

TOWN & COUNTRY

DECEMBER 2024/JANUARY 2025

KELLY REILLY
& the *Yellowstone*
Succession Drama

The Man
Who Might Save
SKIING

ESCAPE FROM
REALITY
in 191 Gifts

BURIED
SCANDALS
of the Gilded Age!

Lovey, Let's Go
on a LONG, LONG
CRUISE



Mommy,
Does Santa Like
Pavlova?

“**I**fear the Greeks even when they’re bringing gifts,” a Trojan priest exclaims early on in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, trying to persuade his countrymen that there’s something fishy about the giant wooden horse that has mysteriously materialized in front of their city’s gates. That line of the Latin epic has, over the millennia, morphed into a familiar saying: “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” And indeed, there are so many Greek gifts piling up on our cultural doorstep—stage performances of Greek tragedies, film adaptations of Greek epics, and a parade of novels based on Greek myths—that it’s hard not to be just a bit wary.

The next six months alone are studded with high-profile performances on both sides of the Atlantic based on the greatest ancient dramas. The upcoming London theatrical season boasts the staging of two Sophocles plays: *Elektra*, with Brie Larson, and *Oedipus Rex*, which Aristotle considered the greatest of all

Tired of contemplating the demise of democracy?

Escape to ANCIENT GREECE

BY DANIEL MENDELSON

tragedies. The latter, starring Rami Malek in his UK stage debut as the tragic king fated to kill his father and marry his mother, opens on the heels of a contemporary version of the tragedy, directed by Robert Icke, whose earlier foray into Greek drama was a starkly updated version of Aeschylus’s great revenge trilogy *Oresteia* at the Park Avenue Armory in 2022.

Both come on the heels of Luis Quintero (taking a leaf from Lin-Manuel Miranda?) offering a hip-hop version of Euripides’s *Medea*, the first great drama about what can happen when an arrogant husband discards his long-suffering wife for a younger model. (Hint: The spurned woman is a sorceress who has already blithely killed a string of victims, including her own brother. Dismemberment is one favorite MO.)

Bad Greek marriages aside, December will bring the first wide screen adaptation of the *Odyssey*, one of Western civilization’s great love stories, since 1954, when Kirk Douglas took on the role of the storm-tossed hero trying to get back to his faithful wife. Uberto Pasolini’s *The Return*, starring Ralph Fiennes as Odysseus and Juliet Binoche as Penelope, loses all the gods and monsters of Homer’s original, focusing instead on what the director calls “the human emotions” of the great ➤



Patricide, dismemberment, and betrayal are just a few of the gifts the ancient Greeks are bestowing on us this season.

MARK GAGNON URN (\$4,800), KRBNYC.COM. **LLADRO** SCULPTURE (\$975), LLADRO.COM. **CREEL AND GOW** CANDLESTICK (\$1,600 FOR 2), CREELANDGOW.COM. **CHRISTOPHER SPITZMILLER** CANDLESTICK (\$1,450 FOR 2), KRBNYC.COM. **LALAOUNIS** NECKLACE (\$54,000), LALAOUNIS.COM. **BOOKS** (FROM \$50), ARGOSYBOOKS.COM. **HOMER** (\$1,240), PETERHARRINGTON.CO.UK. **PAUL SORMANI** LAMP TABLE (\$20,000), 1STDIBS.COM

DAVID SCHULZE. SET DESIGN BY CHELSEA MARSKIN AT ART DEPARTMENT

epic: the “return of an old soldier” and what it means for him and his family. (On a lighter note, the new Netflix series *Kaos* reimagines the Greek gods in hilariously contemporary terms. When one mortal character dies, she finds herself crossing the River Styx on an enormous tourist ferry.)

Over the past few years, the desire to view the ancient myths from a contemporary perspective has fueled an avalanche of novels from the point of view of their oft-overlooked female characters. Madeline Miller’s *Circe* takes a minor if memorable character from the *Odyssey* (the goddess turns the hero’s men into pigs, among other things) and places her at the center of her own story.

So too with the recently completed trilogy of novels about the Trojan War by the distinguished British author Pat Barker, who gives us the tale as seen by two characters whom Homer relegated to the sidelines:

Briseis, whose seizure from Achilles by his commanding officer, the arrogant generalissimo Agamemnon, triggers the action of the *Iliad*; and Cassandra, the doomed Trojan prophetess who is enslaved and dragged by Agamemnon back to Greece, where a dreadful fate that she alone sees awaits them both.

So why this cornucopia of Greek culture gifts now? It’s easy to explain the feminist revisionist novels: The past two generations of classical scholarship have focused on reexamining the role of women—both mythic and real—in ancient Greek society and literature; that, along with post-Me Too cultural sensitivities, has created a fertile environment for rethinking these stories. And retranslating them: New English renderings of both of Homer’s epics along with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid* by female scholars have garnered much attention.

Yet the surge of interest in all things

ancient Greek is part of a much older phenomenon. Again and again, in troubled times, we in the West have turned to our oldest stories for answers. Some of those answers are dark; as the creator of the hip-hop *Medea* put it, “*Medea* was written by Euripides to remind us that chaos lurks in our world and there is no answer.”

But some are more encouraging. Speaking of his new *Odyssey* film, Pasolini reminded an interviewer of the comfort to be found in the ancient works. “There is a reason we are still talking about the *Odyssey*,” he said. “Because it speaks to what it means to be human in the most direct way. What it means to go to war, what it means to leave your family, what it means for the family that has been left behind, the difficulties to get together again...?” It seems that, three millennia after Homer first started singing his songs, they are the gift that keeps on giving. **T&C**

GREGOR HALENDA (OLIVE TREE); PHOTO12/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY IMAGES (MASK OF AGAMEMNON); KATHY DEWITT/LAMY (FERMOR BOOK COVERS)

ONE FOR ALL

You can try to get through The Odyssey again. Or consider these shortcuts.



▲ THE FIELD TRIP

The archaeological site of Mycenae, the kingdom of Agamemnon, won’t disappoint. Our favorite guide? Michael Patmanidis.

▼ **THE TCHOTCHKE**
MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC ART SHOP
HANDMADE CERAMIC TILE (\$40), CYCLADIC.GR



▼ **THE MINERALS**
SALT ODYSSEY A JOURNEY OF SALTS
(\$15), HELLENICFARMS.COM



▲ THE POTTERY

NATALIE TRIANTAFYLLOU SIX HANDLE AMPHORA (\$1,795), THEFUTUREPERFECT.COM



▲ THE BRANCH

PLANTOGRAM FRANTOIO OLIVE TREE (\$124), PLANTOGRAM.COM

► **THE SPLURGE**

In Athens, stay at the Four Seasons Astir Palace and book the Arion Riviera suite. FOURSEASONS.COM



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ALEKOS FASSIANOS DRAGON TABLE LIGHT (\$2,800), CARWAN-GALLERY.COM



◀ **THE ARMOR**

MATOUK EVIL EYE SLEEPING SOCKS (\$95), MATOUK.COM



▲ THE TALISMANS

ILEANA MAKRI EARRINGS (\$9,370), ILEANAMAKRI.COM

▼ **THE RETREAT**

The Patrick and Joan Leigh Fermor House in Kardamyli on the Mani Peninsula is a museum. It could also be your summer rental. ARIAHOTELS.GR

