Popular Receptions of Classical Antiquity, 2-3 September 2021
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Abstracts

Edith Hall

The Iliad Beyond the Academy in the 21st Century

This illustrated lecture surveys a selection of significant English-language works recently responding to the *Iliad* including films, television serials, poetry and fiction. and suggests reasons for its recent prominence in our shared imagination: the contingent historical and political background, the transnational theme of continents in combat, the nexus of topics relating to war crimes, captivity and migration, a shift from the ironic and cynical mood of much late 20th-century postmodern culture to an appreciation of gravity, severe grandeur and emotional authenticity, the emphasis on individual witness of harrowing events, the urgent perception that women need at last to reclaim even the most canonical, exalted and patriarchal literary artefacts, and the sense we increasingly share of an apocalyptic era which faces the imminent prospect of our entire civilisation's extinction.

Trine Arlund Hass

The Rubicon of Stevns: Julius Caesar and King Christian IV of Denmark-Norway in *Elverhøi* (1828) and *Asterix romernes skræk* (1972, orig.: *Le bouclier arverne*, 1967)

Although Gaius Julius Caesar expanded the Roman borders far to the north, it is generally agreed today that he did not make it to the Danish regions – Denmark was never part of the Roman Empire. As long as Danish literature has existed, however, connections have been established between the Danish regions and culture and the illustrious Roman ditto. This paper addresses what is perhaps the most famous instance of Danish Caesar reception in a line of the Danish national play, *Elverhøi*, and its reuse (reception?) in the translation of Gosciny and Uderzo's *Asterix*. My hypothesis is that they can provide insight into ways of negotiating the relationship between the two cultures, the Danish and the Roman.

Elverhøi, written by the immensely influential and renowned playwright, critic et al. J.L. Heiberg on the occasion of the wedding of the crown prince, is a product of Danish Romanticism, drawing on Nordic folklore and popular balladry (music by F. Kuhlau). Set in the region of Stevns in south-eastern Sealand, Denmark – in the play the mythical realm of the Elf King – and during the reign of King Christian IV (1588/1596-1648), it tells a story of mistaken identities sorted out, in the end, by King Christian himself. As he is about to cross the stream Tryggevælde Å to Stevns, defining the reign of the Elf King, he famously exclaims: "Vel er jeg ikke Cæsar, og disse bølger ikke Rubicon, men dog jeg siger: *Jacta est alea*" (I may not be Caesar and these waves not the Rubicon, and yet I say: *Jacta est alea*). To understand the line in its own context, I will discuss 1. how the reference to Caesar and his invasions affects the 'confrontation' between the Danish king and the Elf King of Stevns and the conflict of the play, and 2. the effect of Christian IV's negation of his own identification with Caesar?

Moving on to *Asterix*, a paraphrase of King Christian's line from *Elvhøi* is put into the mouth of Caesar, when determined to say 'something historical', in Per Då's translation of *Le bouclier arverne*. In comparing this statement with the role of Latin quotation in the *Asterix* series as such, I intend to discuss it as reception, as well as its effect on a Danish audience.

Lastly, I will attempt to conclude on the insights offered by the *Elverhøi* and *Asterix* cases of Classical reception into ways of intermingling Danish and Roman culture and of negotiating roles and balances between their heroes.

Vinnie Nørskov

The Unruly Power of Myth: Classical Narratives in Contemporary Danish Art

The last 10 years, the Museum of Ancient Art and Archaeology has housed 14 exhibitions showing art and crafts inspired by the classical past. All exhibitions were made on the request of the artists and accepted as they were considered to add new perspectives to our understanding of the collections and the meaning of classical heritage today. The paper explores what is driving contemporary artists to engage with classical heritage. It looks specifically at the role of ancient myths and identifies a marked interest in transformations, that is present in many of the exhibitions and will be exemplified in Helle Kingbird Bjerregaards exhibit *Phaeton* shown in 2015 and a group exhibition by Guirlanden in 2018. It can also be identified in other artists works, as for instance Helene Nymann's *Dear on my head* in the exhibition *Mythologies* at ARoS in 2020.

Jakob Engberg

From wronged Imperialists in search of Peace to Emperors as Puppets of Germanic Chieftains: The Romans and the Roman Empire in Claus Deleuran's "The Illustrated Danish History for the People".

In 1987, the cartoonist Claus Deleuran began his "The Illustrated Danish History for the People", planned to cover the history of Denmark from the World's creation in the middle of Ginungagap and until present day. By Deleuran's death in 1996, he had managed nine volumes and covered until 1100 AD. In each of the volumes 3-5, there are several pages devoted to the Roman Empire. This presentation will analyze how Deleuran presented the Romans and the Roman Empire, it will discuss Deleuran's approach, the sources and the scholarship he used, and how his text and illustrations offered satire of his sources and of (some of the more far-fetched) scholarly theories.

Jens Krasilnikoff

Finding Pericles Lost. Danish Travel Accounts and Nostalgic Encounters with 19th Century Greece in Transition

Throughout the 19th century, a considerable number of Danish academics and artists traveled Greece and produced a variety of narratives of a country in the making, before, during and after The War of Independence. In these texts, Danish cultural dignitaries reflected on everything from exalted anticipations of meeting 'the descendants of Pericles' to disappointments of the 'modern' 1830-Greek decayed by Ottoman rule. Others pondered how to save Greece from itself, and its Classical inheritance from the neglects of 'the Orient'. This was followed by frustrations of the alleged Greek inability – around 1860 – to abide by law and place trust in the state. Around 1880, professors engaged in nostalgic encounters with the great moments of Classical Greece, and finally, journalists covered the final stages of the war of independence in 1897 Crete, without paying much attention to the deep past, but succeeded in finding Pericles lost. This paper explores the meaning of these accounts and their use of history in a diachronic perspective.

Lorna Hardwick

What's behind the Label?

This talk focuses on the implications of key terms used in classical reception studies. Key terms – and 'popular' is one – indicate what we should look for, in both content and medium. They direct the gaze and the intellectual and affective response. Yet, (or perhaps 'therefore') cultural historians are continually constructing and revising these categories. For instance, recent and current debates have revealed the cultural freight around use of the term Neo-Latin, as opposed to Early Modern Latin. Another example is the tension between using 'classical tradition' or 'classical reception. Indeed, the terms 'classics' and 'classical' are themselves increasingly perceived as problematic.

Key terms often operate as labels, carrying with them assumptions about cultural value and appropriate methodology and epistemology. They reflect and shape the questions that are considered to be worth asking. The study of Greek and Roman antiquity throughout the centuries has largely focused on extant sources, both written and material, created by and for an elite. People who have inherited that culture have also inherited its perspectives and terminology. Shifts in terminology are markers of deeper cultural and geo-political shifts. The development of theories and methods for investigating popular culture within antiquity and in its subsequent reception therefore deserves scrutiny both on its own account and for its place in a wider dynamic.

The study of popular culture in the modern world extends from the specific impact of modern technologies and new genres (from print to computer games) to how these situate material from antiquity and act as a conduit for its transmission into the public imagination. In terms of relationships with antiquity, a focus on the 'popular' in contemporary culture is

sometimes seen as a counter-balance, even an antidote, to perceptions of antiquity that have been skewed by transmission and labelling in elite contexts.

The aim of this paper, however, is to question rigid polarisations between 'high' and 'popular' culture in the creative and scholarly practices involved in the reception of antiquity. Discussion of specific examples will draw out new 'labels' are constructed and disseminated, by whom, for whom, with what purpose and with what effect over time. I hope that this approach not only suggests critical tools for the study of antiquity and its reception but also opens the way for the perhaps urgent resetting of teaching and research.

Gregory Darwin

Ór na Gréige is stór na hÉigipt: Classical Antiquity in Irish Song Tradition

A large portion of the contemporary repertoire of Irish-language song consists of works composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In these works, we find responses to both large-scale and local historical events, universal themes such as love and death, and numerous references and allusions to classical figures, events, and landscapes. While many of these songs derive from the learned compositions of scholarly poets, their performance, transmission, and reception represents popular interest in these themes. As Laurie O'Higgins has observed, knowledge of classical languages and learning among the Irish-speaking lower classes in this period was much greater than is often appreciated, due to the workings of peripatetic teachers at hedge schools. It is unsurprising then to see an interest in this learning reflected in the songs that people chose to perform and remember.

In this presentation I will offer an overview of classical allusions and references in both anonymous and authored songs dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, discussing the persons, places, and events referenced, how these references are phrased and their function within the rhetoric of the song, and the level of familiarity that they imply. Only rarely are classical events directly narrated; comparisons between the contemporary world and the classical one are far more common. I will suggest that such allusions are not simply ostentatious displays of learning, as some earlier critics have stated, but part of a larger cultural logic that sees Irish as a classical language alongside Latin and Greek, making comparisons between the worlds of Ireland and of Mediterranean antiquity natural. While this classicizing tendency has deep roots in Ireland, its significance in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in the context of expanding British control and the cultural capital of the English language, will also be explored briefly.

Christian Djurslev

Tomyris: A Killer Queen in Heavy Metal Music

Heavy metal is a musical offspring of rock music, characterised by its clamorous sound, provocative counter-culture, and aggressive machismo. Relatively unknown to many scholars of reception until recently (Fletcher & Umurhan 2020), the genre has spawned receptions of Classical antiquity from the genre's inception in the late 1960s to today. Topics and themes cover numerous aspects of Greek and Roman culture and society, but especially warfare in myth and history. Of particular interest to metal bands from Led Zeppelin and Iron Maiden to Sabaton have been traditionally masculine power symbols, such as Achilles and Alexander the Great. In more recent years, however, artists have embraced an ever more diverse cast of characters and stories from the ancient world.

In this paper, I will investigate one such important instance of reception, namely, A Sound of Thunder's track about the warrior queen Tomyris, the bane of Cyrus the Great (*It was Metal*, 2018). This is but one of the many contemporary receptions of this ancient character (see e.g. Edith Hall's blog post about *The Legend of Tomiris*, a Kazakhstani film from 2019). After a brief introduction to the band, their discography, and the song, I will use transformation theory (Baker *et al*. 2019) to compare their version of the story with the original account of Herodotus (Hdt. 1.205-214). The aim is to explore how the band redefines Tomyris' role through a subversion of primarily the Herodotean narrative, and I argue that they raise a particularly feminist agenda in highlighting her independence, freedom, and power. I will contextualise this representation of Tomyris with the band's general involvement in bringing feminism into the masculine world of heavy metal, which raises further questions about Classical reception's role in promoting this agenda at large.

Joanna Paul

Amplification, Reverberation, and Distortion: The Curious Story of Pompeii in Popular Music

In early 2013, British band Bastille released 'Pompeii', a single which would become the UK's most-streamed song ever by mid-2014. Although unlikely to secure a long-term place in the canon, this recent slice of Pompeian pop is just one example of how popular music in the 20th and 21st centuries has derived inspiration from the ancient city and its destruction, a strand of Pompeii's diverse reception history which has been surprisingly neglected by recent scholarship in this area. This paper argues for the importance of Pompeii in popular music, in two main ways. First, it assesses the varied corpus of musical receptions, from The Flaming Lips to The Decemberists to Siouxsie and the Banshees, as evidence for the ongoing cultural relevance of Pompeii, showing the extent to which popular music uses Pompeii to address the same sorts of themes found in other creative receptions: including death and decline, ghosts and absence, and civilizational collapse. Second, with a closer look at *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* (1972), I explore how this filmed performance in the city's amphitheatre not only engages with similar motifs, but also encourages a new appraisal of popular culture's encounter with the ancient past. As the band generated and amplified new and schizophonic

sounds within this ancient space, the resulting piece offers a new framework for conceptualising the process of reception itself.

Andrew Faulkner

Between Poetry and Prose: Eudocia's *Martyrdom of Saints Cyprian and Justina*

Stories about local saints and their martyrdoms were widely popular in late antiquity, closely connected to cultural and civic identity. In his sermon on the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia, Gregory of Nyssa could call upon his local audience to supply their own versions of the martyrdom narrative, whose popularity must have been a source of civic pride. Yet martyrdom stories were also in late antiquity treated in elite and exclusive genres. In the fifth century, the empress Eudocia composed a classicizing hexameter version of the martyrdom of Saints Cyprian and Justina, which closely paraphrased existing prose accounts of the story. In this paper, I will explore how Eudocia negotiates scholarly and popular reception of Classical Antiquity in her late antique paraphrase. Special attention will be paid to the question of Eudocia's audience and the enactment of popular performance within her narrative.

Marianne Pade

The Vernacular Alexander

Filippo Maria Visconti († 1447), the powerful Duke of Milan, was interested in ancient history, but not proficient in Latin. He therefore had his long time secretary, the Lombard humanist Pier Candido Decembrio, produce vernacular versions of ancient historians, among them Caesar. However, Visconti also wanted to read about Caesar's traditional foil in the Hall of Fame, Alexander the Great; to accommodate him, Decembrio translated Curtius' *Historia Alexandri Magni* into Lombard, filling the *lacunae* in Curtius' narrative with passages from Plutarch's Alexander (1438). He also wrote the comparison between Alexander and Caesar that is missing in the Plutarchean pair. The two texts circulated together with the title *Istoria d'Alexandro Magno*. Decembrio's *Alexandro* became hugely popular, it was translated into other vernaculars and printed numerous times in various languages. In my paper I shall analyse the paratexts of the work and its material fortune, in order to explore its popular reception.