AND HIS FRIENDS THE SATYRS

Dionysius (Bacchus) roamed the world with a retinue of his randy friends, the Satyrs, bringing the world the vine (wine), erotic joy, and sometimes—trouble.

THE SECOND BIRTH OF “TWICE-BORN” DIONYSIUS *(Joy Giver)*

Zeus lay with Semele, The Moon, and she became pregnant with Dionysius. Hera (Juno) the mother-goddess, furiously jealous of yet another of Zeus’s affairs instigated a fierce argument between Zeus and Semele. Zeus, losing his head, flashed thunder and lightning which consumed Semele, then six months pregnant. (That is why



Joe Radoccia
Satyr
Acrylic on canvas
24" x 36"
2001

she is now nothing but a cold cinder.) The sweet god Hermes, however, saw fit to save his little unborn half-brother. He snatched the baby from the fiery lightning which destroyed the mother and then, later, while Zeus was sleeping, place the immature infant inside Zeus's inner thigh just beneath the warmth of his pendulous sexual organs, there to mature for another three months. At the end of that time Zeus leaned back, spread his Olympian legs and delivered himself of immortal, "twice-born" Dionysius.

DIONYSIUS AND THE SATYRS

After Zeus gave birth to Dionysius he could not keep him on Mount Olympus because of Hera's terrible temper about his bastards. He therefore entrusted the baby to his lovely, fleet-footed older son, the god Hermes (Mercury). He told him to take the infant to the wild hills of Phrygia and there instruct his old friends the Satyrs to raise him. Hermes was to go to Phrygia from time to time to check on his little brother's progress and well-being.

Now the Satyrs were merry forest creatures who spent most of their time running through the woods, dancing to the music of the pipes of the god Pan (the Arch-Satyr), mounting one another and generally disporting themselves sexually with one another and any mortal who happened by.

Physically the Satyrs were handsome, well-made men and boys from the knees up while from the knees down they had the hind legs of goats and goat horns on their heads. They had tails like horses. They never wore clothing and spent much of their time with their (usually formidable) cocks in a state of erection or at least semi-tumescence.

The Satyrs immediately loved the little god and became his eternal friends as they are to this day.

It was when Dionysius had become a beautiful adolescent god that he had his first and greatest love affair; the one that was to set the mission of his entire destiny...Joy Giver.

DIONYSIUS AND AMPELOS

Once when Dionysius was still a young god—a sort of late adolescent in the terms of Greek god-hood—he was hunting in the Phrygian hills with his companions the Satyrs. This was well before he gave the vine (wine) to mankind. Several local youths were also present because the young men of Phrygia loved the company of the happy Satyrs and spent time with them whenever they could. On this day, however, Dionysius saw in their midst a youth he had not seen before. His name was Ampelos and he had the most perfect

face and body he had ever encountered in a human. Approaching him he found a sunny spirit and laughing charm which totally enraptured him. He could not help himself. He set out immediately to seduce him while the older Satyrs looked on with amused approval. His only fear was that, because of his beauty, his father, Zeus, might want Ampelos for himself and so he prays to his father. (The following is shortened and paraphrased—it is very long—from *The Dionysiaca* of Nonnos in the W.H.D. Rouse translation.)

Oh, Father! Grant to me one grace oh Father Zeus! I do not ask the heavenly fire of your lightning, nor the cloud, nor the thunderclap. If it please you give firey Hephaestos (Vulcan) the spark of your thunderbolt; let Ares (Mars) have a corselet of your clouds to cover his chest; let Apollo, if you will, wield our Father's lightning. My lad's beauty to me is dearer than Olympus. Tell me, Father, do not hide it, swear by your own young friend—where you were an eagle, when you picked up the boy with gentle, greedy claws and brought him to heaven—had he such beauty as Ampelos when you made him one of the heavenly table? Forgive me Father Longwing! But don't talk to me of your Trojan winepouurer, the servant of your cup. To me lovely Ampelos outshines even your beautiful Ganymede. To me he is more radiant. And for you there are plenty more; beautiful troops of fine young men. Court them all if you like. But please—leave this one lad to Dionysius!

And indeed, Zeus was content to leave Ampelos to Dionysius. Dionysius, disposed more to affectionate persuasion than force, started taking long walks with Ampelos, often swimming together in a forest pond, where their love was first consummated, hunting, throwing the thrysus, and especially—wrestling.

(Once again, the following shortened and paraphrased rendition of one of their wrestling matches is from *The Dionysiaca* of Nonnos in the W.H.D. Rouse translation.)

Both played in the woods together, now throwing the thrysus to travel through the air, not on some unshaded flat, or again they tramped the rocks hunting the hill bred lion. Often alone on a deserted bank they played on the sands of a pebbly river and had a wrestling match; no tripod was their prize, no flower-graven cauldron lay ready for the victory, no horse from the grass, but a double pipe of love—[an actual musical instrument and also an allusion to erect penises]—with clear sounding notes. It was a delightful strife for both, for mad Love stood between them!

Both stood forward as Love's Athletes!
 They joined their palms garlandwise over
 each other's back, packed at the waist
 with a knot of the hands, squeezed the
 ribs tight with the muscles of their four
 forearms, lifting each other from the
 ground alternately. Dionysius was in heav-
 en amid this honeysweet grappling, and
 love gave him a double joy, lifting and
 being lifted. Ampelos enclosed the god's
 wrist in his palm, then joining hands and
 tightening that intruding grip, interlaced
 his fingers in a double knot squeezing the
 right hand of willing Dionysius. Next the
 god ran his two hands round the young
 man's buttocks, squeezing his body with a
 loving grip, and lifted Ampelos high. But
 then Ampelos kicked the god neatly behind
 the knee and Dionysius, laughing heartily
 at the blow from his young comrade's
 naked foot, let himself fall on his back in
 the dust. While the god lay willingly on the ground, the
 naked youth sat straddling his naked belly, and Dionysius in
 pure delight lay stretched at full length on the ground gladly
 sustaining the sweet burden on his paunch. Then both rolled
 in the dust and the sweat poured out... In bliss...



Anonymous
Satyrs
Watercolor on paper
10" x 7"
ca. 1970

Thus Dionysius was conquered with his own consent, like his father as an athlete, who was conquered at last, though invincible; for mighty Zeus himself, wrestling with Herakles beside the Alpheios, bent willing knees and fell of his own accord before his son.

But The Fates had decreed that such beauty as Ampelos's must die young. On one of their many hunts together Ampelos is mortally wounded by a wild bull.

Dionysius, stricken with grief (not even the gods can countermand the fates) holds his dying lover in his arms. Then, out of compassion for Dionysius, the gods—led by Eros—change the beautiful youth into a beautiful vine while the god is holding him. This vine is henceforth sacred to Dionysius and from it he gives the grape and wine to mankind.

THE DIONYSIA *(Bacchanalia)*

The following scene of the Dionysia is the quintessence of one of the greatest celebrations of the ancient Greek religious year. The

description is extrapolated and paraphrased from the W.H.D. Rouse translation of *The Dionysiaca* of Nonnus and from other sources. When the Dionysia, in honor of the god, were celebrated the populous recreated the god's life in licentious revels and outdoor banquets. Dionysius and his companion Ampelos were represented, sometimes in effigy, but more often by two comely young men, naked and in drunken sexual horseplay on a couch set out on a hillside with bonfires and pitch torches illuminating the scene. Men and boys represented Satyrs and Fauns while women and maidens represented the Maenads (Bacchantes) a sort of female version of a Satyr. Many got drunk and ran through the hills and woods disporting themselves sexually with one another and, in the case of the men, with anyone of either sex whom they encountered. It was a festival in which all the rules were suspended. There was a great riot of dancing and gamboling around the couch with the two young men on it. Nearby, making music on his Pan Pipes, is the god Pan and a huge Phallus (another object sacred to the god) is being draped with garlands of ivy and parsley. Flagons of wine are poured over the Phallus.

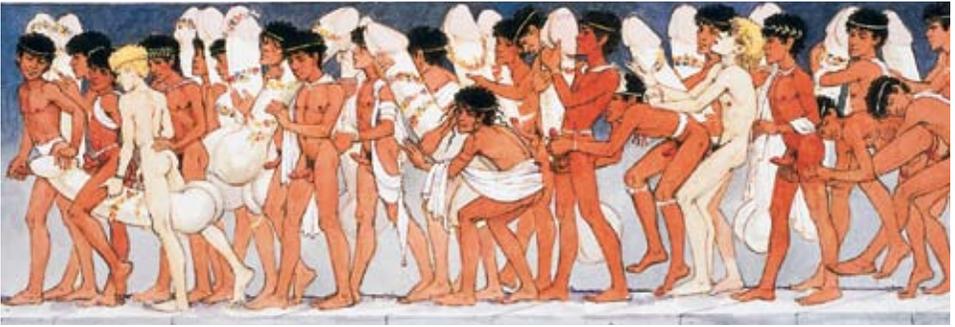
The opening stanza of the phallic hymn to the god, always sung at the Dionysia, has come down to us.

O Phallos!
Revel Roaming!
Glad companion
of the gloaming!
O, lover of wives—
and young men!
Here is my home
I gladly greet thee!

The "Greater Dionysia" lasted from the 28th of March to April 2nd. At Athens a great phallic procession took place in which many garlanded phallae were paraded, carried by younger men, along with an image of the god and accompanied by a large chorus of boys singing dithyrambs.

The "Minor Dionysia" took place in November and early December. In one called the *Oschophoria*, twenty youths from the ranks of the *ephebi* carried branches of vine with grapes still clinging to them in a nude race from the Temple of Dionysius in Athens to the Temple of Athena (Minerva) in Phalerum. Two of the finest boys from each of the major tribes were chosen each year for this honor.

Dionysius's chief symbols are, the Phallus (Priapus is a frequent companion), clusters of grapes and grape leaves (often entwined in his hair), a *thrysus* (a staff with a cluster of pine cones at the top),



*Don Gene Bell
Greater Dionysia
Watercolor on paper
10" x 28"
2000*

wreaths of laurel and ivy, and a drinking goblet. His totemic animals are the bull, the panther, the snake, the dolphin (when at sea) and, of course, the goat.

POSEIDON AND PELOPS

Poseidon (Neptune) great God of The Ocean, fell in love with the hero, Pelops. Young Pelops did not respond to Poseidon's overtures and one day while walking on the shore of the Peloponneses—the region is named after Pelops—a huge, warm, softly embracing wave swept the hero into the passionate embrace of Poseidon in the depths of his watery kingdom. Pelops became the "eronomos" (a youth loved by a man) of Poseidon and Poseidon became the "erastes" (a man who loves a younger man) of Pelops. (The Greeks had a word for everything.)

Later, when Pelops was a fully mature man, Poseidon let him go; and when it came time for Pelops to take a wife he invoked his old lover, Poseidon, with prayers at the sea's edge. Poseidon, for the love he still bore him, used his powers to help Pelops win the woman of his choice.

LAIUS AND CHRYSIPPUS

Later, when Pelops was the father of a handsome son named Chrysippus,—Laius, the King of Thebes fell—not in love—but in lust for the youth. Laius, feigning friendship, pretended to offer to teach the boy how to handle a four-in-hand chariot. While out in the field he suddenly turned his horses and, clutching the struggling youth, made a thunderous, headlong dash for Thebes with Pelops and his men in hot pursuit. But Laius made it through the gates of Thebes before Pelops and his host could overtake him. Laius held his prize fast and poor Chrysippus became a male concubine for the king's pleasure. There are numerous ancient vase paintings and relief's of The Rape of Chrysippus.

Pelops vowed revenge. He put a fearful curse on the house of Laius who was, indeed, eventually killed by his own son, Oedipus. This story was the beginning of the whole series of the famous Oedipus tragedies.

APOLLO AND HYAKINTHOS *(Hyacinth)*

Apollo, who loved numerous female nymphs and mortal women also loved and seduced certain beautiful youths, chiefest among whom was Hyakinthos. He was a young Spartan prince who had already been wooed by the poet Thamyris. He, however, proved no rival to Apollo.

But catastrophe awaited...Zephyr, The West Wind, had also fallen in love with Hyakinthos and he was wildly jealous of Apollo.

Hyakinthos gave his love only to Apollo and so, enraged, Zephyr decided that if he could not have the youth,—then no one else would have him.

One day, while Apollo was teaching the prince how to hurl the discus, Zephyr caught it in mid-air and hurled it back, crushing Hyakinthos's skull. Apollo mourned and made the hyacinth flower bloom from the fallen drops of blood in eternal memory of the

beautiful youth. A renaissance print shows Apollo cradling the dying Hyakinthos in his arms.



Ted Fusby
Zeus and Ganymede in Love
Colored pencil and watercolor on paper
13" x 10"
2000

ZEUS AND GANYMEDE

This is perhaps the most famous story of homosexual love in all of Greek mythology. Apollo's father Zeus, another ravisher of mortal women and nymphs, also fell in love with a boy, Prince Ganymede, son of King Tros of Troy.

Thinking that the prince would resist his advances, the father-god appeared to the youth in the guise of an injured eagle. As the boy approached to help the eagle he was seized, abducted to Mount Olympus, and ravished by the god. The youth, in turn, falls in love with the god. Forever onward, Zeus loved the youth and, wishing to keep him with him forevermore, made him immortal—cup-bearer to the gods—and he lives in eternal happiness on Olympus at Zeus's golden-sandaled feet.

(In one renaissance painting he is pictured kneeling—somewhat suggestively—between Zeus’s mighty legs holding a golden bowl of shimmering nectar.)

A related scene from mythology is of Zeus’s good son, the god Hermes, presenting King Tros a growing golden vine and two splendid white stallions in compensation for the loss of Ganymede. Hermes is assuring the king of the blissful immortality of his son. Mount Olympus looms majestically in the background with Zeus and Ganymede embracing on a jeweled couch. Zeus so loved Ganymede that he set his image among the stars. It is called Aquarius (Water-Cup-Bearer).

ORPHEUS AND CALAIS

Orpheus, the tragic lyre-player, along with Penelope, wife of Odysseus, is seen as one of the great paragons of conjugal fidelity. Although a demi-god—the son of Apollo and the muse Calliope—he was doomed to destruction.

Most know the story of his too brief marriage to his beloved wife, Eurydice—killed by a snake bite. He followed her to Tartarus (the underworld) to beg Hades—the god of the place—to allow her to return to life and into his arms. He played the lyre for Hades and his attendants and because of the power of his music they agree to let her return; but with conditions that are not met. (Orpheus looks back as they are ascending to the upper world.) She is immediately returned to death once more with no further chance of escape.

In deep mourning, he retires to Thrace vowing to eschew the company of women forever and the women of Thrace eventually kill him because of his refusal to succumb to their blandishments.

That is the part of the story we have come to know, but for the Ancient Greeks there was an additional twist to the tale...

In Thrace he meets a young man named Calais who falls in love with him and in time, Orpheus—experiencing unfamiliar longings because of the tenderness this youth shows him—finally opens his eyes to the world of male love and makes Calais his lover. It is a switch from the usual Greek pattern because it is the younger man who is teaching the older man. And yet, in spite of his love for Calais, there is never a suggestion that it has in any way altered his devotion to his lost wife. Inherent in the story is the suggestion that a lovingly married or widowed man might none-the-less find another kind of love (and sexual release) in the arms of another male. But the story has a sad and violent ending.

In this lost aspect of the legend it was his taking a man as a lover—not his merely avoiding their company—that drove the women of Thrace mad with fury. At last they tore him limb from limb and

threw his remains into the river, Hebrus.

For ever after he was credited (though cursed by the women) with having introduced the love of men into the land of Thrace...“where it flourishes.” (Stobaeus)

CASTOR AND POLLUX *(Gemini/The Dioscouri)*

These gorgeous twins, along with their sister, Helen of Troy, were the offspring of Zeus (in the guise of a swan) and Leda. The boys had an unusual birth in that they were hatched from a single egg produced by Leda. Castor became famous as a tamer of dangerous wild horses and Pollux was a great boxer.

As demi-gods sailing with Jason’s Argonauts stars encircled their heads during a terrible storm and the sea became calm. They thus became the patron deities of sailors, who also kept Phallae as protective amulets. The phallus was sacred to Dionysius.

At last, after many noble adventures and heroic deeds Castor was slain in a war and Pollux was so inconsolable that he begged his father, Zeus to be allowed to take his brother’s place in death.

Zeus took pity on him and allowed him to take his brother’s place every other day. But the twins—who cannot bear to be apart—are finally rewarded for their love of one another by being placed among the stars as the constellation Gemini so that they can be together for eternity.

The Heavenly Twins sometimes leave the firmament and appear at great battles to help right prevail, riding naked on magnificent white steeds... Their cult was so powerful that it lasted through Roman times.

Although usually interpreted as symbols of fraternal solidarity, there is something about the obsessive devotion of Castor and Pollux to one another which somehow transcends even legendary notions of brotherly love.

The men simply cannot live without one another and there are no women in their lives. Over time, literary descriptions and images of two beautiful nude males on rearing white horses, or in easeful company with one another cannot but imply an incestuous homo-eroticism that’s hard to ignore.

Was the story of Castor and Pollux really the ancient version of “Brothers Should Do It?”

ORESTES AND PYLADES

Orestes was the son of the great King Agamemnon—he of the Trojan War—and the wicked Queen Clytemenestra. During Agamemnon’s long absence at Troy she became the lover of the



Peter Flinsch
Pylades Calming Orestes (Detail)
Ink and wash on paper
18" x 24"
1976

pretender, Aegisthus, and the two conspired to murder Agamemnon should he return from the war. They would also have to murder Orestes, but his older sister, Electra, knowing of the plot, saved him by spiring him off to the court of his uncle, Strophius, King of Phocis.

In the palace Orestes grows up with the king's son, Pylades, and as Thomas Bullfinch so charmingly put it in 1855—"formed with him that ardent friendship which has become proverbial"... That's Victorianese for—"they became lovers."

The story gets tortuously complicated. Agamemnon is indeed murdered by the dirty duo, Orestes assumes false identities to save his hide, Electra prays for vengeance against her mother and her boyfriend, and Orestes finally kills them. But this creates a big problem.

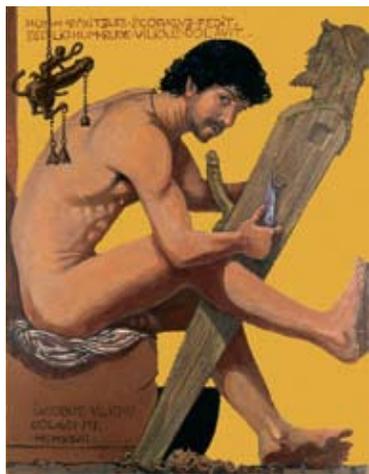
The Greeks and their gods hated the perfidious Clytemenestra and her false king, but they hated matricide even more. Orestes had to be punished.

The Eumenides, horrible avenging female deities were set upon him. He was driven insane, driven from country to country frantically trying to find surcease; a madman in the streets.

But he was not alone.

The faithful Pylades was with him always, protecting him from himself and others, foraging for food, shelter, clothing, praying to the gods and their oracles for help, bathing him, holding him, and making love to him; in short—saving his life. He was a hero of love.

Later, after endless wanderings and terrible adventures they were captured by the barbarous people of Taurus in Scythia and were bound (naked as usual) to be sacrificed to the goddess Artemis... But lo and behold, the temple priestess turns out to be the other, long lost, sister of Orestes... Recognizing her brother she succeeds in freeing them and the three make their escape and return to Mycenae... The gods finally relent, Orestes is acquitted of matricide, and he lives on in legend forever and ever with his beloved Pylades.



James Middleton
A Rude Sculptor
Acrylic on canvas
14" x 11"
1998

APOLLO AND CADMUS

Although Cadmus was destined to marry Harmonia and have many children and grandchildren, as a young man this prince of Phoenicia had an affair with the sun god. It happened thus...

Zeus, in the form of a bull, kidnapped and ravished Europa, Cadmus's sister. (The rape of Europa was a favorite subject for artists of the past.) Their father, King Aegnor, commanded Cadmus to retrieve his sister but it was impossible to go up against Zeus.

In desperation Cadmus consulted the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi for advice and the god took more than a passing interest in giving the handsome young prince a hand.

Apollo told Cadmus he couldn't go home again but to abide with him for a time. Finally, after many intimate encounters, Apollo told him to go to a certain foreign place, there to follow a cow, and wherever she stopped, there to found a city. It was thus that Cadmus became the founder of Thebes.

The story of Apollo and Cadmus has more than a hint of sexual coercion in it;—not of the rape and ravishment kind so frequent in Greek mythology, but of the tit-for-tat, I'll do this for you if you'll do that for me variety. Further, it embodies the proposition that—to use a modern term—an essentially “straight” man can have a homosexual relationship from which emanates a great and wonderful good.

HYPNOS AND ENDYMION

Hypnos, the god of sleep, so loved the beauty of the handsome Endymion's eyes that he broke his own rules and kept Endymion's eyes wide open even as he slept so that the god could adore their beauty.



ARION AND PERIANDER *(It should be noted that King Periander and the poet-musician Arion were real people whose love story entered the realm of legend.)*

Arion was a brilliant young musician (the lyre) and a “singer of songs” (a poet) in the most intimate service of Periander, King of Corinth.

At the time of a famous music festival in Sicily Arion left to compete in the contests. The king, who loved Arion, did not want him to go but the young man prevailed promising his immediate return after the festival... “Oh, Periander,” he exclaimed, “dismiss your fears. Soon shall you forget them in my hot embrace!”

He went to Sicily, competed, and won the biggest prize; a good deal of money... On the ship back the piratical sailors coveted his purse and announced their intent to kill him. But first, they wanted him to give them a concert dressed in his theatrical attire. He behaved courageously and with dignity, lamenting only,—“Alas, my only regret is that I must leave my friend behind me, never to see him again.”

With that he threw himself off the ship. They watched him go under, lyre still in his hand, and began counting their loot as the ship sailed on. (Now here's where the story becomes "legendary." We'll never know how the real Arion made it to shore.)

But the creatures of the deep had heard and were enchanted by his wonderful music and suddenly, a magnificent dolphin rose up beneath him and carried him to shore accompanied by other dolphins as outriders.

Arion rid himself of his sodden garments and journeyed on, lyre in hand singing with a heart full of love, not caring about his loss, only mindful of what he still had; the love of Periander and his lyre.

There is a fevered reunion as the king receives Arion into his waiting arms...

Later, the king tracks down the miscreants, has them brought to court, and asks where Arion is. They lie saying they left him happy in Tarentum whereupon Arion emerges from behind a curtain. They are terrified, admit their guilt, and are sure they are going to die. Periander, however, merely exiles them in perpetuity; an astonishingly magnanimous act for the ancient Greeks. Pity was not much their style in situations like this.

The king explains his decision thusly; "Arion wishes not your blood, you slaves of avarice! Begone! Seek some barbarous land and never may anyone or anything beautiful delight your souls!"

HARMODIUS AND ARISTOGEITON

(Tragic Heroes of Democracy and real people)

Harmodius and Aristogeiton were two strapping young Athenians who lived in the time of the brutal tyrant, Hippias. They were lovers and completely devoted to one another.

Hippias had an equally tyrannical younger brother, Hipparchus, who took a fancy to Harmodius and attempted to seduce him and supplant Aristogeiton in Harmodius's affections. Harmodius, in spite of the danger of resisting so powerful a personage, would have none of it.

Failing in his attempt and enraged, Hipparchus set about to take revenge with the connivance and under the protection of his brother, the dictator.

They mounted a public affront to Harmodius's sister at a public festival—probably something in the nature of a sexual assault—with impunity. Thereupon Harmodius and Aristogeiton entered into a conspiracy with a few brave democrats to rid Athens of the tyrants.



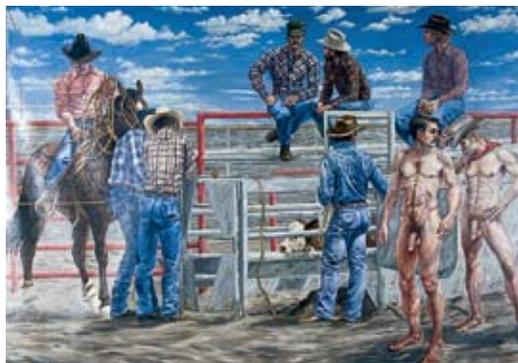
Hugh Holland
Narcissus and Ameinius
Photo Composite Giclee Print, AP
16" x 12"
2001

Their attempt to assassinate them (514 BCE) failed and Harmodius was cut down on the spot. Aristogeiton was captured and hideously tortured to death as an example to the populous.

When Hippias and his gangsters were finally overthrown in 510 BCE, Harmodius and Aristogeiton became Heroes of Democracy and a vast cult grew up around them. Songs and poems were written about them, monumental statues were sculpted in their image, and one of the most magnificent—probably by Antenor—was put in a place of honor in the Agora. A beautiful, larger-than-life size marble of the two tyrannicides, standing shoulder to shoulder, nude and defiant, can be seen in The National Museum of Naples in Italy.

MORE ABOUT AND BY REAL PEOPLE SOME FRAGMENTS, POEMS, EPIGRAMS, ETC...

It is noteworthy, considering that the greater part of ancient Greek writing has been lost to us, that there exists such a large amount of work which explicitly involves homosexual love in what remains...



Delmas Howe
Theseus and Perithous Entering the Arena
Oil on canvas
54" x 82"
1981

STRATON *(An Epigram)*

Going out in revel after supper,
I, the wolf, found a lamb standing
at my door, the son of my
neighbor, Aristodicus, and
throwing my arms around him
I kissed him to my heart's
content, promising on my
oath—many gifts...

KALOS KAGATHOS

(A phrase attached to hundreds of surviving images)

Often, Greek images of young, nude males (vase paintings, relief's, ceramics) bear the simple inscription, "Kalos Kagathos,"

which encapsulates the Greek ideal of youthful male beauty. The body alone was not enough. It means "beautiful in body and soul."

PHIDIAS

One of the two greatest sculptors of antiquity (the other was Praxiteles who also had homosexual loves) Phidias so loved one of his models that he inscribed “beautiful Pantarkus” on a finger of his monumental statue of Zeus at Olympia.

and then again—

AN UNKNOWN LABORER

“Hippias is Beautiful”—inscribed on a building brick..

SOLON *(The Law Giver)*

One of the greatest and most enlightened law-givers of the ancient world. He was also a dedicated lover of men.

You will love these young men
in their delightful prime
desiring their thighs
their delightful lips.

STRATON

Seventeen years old
I wouldn't dare lay claim
Zeus alone has that right!

and

It is youth the thing that I love
As to beauty and what it may be
I have no preference for every young man
has his own.

and

I am not charmed by needless things
taught in the school of art
but by the dusty grime of a youth
fresh from the palaestra [gym]
and by the glow given to
his supple limbs by the gloss
of oil. My love is sweetest when
he is unadorned.

ANACREON

May his chest and hands be those of Hermes
His thighs those of Pollux
And his belly that of Dionysius



Gene Thornton
Theseus and the Minotaur
Acrylic on canvas
20" x 24"
2000

PINDAR

Pindar was the greatest and most powerful of all Greek lyric poets (522–442 BCE) most of whose love poetry has been lost to us. It is known, however, that he died in the arms of his lover, the athlete, Theoxenus, who he described as “my gift from The Gods.”

PLATO, SOCRATES AND THE PALATINE ANTHOLOGY

Socrates and Plato both had vivid love lives as younger men. Each—as he aged in his turn—turned his physical sexuality into a curiously strict form of intellectual and

spiritual homosexual love. (Thus we have the oddly inappropriate term “Platonic” when referring to sexless heterosexual friendships.) As philosophers (not to mention the fact that they were getting older) they determined that the life of the mind/soul outweighed the life of the flesh although both continued to adore “the beauty” of men.

Here are two of several fragmentary epigrams of Plato.

When I kissed you Agathon, I felt your soul on my lips; as if it would penetrate into my heart with quivering longing...
and

...oh, Dion, who filled my heart with the madness of love...

The amount of homosexual poetry still extant is amazing and I cannot begin to touch it all here. In the immense Palatine Anthology the twelfth book is devoted exclusively to the love of young men. It contains 58 epigrams of nearly 1300 lines altogether and represents the work of 20 famous Greek writers. There are many more by unknown authors.

Here are three representative pieces from The Anthology.

EPITAPH

How small the stone, dear Sabinus
That tells of the great love that was between us
I shall love you always:
and you,
Kneeling by Lethe's Water with the dead,
Drink not then forgetfulness of me.

—Anonymous

and

Fair are the boys of Tyre
By Love I swear it
But Mysikos sweeps the bright stars from the sky!
That Bursting Sun!

—Melaeger

and

Boy, hold my wreath for me
The night is black
 the path is long
And I am completely and beautifully drunk
Nevertheless I will go
To Themison's house and sing beneath his window
You need not come with me:
 though I may stumble
He is a steady lamp for the feet of love!

MORE REAL PEOPLE—PHAEDO/ XENOPHON/ALCIBIADES

An interesting footnote to Greek philosophical history involves the figure of Phaedo. As told in Plato's *Phaedo* it was this young man with whom Socrates had his last dialogue on the immortality of the soul just before he is forced to drink hemlock for "corrupting Athenian youth." (This so-called "corruption" didn't have to do with sex, it had to do with "ideas.")

We learn more of Phaedo... He was a boy of Elis, captured in war with Sparta and sold into slavery at Athens to the owner of a house of male prostitution. It was as a male prostitute that Socrates first found him, indicating that Socrates frequented such houses. Finding Phaedo not only beautiful but intelligent and spirited—*Kalos Kagathos*—he prevailed upon a wealthy adherent to buy the young man's freedom whereupon he became part of Socrates' circle.

Speaking of male prostitution, fragments by Aeschines, Timaeus, Theopompos and others make it clear that there was an abundance of male houses in and around Athens; especially in the port of Piraeus and on Mount Lycabettus. While most of the prostitutes were slaves, and although it was forbidden, free boys from good families could occasionally be found working "to make extra money." (Some things never change.)

The trade became so pervasive that Solon, the great law-giver, decided it should be regulated. He started by levying a tax on houses that placed males at the sexual disposal of other males at exactly the same rate that was levied on public women's houses.

MORE ON SOCRATES

It was common knowledge among the ancients that Socrates, in his late teens and early twenties, had been the lover of his teacher, Archelaus.

Xenophon has Diogenes Laertius say, “In his youth he was much given to sensual love which was later supplanted by zealous intellectual work.” And Socrates replies, “Perhaps I may be able to help you in your search for good young men since I am given to love. For whenever I terribly love men I strive with my whole heart that, while loving them, I may in turn be loved.”

ALCIBIADES

Born in Athens (450 BCE) into wealth and according to his contemporaries “of god-like beauty” he came to be one of the most flamboyantly famed figures of the ancient world. He was the quintessential young-man-on-the-make cum hustler, aggressively bi-sexual in the manner of countless ancient Greeks, and a brilliant athlete and horseman who became one of Greece’s greatest generals.

Orphaned early, he became a ward of the Athenian ruler, Pericles, who was related to his mother. He grew up with the elite youth of the state and became a student of Socrates who, like everyone else, fell in love with him. Later, when he was about 18 years old, Socrates saved his life at the battle of Potidea (432 BCE). (Citizens were a sort of reserve force in Greek wars. Everyone had to fight.) Eight years later Alcibiades returned the favor by saving Socrates’ life at the battle of Delium (424 BCE).

As a reward for his bravery an immensely wealthy Athenian gave Alcibiades his daughter’s hand in marriage greatly increasing his personal wealth.

As Socrates’ pupil he became the darling of the philosopher, of Plato, and of all the important men of Athens. He gave his sexual favors to any man who could advance him. Apart from his legendary beauty he had what we would now call an astounding level of personal magnetism—charisma. But he also had a skeptical intelligence.

At 16, when his military duties began, he had already learned to question common ideas of justice, temperance, patriotism, and—most dangerously—Greek concepts of what was holy. He indulged in the wildest and most insolent behavior. His amours (especially with men) his debaucheries and impious revels, both homosexual and heterosexual, became notorious throughout the Greek world. But great as were his vices, his abilities—and his beauty—were even greater. He became deeply involved in Athenian politics, all the

while burning down a succession of male and female lovers and keeping Socrates and Plato utterly entranced.

The story of his political and military life is far too complicated to convey here. Suffice it to say he mounted heroic expeditions on behalf of Athens, eventually became a traitor, played one city-state off against another, and was finally assassinated in Phrygia at the age of 47.

Much is known about his life and in the *Protagorios* of Plato the protagonist says, “Whence come you Socrates? And yet I need hardly ask the question, for I know you have been in chase of the beautiful Alcibiades. I saw him day before yesterday and he has got a beard like a man; and indeed he is a man, as I may tell you in your ear. But I still think he is very beautiful.”

Socrates replies, “What of his beard? Are you not of Homer’s opinion that a young man is most charming when his first beard has come? And that is now the very charm of Alcibiades.”

The French writer and artist, Jean Cocteau, said the most perfect facsimile of the real Alcibiades (who was said to have blond hair) would be Cocteau’s lover, the actor Jean Marais, naked, but bearing the helm, sword, shield and sandals of a Greek warrior.

MORE REAL PEOPLE THE GIVING OF ARETE

(ah-RAY-tay)

The following is extrapolated from the book *Phallos* by Thorkil Vangaard (Copenhagen 1969/UK and USA—International Universities Press/Sociology-Anthropology Series 1972) Social anthropologists of the nineteenth century, on seeing numerous stone inscriptions excavated by archeologists in several parts of Greece (The Peloponneses, Crete, Melos, Rhodes, Thera, etc.) assumed that a crude—albeit scandalous—form of simple “initiation”—a kind of rite of passage for adolescent youths—was simply an “unsavory” tradition among the Dorian Greeks; something akin to modern “hazing.”

But over time a better understanding of one word that is always attached to these inscriptions and a greater willingness on the part of scholars to accept the truth of the matter



Campbell Paxton
Red Figure Fragment—Arete
Terra cotta, black brick
6" x 2" x 2"
1999

changed all that. The word is ARETE.

“The Giving of Arete,” was not a legend of the ancient Greeks, not a base and brutal form of “initiation,” but an actual, deeply held religious belief—and practice—of the ancient Dorian Greeks. Both parties, the older man and the younger, had a completely different understanding of what was happening than the one we might imagine today.

There is no single modern English equivalent for the ancient Greek word, “Arete.” It means all of the following: Noble Manhood, Manly Virtue, The Genius of Masculine Skill, Power, Wisdom, Character and Dynamism.

The Dorian Greeks believed the way to impart “arete”—all the best qualities of manhood—to a youth was by performing anal coitus upon him. They believed—literally—that a man’s semen was a sacred fluid that had spiritual and magical properties quite apart from its procreative function. The semen of a “fine and honorable” man was to them as holy and as sacramental as communion is to some modern Christians. The act of penetration and resulting infusion of semen into the body of the youth constituted a religious “rite” whereby the senior partner imparted his nobility and virtue to the younger male.



James Snodgrass
The Festival of Priapus
Watercolor
8" x 6"
ca. 1978

Inscriptions in stone commemorating acts of ritual homosexual copulation are widely scattered. Because they are all very similar, I will only quote one from the island of Thera (modern Santorini).

Invoking the Delphic Apollo
I, Crimon
Here copulated with a boy
Son of Bathycles

Because the text opens with an invocation to the god Apollo we understand that what follows describes a religious rite involving the giving of “arete.” Crimon not only announces that he is increasing the youth’s “arete” by putting his seed into him, he also proclaims the boy as “high-born” by naming his father. The likelihood is that Crimon and Bathycles were friends and that Crimon had been chosen by Bathycles to give “arete” to his son. Incest in the first degree, both heterosexual and homosexual, was anathema to the ancient Greeks and so a father depended on an honorable friend for this service. Two fathers who were good friends could undertake this sacred obligation on behalf of one another and upon each others’ sons.

It is noteworthy that the boy’s name is not mentioned. It will only become important when he himself reaches noble manhood and is ready to pass on his “arete” to a still younger man.

I have included “The Giving of Arete” because—although not a legend as such, but rather a fact of ancient Dorian behavior—it was a socio-religious phenomenon completely dependent upon belief in the entire pantheon of Greek gods, heroes, nymphs, etc., and the religious construct of the countless myths surrounding them.

LESBIAN INFLUENCES

Although ancient Greek mythology has a paucity of Lesbian references (it was, after all, an intensely phallogocentric, male-dominated society) there are none-the-less three sources which all by themselves provide a wealth of visual possibility. Most importantly, the poems of Sappho, the great bard of Lesbos singing the glory of her girlfriends. The best source book for Sappho is *Sappho: A Garland / The poems and Fragments of Sappho*—translated by Jim Powell and published by The Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux/New York City.

In mythology there is the goddess Artemis (Diana) the goddess of the hunt who was always surrounded by comely maidens in attendance. Kind to humans (men included) who sought her mercy and protection, she none-the-less did not want men to get too close. Indeed, if one even tried to sneak a peek he got torn to shreds.

ARTEMIS was lecherously spied upon in the bath by the hunter ACTAEON even though he knew that no mortal could look upon a deity without the deity's consent. When she learned of his affronting presence she had him torn to pieces by the hounds of heaven...Even though it was never enunciated clearly in the context of Greek mythology, there was certainly something "different" about Artemis. And finally, there were the AMAZONS: a tribe of warrior women who eschewed the company of men. What do you think their home life was like?...It boggles the mind!

IN CLOSING

The more I read and write the more references I find and thus, this brief compendium could go on and on. And so, I here—arbitrarily—bring this collection of information to an end. I feel confident that there is surely something in these myths, legends and moments in the lives of people who lived and breathed that will light a creative fire in the imaginations of living artists—just as they have done...for three millennia.

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Homosexuality: A Cross Cultural Approach, by Donald Webster Cory. The Julian Press, 1956 with material by John Addington Symonds, W.H.D. Rouse, Edward Westermarck, Edward Carpenter, Richard Burton, Paolo Mantagazza, Hans Licht, Voltaire, Alfred Kinsey, George W. Henny, Morris Ploscowe, Albert Ellis and others.

Bulfinch's Mythology, by Thomas Bulfinch

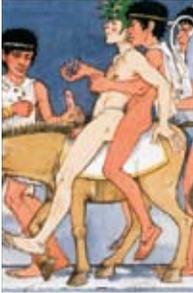
Greek Mythology, by Edith Hamilton

The Encyclopaedia Britannica, the 1911 edition.

Catalog

The exhibition 'And Lo! The Old Gods!' was held at Leslie/Lohman Gallery from April 3—June 2, 2001. Thirty artists were represented showing between one and fourteen works per artist with a total of seventy-three works shown.

In this catalog each artist is represented by one of their works from the exhibition.



Don Gene Bell
Greater Dionysia #1 (Detail)
Watercolor on paper
10" x 28"
2000



David Birmingham
Ganymede
Oil on board
14" x 11"
1999



Cassandra
Gaea, Mother of the Titans,
Grandmother of Zeus
Plastilina, Edition of 12
(Available in bronze)
16" x 14" x 10"
2001



James Childs
Initiation
Pencil & chalk on grey paper
25½" x 33"
1980



James Fetterman
Hercules Seducing Iolaus
Pencil and charcoal on paper
20" x 17"
2001



Peter Flinsch
Pylades Calming Orestes
Ink and wash on paper
18" x 24"
1976



Ron Fowler
Neptune of the Nets
Mixed media on laminate
54" x 16"
2001



Ted Fusby
Zeus, with Ganymede Imploring
Colored pencil and watercolor
on paper
14" x 11"
2000



Kim Hanson
Castor & Pollux
Silver fiber print 1/20
8" x 10"
1992



Peter Harvey
Vita Brevis
Oil on canvas
35" x 46"
1994



Hugh Holland
Ganymede the Cupbearer
Photo Composite Giclee Print, AP
12" x 16"
2001



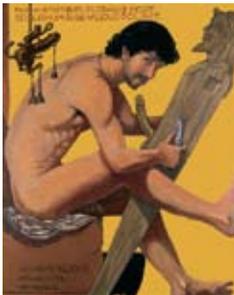
Douglas Holtquist
Amulet, Sacred to Dionysius
Marble, steel
11" x 6" x 3"
2001



Delmas Howe
Herakles and Hylas
Lithograph, AP
22½" x 23"
1993



Josef Kozak
Eros Embracing a Youth
Acrylic on canvas
11" x 14"
2001



James Middleton
A Rude Sculptor
Acrylic on canvas
14" x 11"
1998



Shozo Nagano
The Suffering of Prometheus
Acrylic on board
40" x 50"
2000



Edy Nathan
Artemis: The Warrior
Clay
22" x 8"
2001



Len Paoletti
Narcissus (Yon (Ryan) Dominique)
Acrylic on canvas
24" x 18"
2000



Campbell Paxton
Satyr
Bronze, brown, green, black patina
on marble base
10" x 6" x 6"
1999



Darold Perkins (Perk)
Greek Revival
Oil on board
36" x 24"
2001



Marion Pinto
Zeus/Amun Re, The Father God
Oil on canvas
78" x 50"
1985



Joe Radoccia
The Absorption of Narcissus
Acrylic on canvas
24" x 36"
2001



Andrew Sichel
Virility Greeting a Titan
Oil on canvas
60" x 30"
1972



Wayne Snellen
The Revenge of Ameinius
(Narciuss transfixed in the pool)
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 52"
2001



James Snodgress
The Festival of Priapus
Watercolor
6" x 5"
ca. 1978



FT
Untitled
Watercolor
10" x 8"
ca.1970



Richard Taddei
Achilles and Patroklos
Acrylic on canvas
76" x 48"
2001



Gene Thornton
Achilles and Patroclus
Acrylic on canvas
20" x 24"
2000



The. Titolo
How Ganymede Dreamed It Would
Be Before the Abduction
Acrylic on paper
14" x 11"
1985



Paul Wirhun
Kalos
Batiked Ostrich Egg
6" diameter
2001



The Leslie/Lohman Gay Art Foundation is a non-profit foundation which was established in 1990 to provide an outlet for art work that is unambiguously gay and which is frequently denied access to mainstream venues. The Foundation's Leslie/Lohman Gallery mounts exhibitions of work in all media by gay and lesbian artists with an emphasis on subject matter that speaks directly to gay and lesbian sensibilities, including, erotic, political, romantic, and social imagery and providing special support for emerging and underrepresented artists. It's programs include regularly scheduled exhibitions, video events, workshop presentations of plays, a slide registry, artists' and curator's talks, panel discussions, newsletter, a membership program and an archive with the Foundation's permanent collection.



THE LESLIE/LOHMAN GAY ART FOUNDATION

www.leslielohman.org