

SUMMER READING

with Sarla Langdon continued

Introduction to Classical Literature by Richard Jenkyns

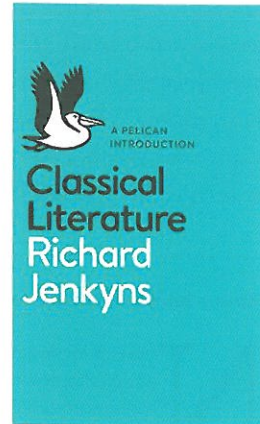
(Pelican Books £7.99)

When I approach a book like Professor Richard Jenkyns' *Classical Literature*, I metamorphose in strange ways. All aquiver, I am a child again, on the verge of entering the wonderful, fast-moving, wired-up world of ancient Greek and Roman myths, legends and stories.

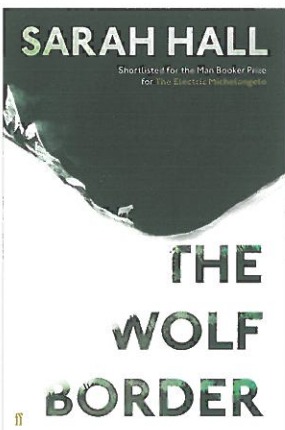
In this small volume, classicist Richard Jenkyns covers nearly one thousand years of writing, poems and stories we are familiar with, no matter what level of education we have benefited from. We all know the story of Troy, the beautiful Helen and the unforgettable heroes who fought in the Trojan War: mighty Hercules, Achilles and his heel, the powerful Agamemnon, and immortal Ulysses (*Odysseus*) himself. The Greek and Latin writings of Homer, Ovid and Virgil live on in our cultural consciousness as much as the work of Shakespeare or Chaucer – and yet are regarded as mental fodder for the posh, the privately educated toffs, even though everybody knows the stories and all watch the epic adventures of, for example, Jason and the Argonauts, avidly on TV.

Richard Jenkyns, in short, engaging chapters, puts the stories, the plays, the poems and the authors in order for us. He inspires us, the general readers, to realise how much we already know about the most enduring and influential works of the classical world: from the Homeric epics to the golden age of Latin poetry, from rollicking short stories to the tragedies of Sophocles' *Oedipus*. He explores their continuing influence in our cultural life, an influence so strong that we don't even realise we are quoting seriously ancient texts and referring to epic events that were old before Christ was even born.

So don't dismiss the classical traditions --- refresh your world with the mythological heritage that lived on for millenia because the Greeks were masters of invention, pioneering most of the major literary forms and genres that are used today, including epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, myth and history. The Romans, already working in the shadow of Greek literature (*to the same extent we do today*), recreated and reinforced many of these forms—as we continue to do.



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The Wolf Border by Sarah Hall (Faber & Faber £17.99)

Sarah Hall's strange and subtle novel *How To Paint A Dead Man* was reviewed in this column as a Booker Prize contender in 2006 and was one of the best novels in the list. Her latest novel *The Wolf Border* is a work in the same strain: exotic subject matter, detached treatment, and a singular protagonist who brings her own new perspectives to the pitfalls that face a single mother in challenging circumstances.

Rachel Caine is a world-renowned expert in conservation, with particular reference to wolves. Her lupine obsession finds her in charge of an isolated wolf sanctuary in Idaho.

The realisation that she is pregnant as a result of a drunken encounter with a colleague encourages her to accept a job back in her native England, where she is to set up a turnkey project --- a historic return of the English grey wolf --- at a vast Cumbrian estate owned by the Earl of Annerdale.

These events occur post-Scottish referendum and Scotland is now an independent country. This affects the political activities of Rachel's employer, who is unable to

offer the support the project needs. The wolves arrive to a chorus of local disapproval which soon turns into national delight when they mirror Rachel's fecundity with a litter of their own.

The Wolf Border is a commentary on the dangers of political and physical confinement --- the wolves escape and make their way cross country across the border to Scotland. Their adventures and Rachel's offer a vision of the irrelevance of political and psychological boundaries. As always, Sarah Hall picks up the contemporary, blends it with the extraordinary, stirs in her superb prose style and leaves the reader fascinated and enriched.

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