

Andrew Marshall and Classics

A Remembrance

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The word "classics" derives from the Latin adjective *classicus*, meaning in ancient Rome "belonging to the highest class of citizens."¹ By the 2nd century CE literary critics used the word to describe the highest quality writers.

Andrew W. Marshall lived for classics. He sought to grasp the broad meaning of the entirety of history, the ultimate design of the world. Such timeless understanding is not found in committee reports. Andy understood that most great intellectual achievements of the kind he valued came from individual minds.

Andy's capacity to read and listen enabled him to voyage in space and time. For Andy space and time united. History was a set of developments of ideas in time, while geography was the development of a set of ideas in space. He always seemed at home in a room where maps covered the walls. At the same time, he understood that history employs people to do its work.

While Andy trained in economic history, he saw, like a biologist, that the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, the taste and form of its fruits. Also like a scientist, he sought to remove the I, to make history a science, objective and reproducible.

Books and articles and conversations, and frameworks into which to place telling details, accumulated in Andy's mind and office. He resembled other great observers in his ability to see the world without actually venturing far. Henry David Thoreau remarked in his classic *Walden*, "I have travelled a good deal in Concord."² Jane Austen, author of *Pride and Prejudice* and other classics, never ventured more than about 100 miles from where she was born.

The travels of German philosopher and historian Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel spanned only the Netherlands, Brussels, Paris, and Vienna. Yet, he portrayed China and India, and also Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome as deeply as today's mileage-rich researchers. Hegel read Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, and Marco Polo, and translations of Confucius and the Vedas. About 1830 Hegel wrote "America is therefore the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the 'World's History' shall reveal itself."³ We might say that Hegel led Prussia's Office of Net Assessment.

Like Hegel, Andy Marshall believed that scholarship ought to comprehend the character of a nation. He also understood that the final cause of the world at large is indefinite, ambiguous, incalculable.

Andy's scope included the sea, whose qualities are precisely, at least until recently, that it is unlimited and infinite, and invites humanity to stretch. The sea invites conquest and piratical plunder and also honest gain and commerce. The land always involves a multitude of dependencies. The sea is boundlessly innocent and submissive until it rages or fills with new things. Global history and strategy must encompass land and sea and, increasingly during Andy's lifetime, air and space.

¹ According to Wikipedia, citing Jan Ziolkowski, director of Harvard's Dumbarton Oaks Library and professor of Latin.

² *Walden*, first chapter "Economy," second page.

³ *Philosophy of History*, Dover, New York, 1956, p. 86.

Hegel was terminated as Rector of the University of Berlin after less than one year. Thoreau and Austen in some sense also “did not fit” in their societies, and part of Andy’s gift was to appreciate that individuals who did not fit easily into well-established institutions might create classics. Classics arose neither from committees nor from consensus. Moreover, time and digestion might matter more to create a classic than sweat. Against all odds, Andy created a niche where he himself, who did not fit, fit for more than forty years, and nurtured appreciation of classics and manufacture, by hand, of new ones.

An American citizen of the highest class, Andy appreciated that classics offer abiding insight and foresight, and thus security, or at least chances to gain advantage from, and occasionally evade, the irresistible power of circumstances.

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