

***In memoriam* Janice M. Benario: Classicist, Colleague, and Top Secret Ultra**

The Classics Department joins the Benario family in celebrating the memory of Dr. Janice M. Benario, who passed away December 2, 2020 at the age of 96. Dr. Benario, emerita from the Georgia State University Classics Program, has been part of Emory's Classics community for nearly fifty years alongside her husband Herbert Benario, Professor Emeritus. As a Classicist, Dr. Benario built a Classics program, edited a prestigious journal, co-directed programs in Italy through the Vergilian Society and the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome: as a teacher, a colleague, a mentor and a patron, she exemplifies the best of the discipline. Her contributions to her country in a time of war place her in the history books that reach beyond antiquity.

Born in Baltimore, Dr. Benario earned her BA (Phi Beta Kappa) from Goucher College, where she majored in Latin and minored in History; she earned an MA and a PhD in Classics from Johns Hopkins University, completing the doctorate in 1952. Her particular interests were Roman Poetry, especially Horace.¹ Over a 23 year career at Georgia State University she initiated the Classics Program and mentored junior faculty. She taught as well at Emory and Agnes Scott, edited the journal *Vergilius*, and served in both state and regional associations, including the Society for Classical Studies (formerly the American Philological Association), the Vergilian Society, the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, and the Foreign Language Association of Georgia, which she helped guide from a fledgling institution to a robust organization. Among her many academic honors are a Ford Foundation grant for teaching, a Fulbright award to the American Academy in Rome, and in 1982, from the American Philological Association, the prestigious National Teaching Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Classics. The award's referees noted: "Janice has not simply evidenced the award's criteria, she has embodied them, since the entire Classics program there is testimony to her design and implementation of new courses and programs.... Janice M. Benario throughout her career has been not only an outstanding teacher, but a 'teacher of teachers'."² Together with her husband she endowed The Janice and Herbert Benario Award for the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, an award which enables recipients to apply to the summer travel program of his or her choice. The Drs. Benario themselves knew the value of experiencing the ancient world from the ground up, as they led multiple student groups through the ancient sites, great museums, traffic disasters and unexpected squalls of summertime Rome and Campania. CAMWS honored the Drs. Benario in 2010 with the Special Service award, noting that together they have dedicated over a century to the promotion of Greek and Latin and the influence of Classical Studies.

From 1943 to 1945, Dr. Benario joined the ranks of Classical scholars who contributed to the war effort that defined her generation. Goucher College was one of seven different women's colleges chosen by the Navy to recruit and train women in code breaking. Ola Winslow, a Pulitzer Prize winning professor of English who knew Dr. Benario well, invited her to take a course in cryptology. Janice became one of ten undergraduate women, mostly English and Classics majors, who met on Fridays at 4:00 for fifteen weeks in a locked classroom whose location was unknown to the rest of the student body. Dr. Benario recalled having to lie to those who asked where she was spending her Fridays. Upon completion of the course she went on active duty for eight weeks of indoctrination, at the conclusion of which she became an Ensign in the WAVES, Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service, one of the first groups of women line officers in the navy. She was sent to Washington D.C., where she served in the code-breaking team called Operation ULTRA. David Kahn has written that "Ultra was the greatest secret of World War II after the atom bomb."³ Of her experience, Dr. Benario said: "I was one of the few WAVE officers privileged to serve in the secret inner sanctum at the Naval Communications Annex where machines broke each day's code, officers translated the German messages and sent the material on to the upper echelons, in fact, to the level of Combat Intelligence immediately below the COMINCH, Admiral Ernest J. King himself... My life was governed by secrecy. We were not to breathe a word about what we were doing once we got into that office. In wartime it would

¹ Among her publications are (1960) "Book 4 of Horace's Odes: Augustan Propaganda." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 91: 339-352. doi:10.2307/283861; (1970) "Dido and Cleopatra." *Vergilius* 16: 2-6; (2001) "Sir Edward Burne-Jones: The Perseus Series." *The Classical Outlook* 78.2: 53-57.

² Kelly, D. (1983) "Notes and News." *Classical World* 76.4: 243-247; 244.

³ Kahn, D. 1991. *Seizing the Enigma: The Race to Break the German U-Boat Codes, 1939-1943*. Boston: Houton Mifflin Co.

have been considered treason if any talk had gotten out.”⁴ Anticipating her own academic future, and armed with her Bachelor’s degree in Latin, she served in the group known as “The Office of College Professors” alongside men who already had their PhDs. The unit functioned 24 hours a day for two years, on a weekly rotation of shifts from eight to four, four to midnight, and midnight to eight. Their task were the German communiqués sent by Admiral Dönitz to his U-boats; Dönitz used a machine known as Enigma, whose codes had seemed impenetrable. British and American forces, working in concert, successfully broke the codes, so that by December 1942 nearly every message could be successfully translated. The women, with only a minimal cryptological training, did not decipher the messages; they processed those that had been decoded, tracking the positions of German submarines and recording the information with pins on a large wall map. The information they organized was sent on to the Navy Department, who used it to make tactical decisions. The data helped allied troops avoid the “wolf packs”, hunt and destroy the U-boats, and organize US troops and supplies on D-Day.

For her contributions to ULTRA, Dr. Benario was awarded the World War II Victory Ribbon, the Atlantic Theater Ribbon, and the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon. Dr. Benario stands alongside other Classicists of the 20th century who contributed to ULTRA, among them Denys Page, Leonard Palmer, T.B.L. Webster, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and L.P. Wilkinson. This kind of service touched her own mentors as well: her first Greek professor, John B. McDiarmid, was in charge of the submarine tracking room in Ottawa, Canada, where one of his colleagues was Gordon Kirkwood. Dr. Benario’s service was recognized in May 2010 with a Doctor of Humane Letters, *Honoris Causa*, from Goucher College.⁵ That service also became a source of scholarly inspiration, as Dr. Benario researched the contributions of her fellow Classicists to intelligence, guerrilla operations, and support of the resistance. In a 2003 article she detailed Patrick Leigh Fermor’s role in a successful British plot to kidnap the German General Kreipe, the commander of occupation forces on Crete. The kidnapped general was looking at Mt. Ida and started quoting Horaces’ Soracte Ode: Fermor ended up finishing quoting the whole ode in Latin. For one long moment, Fermor wrote, the war ceased to exist – and the poetry of the past, as Dr. Benario writes, introduced a moment of decorum in a time of war.⁶

After the war, Dr. Benario completed her active duty at the US Navy’s Bureau of Medicine and Surgery in Falls Church, VA, and was discharged in 1946 as a lieutenant junior grade. It was then that she returned to the Classical world that had so drawn her as an undergraduate – and it was at Johns Hopkins that she met her future husband. But she kept the secret of her wartime service locked away, as the material was not declassified until the 1990s. “My parents never knew; my husband only learned after twenty years of marriage; my children were in high school before they heard.”⁷ In 1991, she was reading David Kahn’s book when she saw a group photo of the entire office with whom she had served. Of that moment, she wrote “I let out a shout of surprise and glee. Since then, I have felt free to talk.” Beginning in 2002, she began speaking publicly about her service and experiences, in presentations that manifest a life as resilient and radiant in the classroom as it was trailblazing for modern women in wartime.

Audentes fortuna iuvat – fortune favors the bold: we have been favored to share in Dr. Benario’s life. Our gratitude for that privilege, and our heartfelt condolences, go to our colleague Dr. Herbert Benario, his family, and to all who cherish Dr. Janice Benario’s memory.

⁴ Simmons, H.L. (2018) “Goucher’s secret ‘code girls’ helped end WWII.” *Goucher Magazine* 2018 <https://blogs.goucher.edu/magazine/gouchers-secret-code-girls-helped-end-wwii/>

⁵ Lewand, R.E. (2011) “Secret Keeping 101 – Dr. Janice Martin Benario and the Women’s College Connection to ULTRA.” *Cryptologia* 35: 42-46.

⁶ Benario, J.M. (2003) “Horace, *Humanitas*, and Crete.” *Amphora* 2.1 (Spring 2003) 1-3.

⁷ Benario, J.M. (1998) “Top Secret Ultra.” *The Classical Bulletin* 74.1: 31-33.