

Edith Hamilton's books on classical antiquity—most notably *The Greek Way* (1930), *The Roman Way* (1932), and *Mythology* (1942)—reached, and touched, a wide reading public. They played a key role in launching the study of classics in translation in American colleges and universities after World War II, at a time when various social and political developments, including the GI Bill funding college education for military veterans, were transforming the demographics of higher education. By re-imagining the classical world and its legacy for a general audience, they helped re-authorize Greco-Roman antiquity as a source of intellectual prestige and artistic inspiration.

Since Hamilton's writings strongly favor Greek over Roman antiquity and lavish much attention on Athenian drama, she is often viewed as possessing special expertise on the ancient Greek theater as well as on Greek philosophical thought and mythological lore. But as Yopie Prins has observed, Eva Palmer Sikelianos—who attended Bryn Mawr College in the mid-1890's with Hamilton, and who used Hamilton's translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* when directing and choreographing the play at Delphi in 1927—associated both herself and Hamilton with “the lunatic fringe” in their approaches to re-creating Greek tragedy for a contemporary audience. Prins argues that in their re-presentations of the *Prometheus* both Hamilton and Palmer-Sikelianos did not “claim the authority of professional philology”, working instead on the border between amateur and professional. Indeed, Prins would view both women in the context of the early twentieth century female “high amateurism” described by Bonnie G. Smith in *The Gender of History* (1998), as “articulat[ing] liminality that worked to mark the boundaries, spaces, and locations of femininity” and “expand[ing] cognition to include aesthetic, emotional and kinetic registers” within “a historical knowledge..beyond the horizon of the professional.”

My discussion responds to that of Prins, agreeing that Hamilton's re-creation of ancient Greece, and particularly its dramatic texts, did not claim the authority of professional philology. So, too, Hamilton's “historical knowledge” of the classical world is best situated “beyond the horizon of the professional.” Yet I would distinguish Hamilton from Sikelianos and the other female amateurs discussed by Smith. Unlike them, she was not interested in the women of Greek antiquity, or the aesthetic, emotional and kinetic aspects of the Greek literary works she forcefully illuminated; indeed, she took pains to dissociate Greek mythology from “irrationality”. What is more, she sought validation from a middle brow, mainstream, politically conservative Protestant reading public, particularly male readers. The destination that she wanted was commercial success. Consequently, the classical Greco-Roman world she shared with her audience, even Greek drama and mythic lore, differed drastically from that envisioned and championed by the more ambitious and iconoclastic “female amateurs.”