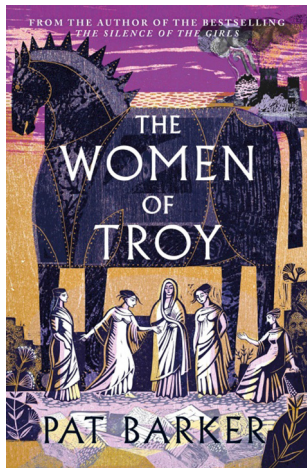


## The Women of Troy

Barker (P.) Pp. 307. London: Hamish Hamilton (Penguin Random House UK), 2021. Cased, £18.99. ISBN: 978-0-241-42723-1.

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After the success of *The Silence of the Girls*, this sequel needs little presentation; in beautiful, deceptively simple prose, Pat Barker invites us to revisit the fall of Troy through compelling characters and a naked look at their experiences.

The book starts with the warriors inside the Trojan horse and finds its resolution, if we can indeed talk about resolution, with the departure of the ships from Troy. The story is told for a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience who want to listen with sympathy to female voices, and one of the main appeals

of the novel is the opportunity it lends to move behind the scenes and see the conflicts in the Trojan war with modern eyes. Those who loved *The Silence of the Girls* will want to read this book to find an uplifting end to the story. However, it can also certainly be enjoyed independently. Indeed, I would recommend it as a first point of contact for mature students who want to explore classical reception or find ways into classical literature through modern voices.

As a classicist, it is impossible not to read the novel as a response to earlier versions of the story. There is a superb intertextual conversation with Homer and an array of different literary and artistic works, from the *Antigone* to modern films. However, good knowledge of classical literature is by no means necessary to cherish what is, essentially, a magnificent piece of storytelling in its own right. An excellent example of this is the fascinating use of similes throughout the novel. Whereas classicists will inevitably read them as a response to their Homeric predecessors, the sheer artistry with which they invite you into the story will be compelling to an audience from any other background. They leave an imprint: days after reading that Cassandra has ‘a network of raised blue veins like drowned worms under the skin’ (p. 121), the thought still creeps me out. The same is true of the invitation to hear female voices and explore their previously mostly invisible world. For instance, the moving singing performance in chapter 12 presents an opportunity to admire humanity, companionship and literary enjoyment. Still, for the classicist, it will be complemented by a contrast with Phemius and Demodocus, and their audiences. The text provides a unique opportunity to reinterpret and challenge the universal values presented.

Teachers of Latin, Greek and Classical Civilisation will want to consider this book as complementary reading for A-Level students,

but it is not a straightforward choice. The main caveat is that a strong trigger warning is necessary: the depictions of abuse do not hold back and drag the reader into the raw realities of violence. Also, the presentation of the characters is so well crafted and convincing that there exists a risk that some students will find it challenging to draw the line between the original texts or translations they have read, and the story as presented by Pat Barker. Finally, some may find the anachronisms in the book inadmissible, but this is a work of fiction and not a historical account, and part of its appeal lies precisely in the fact that it is neither our world nor the world of Homer.

I would like to finish this review by praising the material quality of the hardcover edition. Sarah Young’s print for the jacket and internal artwork is absolutely delightful, and it suits incredibly well the high quality and care that have gone into binding the book. All in all, this is a book that should be present on the shelf of every classicist.

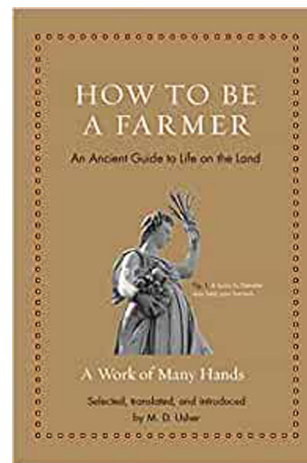
doi: 10.1017/S2058631022000162

## How to be a Farmer: An Ancient Guide to Life on the Land

Usher (M.D.) pp. xvi+247. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. Cased, £12.99, US\$16.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-21174-9

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This handsome book is an interesting selection of a wide range of texts in celebration of country living. 24 passages are chosen from: Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, the Orphic Hymns, Cato, Plato, Virgil, Horace, Lucretius, Varro, Pliny (the Elder), Columella, Musonius Rufus, Longus and one telling inscription which ends the book. The passages chosen show different aspects of rural life from the idealised and the idyllic to the shared experience of tilling the land as a source of scientific observations, to the practicalities

of naming dogs, choosing rams or appreciating the humble donkey. The agrarian lore contained in it is (Usher admits) of limited practical value to anyone setting up a farm today—he describes it (p. xi) candidly as ‘dated, locale-specific and often outmoded or inaccurate’. The book aims for ‘variety and accessibility’ in making its selections and the result is an engaging mixture of history, philosophy, poetry, prose treatise, epigraphy and satire. Varied it certainly is. In his spirited introduction, Usher makes an apology for the fact that much of the ancient evidence presents us with a