

Harry Potter Notes - Chapter 2

http://www.classicpage.com/greek_harry_potter/commentary/chapter2.htm

δέκατον μὲν ἔτος τόδ' ἐπεί: you'll of course recognise that these words have been lifted from the start of Aeschylus' magnificent parodos in his award-winning drama Agamemnon. No doubt the author here is attempting to convey the epic grandeur of his little tale, and also evoke the sense of tragedy which looms over the house of Dursley as surely as it did over the House of Atreus. Mrs Dursley has something of a Clytemnestra about her.

ἐφ' ἵππου ξυλίνου. After the allusion to the Trojan War, it would be natural to assume that the Wooden Horse referred to here has some connection. Not so. It's just a child's toy, reminding the reader (though obviously not the Dursleys) that in times past children looked forward to riding real horses rather than a δίκυκλος ἀγωνιστικός.
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τηλυγέτου Another Homeric echo. Even we Greeks don't really know what τηλυγέτος was supposed to mean exactly, but it's only ever used to describe some special, cherished child, Agamemnon's son Orestes for example. Ironically though, it is Harry who will have to avenge a murdered parent, not Dudley.
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Ἐρώτιον νήπιον : Christian mythology has popularised the

idea of an angel - the word ἄγγελος is as you know merely our Greek word for messenger, whether from a mortal or an immortal. But sentimental interpretations of the scriptures by artists have confused the awesome messengers of their immortal god with the cute little winged images of Eros, son of Aphrodite, which decorate so much of our pottery. So "angel" is now a dismal cliché, and applied to any cute person. The author has wisely restored JKR's "little angel" to "little cupid". The English are funny about pigs. For us they are fine creatures, to be sacrificed to the gods on very special occasions. For them they epitomise all that is nasty, ugly and fat - hence Harry compares his cousin to a "pig in a wig". We rather like the way the Greek phrase δελφάκιον ἐν φενάκη preserves a similar sound to the English.

ἡ Μαργή: Marge - an auntie (see ch1 p9). Her name when transliterated into Greek means of course "the mad woman". This is a useful coincidence!
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ἡ Συκέα: Mrs Figg. συκέα is a fig tree, as you know. "Fig" in Greek has various connotations, not all of them polite: perhaps compare English "I don't give a fig"?

κινηματοθέατρον: The English have taken our word κίνημα, which they apply to a large building where people sit around in the dark watching pictures on a wall, pictures that

move. It all reminds me of the cave in Plato's Republic, where people sit in the dark looking at images which they believe are real.

Δρόμας κτλ : well-educated readers will recognise these as the names of some of Actaeon's hounds. The English are amused by this story, because they have now banned hunting with dogs, and so the fate of Actaeon in being torn apart by his own dogs would now be impossible in England! We Greeks give names to our horses and dogs (remember Argus in the Odyssey), but we don't revere cats like the English and the Egyptians. This is probably why Mrs Figg's cats have doggy names.

κοχλία γυμνή: a slug is a naked snail, obviously.

Πιτύουσαι: the Pine Islands are now called the Balearics, and include Majorca and Ibiza, popular holiday destinations.
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νή τῶ θεῶ : "by the two gods", "by the holy twain". Women in Greece swear by Castor and Polydeuces, the heavenly twins - two rather minor deities. In England they seem to be allowed to swear by the same gods as the men.

Νεώνητον δὲ τοῦτο : the car is new; it is difficult to convey the sense of pride and pure joy of ownership that cars inspire. Although it wouldn't last nearly as long, the cost would be

something like that of a slave for us - but I don't think we get quite so excited about our νεώνητοι.

ὁ Πιαρὸς Πολύχους: Piers Polkiss, Dudley's odious friend. His first name means fat, the second suggests overflowing in abundance. He's described ἄσαρκος so was not actually fat at all - so his name is ironic, like Little John in the English story of Robin Hood!

γαλῆ: the English have a large number of names for small furry animal, where we have only two - the smaller one we call μῦς, the slightly bigger ones γαλῆ.

But the English have to decide whether the creature is a mouse, rat, shrew, vole, dormouse, weasel, stoat, ferret, polecat, marten, badger. Why does it matter? Piers has a "face like a rat", so presumably seemed more appropriate here than μῦς.

ὁ Φερνίων: Vernon, Dursley's first name, which we hear for the first time. In Greek it's very similar to φερνιον, a fish-basket. It also suggests φερνή, the personal property which belongs to the wife in a marriage. This seems very appropriate for the "hen-pecked" Dursley.

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παγωτόν: "frozen thing". In modern times many items of food can be frozen artificially. A very popular one is the παγωτόν or ice-cream, which is still considered something of a luxury. A particularly large and brightly coloured ice-cream is known, for some reason as a "Knickerbocker Glory" - hence θυλακοδόξα - "trouser-glory".
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μετάξης : our word for silk, of course - but nowadays this is a powerful drink made by our descendants, which is sillken on the tongue.