

Classical Reception
in Classics Teaching

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Editor's Note

I cannot recall exactly what my first introduction to the Classical world entailed but my earliest memories are of Jim Henson's *Storyteller* series, a children's programme in which an old man and a puppet dog re-told Greek myths, and a primary school project which culminated in a class play where Theseus battled a 6 inch mechanical minotaur constructed from Lego and a chorus of clouds sang and danced.

These are powerful memories and good examples of Classical reception. When deciding on the topic for the first edition of the Classics Library Journal, I considered how important Classical reception was to teaching. The fact that our students' perceptions have been influenced by modern interpretations and versions of the Classical world is not something we necessarily focus on in the secondary school classroom, in fact, we often find ourselves cursing their exposure to it (I have done exam marking on the *Persian Wars* topic and can easily imagine the teachers' frustration at their students' inability to differentiate between Herodotus' Leonidas and Gerard Butler's). And yet it is crucial to our teaching. Indeed, our teaching itself is a form of reception. We offer, for many of our students, their first, or at least their most detailed, taste of the ancient world, and we deliver that through our own interpretations and influences.

If we engage with reception studies more willingly in the classroom, we will enable our students to have a deeper understanding on the endurance and importance of Classics in modern society. We are often required to prove the relevance of our subject when it is so obvious to us. Thinking about reception in the classroom might help to make it more obvious to our students.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this first edition; I have thoroughly enjoyed reading about their work and have gained some insights and ideas about approaches to classical teaching. I hope you find this journal as interesting and informative as I have.

Thanks are also owed to Stephen Jenkin. His list of duties is a long one from posting calls for article suggestions through to translating the completed articles into accessible posts and collating them into the downloadable journal. As well as managing the journal, he has also had to manage me, not an easy task. Thank you and well done, Stephen.

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Contributions are always welcome, on any topic, but especially on the topic of the forthcoming issue, as are reviews on newly released publications. [Visit the CLJ site.](#)

***HisTroy*, a Play with Ajax, Philoctetes, Sassoon, and Owen**

Putting on a Classics play raises the profile of a department, helps the pupils to consider the impact of the drama “off the page” and enables useful discussion about adaptations and settings. It is a very visible way of showing pupils (and their parents) the enduring relevance and power of the plays. Over a number of years, in two different schools, I have either directed or co-directed productions of a number of Greek tragedies with a cast of, in every case, Year 12 pupils. In previous years we have put on *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, *Hippolytus*, *Antigone*, *Trojan Women*, *Persians* and *The Bacchae*. Each play has presented challenges for the director and cast: Medea’s monologue, the “carpet scene”, blinding Oedipus, Artemis appearing as “*dea ex machine*”, the presentation of Athene and Poseidon to a modern audience, putting on a play in which little happens, Pentheus’ head (!). The plays have prompted many interesting discussions in lessons which have followed; the vehemence with which the pupils’ discuss whether or not they have agreed with the interpretations reflects the extent to which they have themselves “claimed ownership” of the plays.

In early February 2014, I will be directing *HisTroy*, which will feature abbreviated versions of Sophocles’ *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. The choice of the play was influenced by the centenary of the First World War, and *HisTroy* will be set in 1917. Many years have intervened between the Trojan War and Homer, between Homer and Sophocles, between Sophocles and the First World War and between the First World War and today. However, notions of duty or honour or glory and their relative importance have been considered ever since Homer related the story of the argument between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book 1 of the *Iliad*. Homer and Sophocles also showed the psychological effects of war on individuals. Every man who goes to battle faces his own “Trojan War”, his own “Troy”.

Both *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* deal with the misery of war and have been used to help American soldiers deal with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder¹. Similarities have been seen in the misery of the protagonists, but also in the effect of their detachment on those around them. The First World War, was the first conflict in which “shellshock” was recognised, by some, as a condition to be treated. This was particularly true for the “soldier poets” Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, both of whom received treatment for “shellshock” at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh from pioneering doctors William Rivers and Arthur Brock². Sassoon, Owen and, through Sophocles, Ajax and Philoctetes each talk about their experiences of war and a comparison between the four men seemed an interesting way in which to tie the two Greek tragedies to the First World War.

Both Ajax and Philoctetes are “hors de combat”, Ajax in his tent and Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos. Athene explains to Odysseus that “anger” has driven Ajax into his “frantic violence” and that it was only due to her intervention that this rage had become a delusional madness. It is

¹ www.ptsdsupport.net.

² The story is fictionalised in Pat Barker’s “Regeneration”.

interesting that the same word for anger (cholos) is used by Achilles to Ajax in the Iliad to explain his withdrawal from the fighting in Book 9. This cholos which the two share is a stress disorder of sorts. Ajax also withdraws from those around him, pushing away both Tecmessa and the Chorus, memorably telling them that he is “safe and well”³, while planning his suicide.

Philoctetes is suffering from a physical wound, he was put ashore on Lemnos because of his shouts of pain which had been disturbing the Greek camp. And yet, as with Ajax, it is his isolation which is the greater affliction and mourned first by the Chorus⁴. Also, like Ajax, he sees suicide as the escape from his pain⁵.

Sassoon was committed to Craiglockhart following his public “statement” in 1917 that the war could no longer be justified. This may have been for genuine “shellshock” or because, as Sassoon was a public figure at this time, committal was preferable to a court martial. Sassoon himself had worried that his fellow officers might think he had “gone a bit crazy”⁶, and he thereafter resorted to his poetry to advertise the truth of the war as he saw it. Owen came to Craiglockhart after a shell exploded in close proximity to him. He also saw it as his duty to report the truth of the conditions in France and so to “educate”⁷ his family back home. Their shared purpose and facility created a friendship between the two poets; while they were in Craiglockhart together, Sassoon helped Owen refine “*Anthem for Doomed Youth*”.

The script I have used for *HisTroy* is based on the Penguin Classics translation by David Raeburn, but I have also included excerpts from the poems written by Sassoon and Owen while under treatment at Craiglockhart. I hope to show how well the views given and imagery created in the poems match with the ancient script. In his encounter with the goddess Athene, Ajax says to her:

“Far from clean things or any hope of cheer,
Cowed anger in their eyes, til darkness brims
And roars into their heads, and they can hear
Old childish talk, and tags of foolish hymns.”⁸

Ajax is bereft, his fury spent and soon to become a source of embarrassment and further dishonour. He is also bitter that the reality of war is far removed from the heroic fantasy. This heroic fantasy was fuelled by the memory of his father Telamon’s expedition to Troy, on which

³ Line 692, Raeburn’s translation.

⁴ Line 170–1, Raeburn’s translation, “No one there to look after him, no companion with kindly eyes....”.

⁵ Line 1208, Raeburn’s translation, “It’s death, death that I seek now”.

⁶ *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*.

⁷ “I deliberately tell you all this to educate you to the actualities of the war” (from a letter written by Owen in 1914).

⁸ From “Break of Day” by Siegfried Sassoon.

he comments later in the play⁹. Ajax feels a sense of duty to his father, not wishing to return to Salamis dishonoured, he says:

“Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win

Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives.”¹⁰

Philoctetes says of himself to Neoptolemus when they first meet:

“He dropped, more sullenly than wearily,

Became a lump of stench, a clot of meat.”¹¹

He realises that his appearance is repellent, but is desperate for pity and some human contact. Later in the play, when he is wracked with pain from the wound in his foot he will shout:

“How cold and late it is! Why don’t they come

And put him into bed? Why don’t they come?”¹²

Philoctetes is then betrayed by Neoptolemus, who takes from him his bow which he needs to hunt food. Philoctetes says to him at this point:

“Neither should I go fooling over clouds,

Following gleams unsafe, untrue,

And tiring after beauty through star-crowds,

Dared I go side by side with you.”¹³

Our play will culminate with the return of Ajax to the stage in place of Heracles as “*deus ex machina*”. The two warriors then finish by reciting together Owen’s “Song of Songs”, a poem by which Sassoon was especially impressed:

“Sing me at morn but only with your laugh;

Even as Spring that laugheth into leaf;

Even as love that laugheth after Life.

Sing me but only with your speech all day,

As voluble leaflets do; let viols die;

The least word of your lips is melody!

⁹ Line 434ff.

¹⁰ From “Dreamers” by Siegfried Sassoon.

¹¹ From “The Dead-Beat” by Wilfred Owen.

¹² From “Disabled” by Wilfred Owen.

¹³ From “Six o’clock in Princes Street” by Wilfred Owen.

Sing me at eve but only with your sigh!
Like lifting seas it solaceth; breathe so,
Slowly and low, the sense that no songs say.

Sing me at midnight with your murmurous heart!
Let youth's immortal-moaning chords be heard
Throbbing through you, and sobbing, unsubdued."

The excerpts from Sassoon and Owen's poems will stand out from the rest of the play but it is hoped that, although taken out of context, the lines should still be considered to fit in with both the feelings of Ajax and Philoctetes at that moment and with the tone of the rest of the plays. The tragedy, bitterness, and reality of war come through strongly in both Sophocles' scripts and the poems of Sassoon and Owen. There is a desire to educate a public removed from the bleak reality of foreign conflict so that others will not be misled about war, and there is a resentment towards authorities who perpetuate these lies to their own ends.

However there is an important and illustrative difference between Sassoon, Owen and the protagonists; Ajax withdraws from the fighting because he was not given Achilles' armour. Philoctetes refuses to return to Troy, despite being offered a cure for his wound, also because of dishonour. It is interesting to again return to Book 9 of the Iliad where Ajax himself calls Achilles "cruel" (schetlios) in line 630 and then finishes off that same line with a reference to the comrades (hetairoi) whom Achilles is betraying by staying out of the fighting. Sassoon and Owen both returned to the war in France out of duty not to the authorities, whom Sassoon accuses of betraying him in his "statement", but to their comrades. Both were awarded the Military Cross (although Sassoon threw his into the River Mersey). Wilfred Owen was killed in the trenches a week before the end of the war. Ajax and Philoctetes wish to be remembered as men with honour, but Sassoon and Owen wish to be remembered as honourable men. When doing my research for the play, I was very moved by reading about the lives of Sassoon and Owen and so I hope that those who come will also be inspired by their courage in and out of battle.

Although neither *Ajax* nor *Philoctetes* is read as a set book by our students, it will still be interesting to hear their views on the characters and on the adaptation. Although I hope that they enjoy the play, it is more important that they can explain their opinions. They should also be able to identify features of the plays which are similar to the tragedies which they are reading. It may also provoke discussions of heroism by students studying the Iliad.

Andrew Thorley
Stockport Grammar School

Changing the world with *Xena: Warrior Princess*

'In a time of ancient gods, warlords and kings, a land in turmoil cried out for a hero. She was Xena, a mighty princess forged in the heat of battle. The power. The passion. The danger. Her courage will change the world.'

A television serial of fantastic adventures in an ancient time, *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) was at one point the most widely syndicated show on the planet. Xena's beginnings were inauspicious – she was conceived as a mere villain of the week for *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* – but her appeal was such that her eponymous spin-off soon eclipsed the success of its parent series. Figuratively and literally, and typically in leather, Xena kicks ass; she's also very funny. Last year, I taught a course about her for undergraduate students at the University of Birmingham.

Why Xena? An obvious objection is that, although her name sounds almost plausible, this is a character with no basis in genuine antiquity. The world of Greek myth, in which most of her adventures are notionally set, is no place for a warrior princess: female characters get raw deals, and the best most of them can hope for is a walk-on part as some male hero's quest object. Many of Xena's adventures have a genuinely classical ring – she encounters classical monsters and fabulous beasts (centaurs and cyclopes), and lends a hand to famous heroes (Odysseus, whom she lets grab the credit so he can carry on being the hero of his own myth). And these adventures sometimes engage more or less closely with actual ancient versions (e.g. Homer but also Hesiod), or with classic post-ancient treatments based on them (e.g. Shakespeare), and that can be fun and enlightening to study. But these examples tell only one side of the story. The 'Xenaverse' is one big mashup of myth and history from many ancient times and places, from Prometheus to Pompey, Helen of Troy to Caesar (a recurring nemesis) – and with occasional cameos from other mythologies besides. If everything you knew about the ancient world was out of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, you'd have some very odd ideas about antiquity.

Why Xena, then? In part because 'odd' covers many of the ideas we share concerning the ancient world; we just tend not to examine them often. Why do we assume the ancient world is somehow our shared property and no-one else's, as Western culture typically does, whether in its high art (*Julius Caesar*) or popular entertainments (Caesars [sic] Palace in Vegas)? At least with Xena it's obvious we shouldn't take everything at face value. Her world is more than a cheeky mashup – it's defiantly anti-traditional. Its women take charge of their own stories – with Xena's aid, *this* Helen of Troy heads off to make a new life for herself where neither Trojans or Greeks will find her. They are multicultural – the Cleopatra of *this* ancient world is black (the writing team's riff on Afrocentrism and the *Black Athena* debate that shook up classics in the 1990s), and Xena learns her craft as a warrior from powerful women of the East. They embody sexual diversity, if only at the level of subtext – but the subtext is strong; the show's writers knowingly courted an avid lesbian following that knew how to send out and pick up subtle signals, because that was how they survived day-to-day in a more openly homophobic time.

So, *Xena: Warrior Princess* invites us to question what we ourselves bring to the party when we engage with classical literature and civilisation. It's full of opportunities to reflect on how different kinds of readers and viewers respond to the ancient world (or to the versions of it they can access – but really it's only ever versions for any of us, even the experts). What's more, it offers fascinating insights into how our receptions of the ancient world change with changing times – for students today, the 1990s are almost as distant and exotic as the worlds of antiquity ('In a time of ancient gods, warlords and dial-up modems...'). And of course you can rely on your students to complete the homework, when the homework is getting together with their mates and watching *Xena*.

It worked great as an optional module at university. Would it work in schools? I'm not the person to even attempt to answer that. I certainly don't see *Xena: Warrior Princess* appearing on an A-Level syllabus any time soon. But she might be a good example to us, just as she was when she coached Helen of Troy to ditch the fan club and do her own thing. So often, classical receptions get squeezed in as an afterthought – what we do in the last lesson of term instead of Latin Hangman, now that we have access to DVD players. The way things are, it's not just the easy and natural-seeming use we have for film and TV in most of our classics-teaching contexts; it's kind of inevitable. But we can do so much more with that graveyard slot than play 'spot the mistake'. *Xena* embraced the mistakes and put them to work in the best of causes – changing the world, bit by bit and viewer by viewer. It was *courageously* wrong, and that's why I still have a soft spot for it. That and the leather.

Gideon Nisbet

University of Birmingham

Teaching Classical Civilisation, once Modern History: Accounts of teaching methodology and experiences



“Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?”

If you’d asked me that a year or so ago, I’d have said, “Not particularly, no.” Like so many others, I’d spent my youth fascinated by the peoples and cultures and events of the ancient world and then, in the early 1990s, I’d gone to Exeter University to pursue my interest with a BA in Archaeology where the expertise of the staff at the time had meant a heavy focus on the Roman era.

After the requisite years in the wilderness following graduation, I had then settled on a career in History teaching, a career which, I’d presumed, would allow me to indulge my passion for the past and to share it with the next generation which, of course, it did.

But it gradually sank in as the years went by that, at Key Stages 4 and 5, the options to teach the periods that interested me personally were very limited to say the least. Instead, with absolute inevitability, I found myself teaching, year after year, in school after school, the twentieth century at Key Stage 4 and maybe a little of the nineteenth at Key Stage 5. Yes, there were other topics available if you searched hard enough for them but, early in my career, the choice of Units wasn’t up to me but to my Heads of Department and, by the time I’d achieved promotion, I’d managed to accrue or produce such a range of resources and develop such a depth of expertise that change seemed an unattractively laborious course of action. After all, I had enough to be getting on with, didn’t I?

I’ve often wondered how many other History teachers are, or were, in the same boat as I was. How many of them would rather be teaching other periods, other themes, than those they find themselves teaching? What proportion of our Key Stage 4 and 5 History teachers would genuinely admit that the twentieth century really was their first love?

And so it was that, for 13 years, I found myself teaching the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations, Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1920s USA, the New Deal, the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement, with a little Russian Revolution and Gladstone and Disraeli along the way...and all following a degree for which I'd studied nothing more modern than the castles of the Anglo-Norman Marcher Lords!

Until, that is, last summer, I snapped...

Many of you may recall *The Daily Telegraph's* sting on the WJEC Examination Board in December 2011 during which some of their History Examiners were caught on film dropping hints about what wouldn't appear (not what would) in the forthcoming exam. The resultant scandal, combined with Michael Gove's reforming zeal, led WJEC to proclaim that they were going to be "strengthening" their GCSE, extending the scope of some of the Units, banning certain popular combinations of Units and restructuring the exam paper to cover all aspects of each Unit every year, not just certain, predictable parts. Yes, I was going to have to put together a new course. Yes, I was going to have to teach more Germany. No, I couldn't face either.

I initially began by searching online for other WJEC Units that would have been of more interest to me and then for other Modern History courses from other Examination Boards. I wanted to minimise the workload, ameliorate the impact on my work-life balance. But then, out of the blue, I recalled inadvertently stumbling across OCR's Ancient History GCSE a year or so back and thought I'd have another, closer look at it. If I was going to have to revise my course substantially anyway, why not do it wholesale?

However, fascinating as the Specification undoubtedly was (who wouldn't want to teach Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Cleopatra?!), I reluctantly decided it wasn't the right course for my pupils. I teach in a comprehensive that can claim as its catchment area the most socio-economically deprived district in its county. My school has 63% of its pupils entitled to Free School Meals and nearly 40% are on the SEN register. Attendance figures, literacy levels and, consequently, results are low. This year, only 6% of our Year 11s left with 5 A*-C including English and Maths (though 85% achieved A*-C in History). It may not surprise you to learn, then, that we are currently languishing in Ofsted's "Serious Weaknesses" category. In this context, and in my professional judgement, AQA's Ancient History would have been the wrong choice. It depended a little too much on a detailed understanding of the complex and challenging original sources. I wanted to inflame my pupils' passion for the ancient world, not run the risk of dousing it.

Whilst scanning around for alternative ideas and inspiration, a brief snoop online at other local schools revealed that I might be about to become the only teacher in the area to offer pupils the chance to study the ancient world at Key Stage 4. I was then stunned to discover on JACT's website a reference to a survey in 2010 that had established that 83% of state schools no longer taught any of the Classics-related subjects at all. Why not? Where has the perception arisen from that these subjects are, and should remain, the preserve of Grammar Schools and the independent sector?

I was determined not to give up, though, and, after a little more research, I came across AQA's Classical Civilisation course. Immediately, my excitement rocketed! Here, I believed, was a GCSE that was accessible to *my* pupils in *my* school. Its civilisational Units were knowledge-based and required personal responses, properly developed, that I knew my pupils would be more than willing to explore; it was, very fortunately, supported by recently published, comprehensive textbooks (James Renshaw's superb *In Search of the Greeks* and *In Search of the Romans*); and, crucially, it was jam-packed with absolutely thrilling content! I could teach about Athens and Sparta?! Rome?! Pompeii?! I could focus my Controlled Assessment on the archaeology of Roman Britain?! Are you serious?!!

I immediately convened a meeting of all the Year 9 pupils who'd elected to do History GCSE with the understanding they'd be studying the USA and Germany in the twentieth century. Slightly anxiously I proposed to them that we change the GCSE completely and, instead, head 2,000 years further back in time to study the ancient Greeks and Romans instead...

There was not one voice of dissent. Not one.

Why does the twentieth century so dominate our young people's educative experiences? Where does this obsession come from? What was the thinking behind removing the ancient world from our state schools? Does studying these ancient societies not tell us as much about ourselves as studying the modern?

It was then, of course, that the work began! I was going to have to produce an entirely new course from scratch, browse and select the best resources, write new Schemes of Work and put together brand-new PowerPoints for the interactive whiteboard. The prospect was quite daunting to say the least, but I was so excited by the decision I had made, so invigorated by the enthusiasm my pupils had displayed, that I dived in head first without a second thought.

And it was during this initial preparation last summer that it struck me; I was learning again! Yes, much of what I was going to be teaching was personally familiar to me from my degree or from my private reading or from countless documentaries over the years, but there was no denying that I was now, in every sense of the term, a "non-specialist". I was going to have to prepare my lessons to a degree I had not had to for some years.

And I loved it!

In fact, I loved it so much, if I'm going to be honest, that I got completely carried away! I long ago lost count, thankfully, of the hours I've spent these last twelve months voraciously trawling Google Images for vases, frescoes, mosaics, statues, reliefs and artefacts to best illustrate my new PowerPoints. I dread to think how many pennies I've spent on background reading material. I even went as far as writing two of my own 25-page Introductory Booklets for the "*Athens and Sparta*" and "*Social Life in First Century AD Rome*" Units in order to provide my pupils with some sort of historical context before delving into the actual examined content!

But it didn't stop there. A few months into the course, I came up with the idea of setting up a Facebook page that my pupils could "Like" that would keep them up to date with interesting

developments in the study of the ancient world. I didn't want their experience and understanding to be confined solely to AQA's specified content, rich though it was. I could let them know a certain archaeological discovery had been made, remind them to watch a certain documentary that night, alert them to a relevant activity day somewhere at the weekend. However, try as I might, I couldn't get my Page to publish and so I contacted an old school friend who'd given up a career as an IT Technician to become a Primary teacher (and, of course, not regretted it for one second). I thought he could solve my problem for me. Instead, he planted the seed of something slightly more ambitious in my head!

He recommended I abandon the idea of a standalone Facebook Page and instead set up a website using WordPress. The blog part of it, he informed me, could link to a Facebook Page anyway if I wanted it to but having a website would provide me with so much more flexibility. I'd never done anything remotely like this before and so was a little apprehensive when I set to it but, sure enough, with WordPress's idiot-proof guidance, I managed it.

Quite what I would fill the rest of the website with struck me immediately; I would put together a One-Stop-Shop for other teachers just like me, from whatever background, who were thinking of making the change over to Classical Civilisation or Ancient History. I was having such a fantastic time teaching about the ancient world and, as we all know, the subjects are in need of as much support as we can possibly muster. If I could make it any easier for "non-specialists" to make the switch, if I could make the transition any smoother, then I had to seize that opportunity. I could save them hours scouring the internet, try to ease any anxiety they might have about the difficulty of taking such a daunting step. I'd create a Page arguing the case for introducing the subjects to *any* school's curriculum; a Page detailing the various Specifications and the differences between them; a Page highlighting the most appropriate textbooks for each course; a Page suggesting the best organisations to join or to appeal to for funding; a Page for students to visit who were thinking of opting for the subjects; a Page, eventually, with my own Schemes of Work and PowerPoints for them to adopt and adapt as they saw fit...

If you're still reading this and you're interested in visiting my website, its address is www.nonmedelectamini.wordpress.com. It's still in a fairly embryonic form and I've yet to begin actively promoting it. In fact, this article is the first public admission of its existence! Also, if after having visited it you have any comments or recommendations you'd like to make (either about the design, the content or especially about how best to promote the site) then please, please feel free to contact me at the email address below. If listening to others, especially experienced specialists, can improve the site and ensure it has the biggest impact possible, then I'm more than willing to do so and take the advice on board!

And so here I am, halfway through my first run at AQA's Classical Civilisation GCSE. Well, I say halfway, but I'm actually over-running quite considerably as I'm enjoying teaching to an unnecessarily great depth and I'm also getting stopped every five minutes by my pupils' incessant questioning! I have never, ever in my entire career experienced this level of inquisitiveness in Key Stage 4 pupils.

When I return to school in September, it won't be long until we're all off on our trip to Hadrian's Wall, the frontier I was examined on in my finals, before we start the Controlled Assessment on the Romanisation of Britain, the topic I chose for my own dissertation way back in 1995.

"Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?"

Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Ken Pickering

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Finding the ancient and its meaning in a modern North American city: A Lesson on the diversity and layers of Reception

In the winter of 2010, I taught a survey course on ancient Near Eastern and Classical art and architecture at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. In that course, I gave students an assignment in which they were to find an example of the influence of ancient Near Eastern or Classical art in or around the city.¹ The assignment asked students to find an object (e.g., a work of art or a building) on public display in Halifax, either on campus or elsewhere in the city, that they thought had been influenced by ancient art and/or architecture. Students were to briefly describe the object and its history as appropriate and relevant to the assignment, explain what ancient influence(s) they saw in the object, and outline some reasons why the influence might be there.

The city in question, Halifax, is the capital of the province of Nova Scotia. It is an historic port city on the Atlantic coast of Canada, with an impressively large natural harbour. The area was inhabited by the indigenous Mi'kmaq people for millennia; in 1749, it was settled by the British under General Cornwallis, who founded the Town of Halifax to counter the military strength of the French fortress at Louisbourg to the north and to increase the British population in the region.² The new settlement was named for the Earl of Halifax, the president of the Board of Trade and Plantations which had made the plans for the new settlement.³ On the heels of the British came a number of German settlers in the 18th century. Over the following centuries, Halifax experienced several waves of immigrants from different areas of Europe, Asia, and the USA. As a sign and a result of this colonial history, Halifax has an interesting and varied architectural heritage, which provides a good opportunity for exploring the place of the ancient in the development of a modern North American city.

I assigned this particular project partly because I was looking for an assignment that would be suitable for an introductory survey course with only a few students with a background in classics and many more elective students *and* that would connect art and architecture to the themes of culture and context with which we had been engaging in the classroom. It also seemed to be a good way for students to apply their classroom learning. More profoundly, however, I wanted

¹ I would like to acknowledge and thank the students of CLAS 2021 at Dalhousie University from 2010, whose inspiring and inspired work made this article possible.

² Reid 2009, 14–15, 74–75. The city is perhaps best known outside of Canada as the port from which ships were dispatched for rescue and recovery of Titanic victims (Halifax became the final resting place for many of them), for the accidental explosion that levelled a large segment of the city in 1917 (apparently, the largest man-made blast before the atomic bomb), or as one of the major harbours from which large Allied convoys sailed across the Atlantic in WWII, bringing troops and supplies to Great Britain. Initially built as a fort city, Halifax maintains strong connections to the military, but it is also known as a university town. The regional municipality of Halifax currently has an estimated population of 413,700 people and is the largest city in Atlantic Canada (Statistics Canada 2013).

³ Raddall and Kimber 2010, 18, 27.

students to notice and consider the presence of the ancient past in the world around them, and begin to think about how the past can inform and create the present, and how the present in turn creates and shapes the past. This notion, after all, that the past is actively produced as much as passively received is one of the major ideas in reception studies.⁴ Reading these assignments was the most interesting and enlightening marking session I have yet had. The students and I both learned a lot about the city (I was a relative newcomer at the time, as were several of my students), but I also learned something about the reception of the ancient world and its meaning as perceived by students from diverse backgrounds. It was eye-opening to glimpse what the ancient world and its traces in a North American context signified to them. The objects and structures chosen and how students perceived the meaning of the ancient in the modern provided interesting lessons on the layers and diversity of classical receptions.

Although many of the assignments I received dealt with fairly obvious classical connections (e.g., buildings with temple-like façades and classical style statues in the public parks), a few students saw the ancient in surprising places. One student wrote about a statue of Robbie Burns located in a downtown park close to campus (Fig. 1). He had noticed in the statue that Burns had his weight shifted to one leg and the other raised, very much like a Greek *kouros*. Another assignment addressed some round planters on a major shopping street that seemed to the student to mimic the fluting on Greek columns (Fig. 2); he connected the fluting on the planters with their location on a street with a number of Greek restaurants. It was unknown to both the students and myself if these objects were consciously influenced by ancient art or intended by the makers to reference classical antecedents. I had left the choice of objects for the assignment rather open-ended on purpose, not wanting to constrict students' observations and interpretations of what they were seeing. And so, determining whether or not the specific subjects in question were in fact directly influenced by ancient art or part of a continuum of artistic practice, seemed to me to run against the spirit of the assignment. How could their perceptions be right or wrong? Can reception be wrong? Reception theory suggests no. As Batstone observes, in most classical reception studies there is a "commitment to the subjectivity of the reader."⁵ For example, Martindale suggests that meaning only comes about and is made real at the point of reception.⁶ That the students perceived their chosen objects to have a classical influence was to receive the classical. In asking the students to study and interpret the reception of the ancient in the world around them, I was also asking them to be the receivers of ancient material, relying on and presenting *their* perceptions of ancient and its meaning.

Another surprising choice was a marble sculpture located on Dalhousie University campus (Fig. 3). A number of rumours circulate around campus about what exactly this sculpture is, if it depicts anything in particular (e.g., I had heard from a fellow student that it was supposed to be molecules). The usual response is that it looks like large male genitalia, and accordingly, it is the subject of giggles and frosh week (editor: Freshers' Week) pictures. For example, a short piece on the Dalhousie Art Gallery from the university's news blog begins with this description of the

⁴ E.g. Porter 2008, 474.

⁵ Batstone 2006, 14.

⁶ Martindale 1993, 3.

sculpture: “It’s the elephant in the corner of the room, only the room is the boulevard in front of the Dalhousie Arts Centre, and the elephant is a white marble sculpture shaped like something else entirely. What, no one is quite sure—just something else entirely. Don’t make the mistake of asking the students what it’s supposed to represent. They’ll dissolve into helpless giggles.”⁷ Little do many members of the university community know, the sculpture’s phallic shape is very likely intended. The piece is, in fact, called *Marine Venus*. It was sculpted by Robert Hendrick for Expo 67 and donated to the university by the House of Seagram in 1969.⁸ Connecting the sculpture with the myth of the birth of Venus from the castrated genitals of Uranus and its watery sea theme with its presence in an old port city, the student had discovered an unexpected example of classical reception in the heart of campus, one that was very different from the more obvious examples of columns and statues. This assignment illustrated nicely the idea of the shaping of the ancient in reception studies. The past never comes to us unmediated, like (to borrow an image from Gaisser) a Teflon baseball, soaring above all untouched and untainted over time, but instead sticky from and molded by many hands, and stamped with new meanings.⁹ In this case, the student discovered a myth interpreted and expressed through modern sculpture, unidentifiable by most of its viewers, figuratively and quite literally shaped and molded by a previous generation.

The most popular choice of subject for the assignment also illustrates this idea. The subject was the Palladian style provincial legislature building, Province House (Figs. 4 and 5). It is considered by some to be one of the finest Palladian structures in North America.¹⁰ It is also the oldest legislature building in the former British colonies (its cornerstone was laid in 1811, but it was not completed until 1819). Interestingly, despite the high quality of its design and execution, it was not planned and built by an architect, but rather it was designed by a local contractor to the military (‘of paints and varnishes’) and constructed by a local stonemason, since there were concerns about expenditure.¹¹ John Merrick, the contractor-designer, incorporated many of the classical elements of the Palladian style: symmetrical wings, triangular pediments above the entrances, niches, pilasters, and columns adhering to the classical orders. There is an obvious concern for classical ideals of symmetry both in its plan, elevation, and in the architectural detailing. The interior contains more classical elements, especially columns and figures in the ornate plasterwork, which was of a quality rare in Canada.¹²

The adoption of Palladian Style in Province House is an example of the layers of classical reception and another instance of the past coming to us molded and shaped by previous generations. As Hardwick suggests, reception studies ought to consider the routes by which a ‘text’ comes to us and the cultural and historical forces involved in shaping or distilling it.¹³ In the

⁷ Schneiderei 2008.

⁸ Dalhousie Art Gallery; Halifax Regional Municipality 1996.

⁹ Gaisser 2002, 387, quoted in Martindale 2006, 4.

¹⁰ Dickens, e.g., called it “a gem of Georgian architecture” (Maclean 1996, 58–59).

¹¹ Maclean 1996, 59–60.

¹² Eve 2009, 10. The plasterwork was added to over the remainder of the 19th century and the assembly chamber itself remodelled with a great deal of sensitivity to the original designs, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to know what is original and what is later (Eve 2009, 10–16).

¹³ Hardwick 2003, 4

case of Province House there are many levels of reception, from Palladio himself, the founder of the style inspired by classical models and ideals, to those who adopted and adapted his style in successive turns over time and place,¹⁴ to Merrick, the local contractor, who, copying other structures, created a quintessentially Palladian structure in Nova Scotia. But it is not just material and ideas that make up the layers of reception, but the meaning behind the use of the classical also compounds and becomes sticky over time by the touch of many hands. Building the provincial legislature in the Palladian Style was no bold and daring choice; it was standard and expected. The structure is perhaps noteworthy in Canada, where few buildings of this ornate sort were necessary in this period, but it is not unusual in style for an official governmental building in Europe and especially in Great Britain in the 18th century.¹⁵ And that seems to be the point. Adopting this style was about aspiration and legitimacy for the province and using the style was to speak the architectural vernacular of European power and politics. Just six years earlier, in 1805, a grand residence for the governor had been finished at enormous cost (£30,000) to the small colony of only about 60,000 people, but the governor and his wife had argued that the King's representative required a residence befitting his position.¹⁶ Following the building of the governor's new residence, there was a concern among politicians that the legislature, which was currently operating out of rented rooms, also have a building that suited "the prosperous state of the Province."¹⁷ At the first meeting of the legislature in its new building, the Earl of Dalhousie (for whom the university is named) said of the building: "It stands, and will stand, I hope, to the latest posterity, a proud record of the Public Spirit, at this period of our History: And as I do consider this magnificent work equally honourable and useful to the Province, I recommend it to your continued protection."¹⁸ In the end, Province House had cost £52,000 to build, much more than the governor's residence, the cost of which had been much discussed. But it was an important expense to be spent on local government. Province House with its classical columns, pediments, and proportions in the standard Palladian style signified for the present and for posterity that the 'Public Spirit' of Nova Scotia could play on a real political stage and that the province was indeed prosperous.¹⁹ The classical, through its presence in the Palladian style of official structures in Europe, had come to represent venerability, legitimacy, and official status; therefore, the presence of the classical in the legislature building carries a significance shaped and molded over time and place.

¹⁴ Wundrum and Pape assess Palladio's legacy as follows: Palladianism crosses every architectural border, not only in Latin countries, but also in Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and Eastern European countries, and forms one of the most important roots of 17th and 18th century English architecture. And although Palladio, throughout his entire creative life, concentrated on "pure" architecture, the forms he defined had an effect on other areas, such as English furniture making of the 19th century" (2008, 6).

¹⁵ On the importance and prevalence of Palladianism in British architecture, see Cannon 2009, s.v. "Palladianism."

¹⁶ Eve 2009, 5. Government House is still officially home to the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia and the Canadian monarch when in Halifax.

¹⁷ From the 1811 Speech from the Throne by Sir George Prevost, quoted in Eve 2009, 5.

¹⁸ From the 1819 Speech from the Throne, quoted by Eve 2009, 6.

¹⁹ Eve 2009, 6.

I suspect that Province House was the most popular choice among students because the circumstances of its construction are publicly documented and, therefore, easily researched and the connotations of the classical more readily analysed. Students could consider Palladian style more generally or look into the intentions of the designer and the patrons more specifically. This gave students a fairly firm footing in their interpretations of the use of the classical (most papers referenced concepts like power, longevity, and official status in some capacity) and the sense that there were layers to this appearance of the classical in this particular style of architecture.

Sometimes, as in the case of Province House we can research and surmise the intentions of the 'author' of a work of reception; that intention, however, does not necessarily determine the perception of the 'reader'. Even when we can get at the intentions of the artist, designer, or architect or their patron or employer, those intentions do not necessarily transfer to the receiver. The audience, reader, receiver, whatever language we chose to use, brings and develops their own perspective, reading through a prism of experience and knowledge (be it cultural, personal, educational, etc...). This is the diversity of classical reception and the diversity of the meaning of the classical. This came through loud and clear in one particular student assignment. Many of the students in the course, whether they were writing about Province House or another structure around the city or campus (e.g., a former bank, the courthouse, or the Freemason's building (Figs. 6, 7, and 8)) interpreted classical elements like columns and entablatures with similar language and concepts. Although few of the students had a fully developed idea or theory of what the ancient represented or signified in these structures, they mentioned official status, wealth, power, authority, longevity, or significance of some sort (e.g., historical, political, etc...). One of the students, however, from an Iranian background, perceived such elements on structures quite differently. She interpreted the classically themed entrance of Sheriff Hall (Fig. 9), a student residence on the university's campus, as welcoming. Compared to her experience of government buildings in Iran as plain and complicated to navigate, she explained, the ornateness of the entrance to the residence was warm and welcoming because the columns and pediment revealed clearly where the entrance was. I had never quite considered it that way, but it was true. Sheriff Hall is a complex building with a few additions and wings on different levels, but it is immediately clear where the entrance is. One does not need to understand a cultural architectural vocabulary to know that that is where you go in the building. The observation was wonderfully simple, but it pointed to a more profound idea about the diversity of reception and the importance of what we bring to reception.²⁰ The classical porch does not by itself inherently signify power, longevity, or venerability; it is the cultural and historical baggage we bring to the point of reception that creates its meaning. It is that very same baggage, that importation of meaning, that produced a Palladian style legislature in Nova Scotia.

To return to Martindale's point about reception and meaning, it is only at the point of reception that meaning occurs.²¹ If that is true, then we must be ready to accept the diversity of reception and that there is no one true reception. I understand this now not only intuitively and

²⁰ Next time I teach an art and architecture course (this coming winter), I plan to have students present their discoveries and interpretations to each other, so that these lessons are shared.

²¹ Martindale 1993, 3.

intellectually, but observedly. It was shared classroom knowledge that allowed students to recognise and describe specific elements and influences of ancient art in the world around them, e.g., the movement of Robbie Burns' leg, the fluting on planters, or the classical order of the columns and architectural details. The *interpreting* the significance of the ancient in the modern world, however, depended very much on personal experience and background, e.g., how familiar or schooled students were, consciously or not, in the iconography, or in a cultural architectural and artistic vocabulary and norms, or in the traditions that produced such traces of the ancient world. It was a student's knowledge of classical myth that allowed him to see meaning in the phallus-shaped *Marine Venus*, where others did not. And it was a student's cultural background and experience that allowed her to receive a classical porch as a sign of welcome.

I think that one of the great outcomes of this assignment was that it brought theory to life. Martindale argues that reception provides a way to avoid the extremes of "crude presentism" and "crude historicism", on the understanding that the past and the present are always implicated in each other so that each is only understood by thinking in terms of the other.²² The assignments revealed some of the elements of this relationship, this implication of the past in the present and vice versa. The students' work highlighted the idea that the past does not come to us pure or untouched from antiquity, but both it and its meaning are moulded and shaped over time and place. Students' choices also revealed that what the classical signifies is not predetermined by the author or maker; interpretation and meaning are, perhaps, ultimately the domain of the user or receiver. Relatedly, the assignments showed that there is no one meaning of the classical or the ancient, and no one true reception. Diversity and plurality in reception means diversity and plurality in meaning. This is not a 'new' finding, such diversity and plurality has already been both impetus and result of reception studies.²³ That the concept was illustrated so nicely, however, in the assignments was an interesting and enlightening outcome. Overall, the assignment provided a useful lesson not only for the students, but for me as well, on how the ancient is not only manifest in the modern world, but received and interpreted in and through a diversity of layers and meanings.

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²² Martindale 2006, 5-6.

²³ E.g., the studies in *Classics and Colonialism* (Goff 2005) or in *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (Hardwick and Gillespie 2010), or the *Classics and Class* project out of King's College London (Hall and Stead).

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Figures

Figure 1: Statue of Robbie Burns, Victoria Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 2: Planter on Quinpool Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 3: Marine Venus, Studley Campus, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 4: Province House, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 5: Pediment and Columns on the Hollis Street Entrance to Province House, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 6: Bank of Commerce Building, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 7: Halifax Provincial Courthouse, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 8: Freemason's Hall, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



Figure 9: Sherriff Hall, Studley Campus, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia (photo by author)



The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice

I believe the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has managed to stay recognisable for centuries due to its universal elements such as the strength of love and the pain of losing a loved one, as it is understandable to all people throughout the ages. Love is a powerful motivational tool, which can cause illogical behaviour, such as Orpheus travelling to the underworld to get back his true love; this behaviour is caused by the power of love. Orpheus is spurred on by his immense pain of losing Eurydice, and therefore his behaviour becomes irrational as he travels to the unknown underworld. Love again causes great pain to Orpheus as he looks back at Eurydice and loses her again. This is again foolish, but in some respects it shows how strong his love was for her and that he couldn't help himself even when knowing the fatal consequences. I believe the moral of the story is that if one truly loves a person then they will risk everything for them. This idea has appeared in other ways such as the cause of the Trojan War in Homer's *Iliad*, the power of love in that poem causes insane behaviour from Paris, Helen, Menelaus and many others. Orpheus is a heroic figure and most classical myths seem to have a hero, I believe the hero is there to encourage people to aspire to gain their qualities, for example, Orpheus' loyalty and love or Heracles' intelligence and strength.

The myth has been kept alive by being an inspiration in fairly modern culture such as Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Orpheus' music is mentioned and is said to "*soften steel and stones*" and "*make tigers tame*". The poem *Eve of St. Agnes* by Keats has similar notions, Porphyro is spurred on by his love, and his slight obsession, for Madeline which drives him to perform irrational acts such as risk his life by not only falling in love with a member from an enemy family, but trespassing into their castle where he'd be surely killed

"For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,

Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords".

There are obvious similarities between Orpheus and Porphyro one of them being music linked to love. Music is powerful and in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice his music is the reason for passing through the gates of Hades, whereas Porphyro wakes up Madeline by singing to her. The myth is the original tragic love story and the power of music is the main theme throughout it. Many songs are based on love or the tragedy of it, and the myth is an influence to some, I believe it is an influence as this myth asks the tragic question of 'what if?'

The artwork based on the myth dates back to 450 B.C. as an Athenian red figure clay vase and there is art of it as recent as 2009 in the form of underwater digital photography by the artist Valérie Morignat. The myth is an influence in the art world and has not become outdated, due to its universal theme and moral. Many of the paintings on the myth are of a similar scene, of Orpheus tragically looking back at his true love and her inevitably fading away forever. The artwork taps into denial, where the past can't be changed even if Orpheus would so dearly want

it to, his wishes can only be semi fulfilled and a part of Orpheus would always be kept in the underworld in the shape of Eurydice. Death is a constant.

(For Valérie Morignat's *Eurydice*: <http://www.worldphoto.org/images/image/416/>)

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‘Twitter Ye Not’

The push to include ‘Use of ICT’ in lesson planning is something that has always left me a little bewildered and has rarely seen anything more adventurous than ‘Show PowerPoint’ or ‘Watch YouTube Clip’ entered in the relevant box on the planning sheet.

I guess the main reason for this is that I simply don’t engage with technology; I like to be in control of everything and the thought of something letting me down and leaving me clueless during a lesson is not appealing. I am forever trying to enthuse my students in the art of using a pen, particularly a nice pen. The beauty of a piece of prose, well-written, with real ink carries a lot more gravitas than something knocked-up on a word processor – but the kids don’t see it. Tell them you’ve booked the ICT suite for a lesson and all of a sudden, ‘you’re the best teacher in the school sir!’

So what’s the big deal? They still have to produce the work, in fact, I would expect higher quality work, except from those who forget to switch the spellcheck from ‘US’ to ‘UK’ English. Well the deal seems to be that I’m from a lost generation, and I’m struggling to deal with the fact that the world has moved on. Why do they need to browse through a heavy dictionary or thesaurus when there’s one on their phone? Why spend an hour browsing the library for information when there’s Google on their phone? Why write down the notes I’ve written on the board when they can photograph it on their phone? Why bother talking to someone when you can text them? In fact, why bother doing anything? Stay in bed and let your phone go to work for you!

Love it or hate it, it’s here, and it’s here to stay. So, firmly against my principles, I decided to look at ways of using the mobile phone as an educational resource. Starting with my 6th form English Literature group, I started work on a blog that would help them with revision. I knew that all bar one of the class used Twitter so I set up a Twitter account and eventually worked out how to link it to the blog so my intrepid 6th form followers could be informed of any updates. I spent hours, days, weeks making sure the blog was worthwhile then invited the class to follow the Twitter account. At last, I had something else to write in the ‘Use of ICT’ box. Wrong!

From a class of 12 students, 2 followed the account. All that work and no-one was interested. I was retweeting useful resources from other English teachers and aside from my two new followers, none of my class were gaining any benefit. The day after their final exams, when my work with them was complete and they were all off to work or university, I gained 8 new followers from that class! The blog was useful to someone – it’s had nearly 10,000 hits and gained me a significant number of Twitter followers – but obviously not to my own students.

The problem seems to lie with the teacher/student relationship. Students are worried about a teacher being able to look into their private lives, even though a Twitter account is accessible to anyone, and they really don’t want their teacher reading a conversation derived from the tweet, ‘how fit is that new Maths teacher?’



Well my account is barely used now and its use is limited to occasional tweets related to the fluctuating fortunes of my favourite football team, but I'm not one to go down without a fight. This year, my school introduced Classical Civilisation at Key Stage 5 and as I'd set up a new Twitter account, where I only follow Classicists, school

and university Classics departments and people with an interest in Classics, I decided to give it another go.

Fully explaining the benefits seemed a good starting point so I pointed out that as well as using it to follow messages, homework information and deadline dates, they should 'favourite' any useful tweets and retweets I post then read them on the bus, over dinner, or while the adverts are on during their TV viewing. A Twitter account should be used as a bulletin board or online notebook and a tweet does not mean you should drop everything and read it now. I suggested that they could look through the people who I follow and see if there's anyone there they might want to follow – I find classicists to be a most helpful bunch of people and informed them that a university lecturer or classical author would invariably respond to any questions or comments, even from a 6th form student. It is also a useful tool for communicating quickly with each other, maybe with classics students from other schools, and sharing ideas and study problems. I could post anything I forgot to mention in class; they could use the hashtag to get conversations/debates going; they could get instant feedback on practically anything...the list is quite substantial.

The response has led me to a sound conclusion. If you want to engage students through Twitter – forget it! They really are not interested. While I am quite happy to recognise the limits of my knowledge while engaging in a Twitter debate with an Oxford professor or a renowned author or researcher, it is safe to say that students find this a little intimidating; the prospect of 'looking stupid' on a global network is not an appealing one and I guess they see it as my job, not invisible people on Twitter, to teach them within the protective confines of the classroom. I am scheduled to present a CPD session in January to my school colleagues on 'the use of social media for education' – I was panicking that it might be a very short session and a complete waste of time as I spend an hour explaining something that will prove to be virtually useless. Interestingly, our Head of History set up a Twitter account to keep his students informed, and encountered exactly the same apathy; he had three followers from his class of twelve and they were all A* students. I say 'interestingly' because my two followers were also A* students. I would suggest this is a telling statistic. Those students looking to achieve the highest grades, who are adept at independent learning and in the case of the five students mentioned, looking to secure a place at one of the top universities will not only see the benefits of Twitter but will put its educational benefits above the sharing of mundane banter with their friends. The students who think simply turning up to school will get them the required grade and see independent learning as a total

intrusion on their social life seem to regard their teacher's presence on Twitter as an infringement of their social group...and they would have a point if the teacher 'followed' the student, something I always make clear that I would never do!



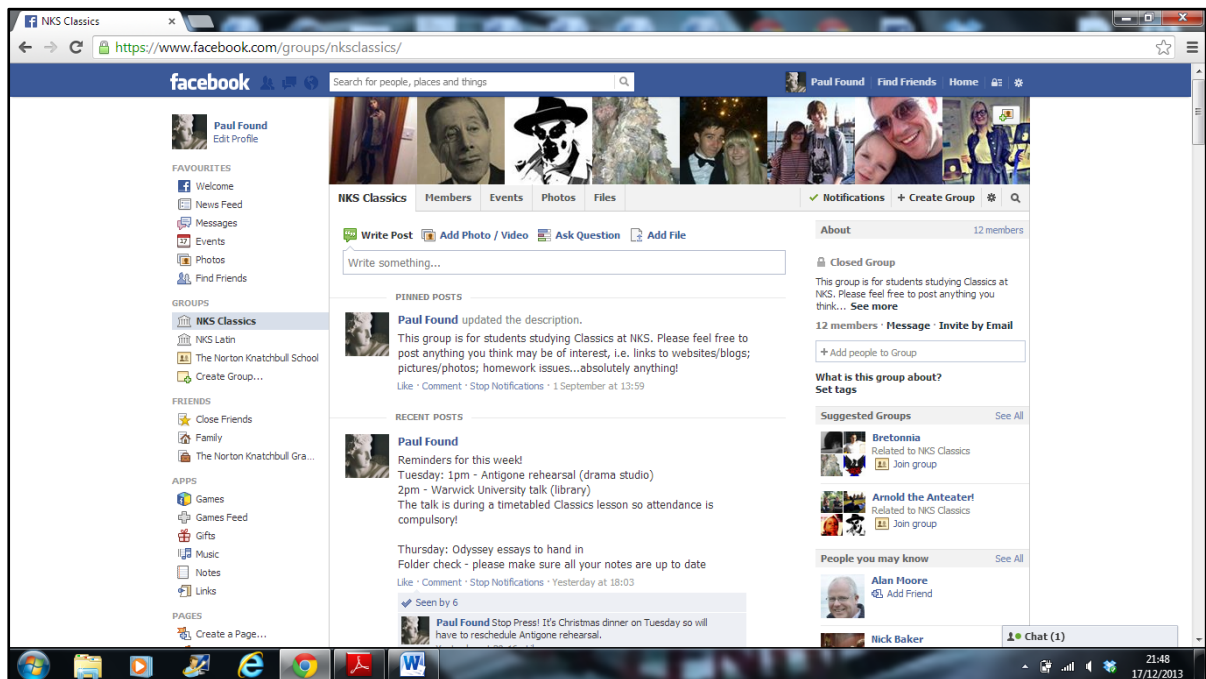
Anyway, here's a word generally frowned upon in schools: Facebook. It seems that every single student on the planet has Facebook and the tales associated with it, usually relating to inappropriate relationships, online bullying, and a whole host of issues that will set the Child Protection alarm bells ringing, lead teachers to be extremely

cautious over its use. Well let me tell you that Facebook works! It can be used in complete safety, without compromising your professional relationship with students, and the students **WILL** use it!

As an extended feature of the classroom, Facebook beats Twitter hands-down. Firstly, the instant visual impact of pictures cannot be underestimated. Incredibly, if there's a choice of clicking on a picture, or clicking on a link, the link won't be clicked. Students it seems are incredibly lazy and the 2 seconds it takes to open a link, where the resulting file or image may not be to their liking, would be seen as 2 seconds of their lives they will never get back.

Which form of link looks the more appealing? It's a no-brainer!

I don't want to advertise Facebook when their Guide for Educators (see below) is freely available but you can see some of the benefits from the following screenshot. There are a few things that I consider to be very important and probably the most significant safeguard is that my profile is empty; it was created purely for setting up a secondary Facebook account. This was easy enough to do – I simply set up the page using my school email address and a different password from my personal Facebook account. As there is absolutely nothing to see in my profile, I don't need to worry about privacy settings but I do insist that students set theirs so that only 'friends' can view their profiles. I make it quite clear that I will not accept any friend requests.



Secondly, it is a 'Closed Group'. This means that people can only join the group through invite or the acceptance of the group administrator. This reduces the likelihood of inappropriate posts by non-Classics students and makes the group 'exclusive', which seems very important to the students in the group.

Lastly, if you look carefully at bottom/centre, you can see that there is a notification saying 'seen by 6'. If I hover my cursor over this, it will display a list of names of people who have viewed this post. This means that no student can use the excuse that they 'forgot' the homework task or the essay title as I post reminders of all such things and I know exactly who has viewed it! All my students have the Facebook app on their mobile phones and this notifies them when anything has been posted on the Classics page.

The possibilities for Facebook as an educational tool/resource are far-reaching and I am looking into incorporating a few more of the available facilities but you can see from the left-hand column that from my profile, I can create more than one group. I have created a similar page for Latin classes and this is likely to be split into pages for different year groups as we (hopefully) expand the Latin provision in our school.

From a teacher's point of view, I must admit to having little preference either way. I follow several worthwhile Classics groups with my personal Facebook profile and probably scan my Twitter feed 2-3 times a day. Twitter does appear to be the more credible social networking site and I have found some excellent resources, news and events, interacted with some very inspiring people and learned a great deal to further my own interest and knowledge in Classics. In addition, I suspect many of us Classics teachers are in the same position of having very little specialist support within our individual schools and for this reason, I find twitter to be a godsend as a support network where teaching problems and issues can be shared, discussed and solved. The Classics community really is very supportive and the wealth of expertise we all hold between

us is always freely and readily available to share. If I have a question about archaeology in Pompeii, I tweet an archaeologist working in Pompeii; If I want to know how to set up KS3 Latin classes, I tweet the Classics teacher at another school to find out; if I'm stuck for ideas on teaching the Women in Ancient Athens and Rome module, I can tweet anyone from a number of teachers across the country who teach it for innovative tips and resources. It's like having a staff room full of classicists right here in my pocket! However, there is no point in me retweeting anything important as my students are all farming their virtual crops or milking their virtual cows, but at least Facebook interrupts them with a bright red flag when I post something...even at the peak of Harvest time! Oh, and I finally have something else to write in the 'use of ICT' box on my lesson observation form!

<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/ufiles/Facebook-guide-for-educators1.pdf>

Paul Found

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Latin Verse Composition in English Schools, 1500–1900

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries the ability to compose Latin verse was the pinnacle of a schoolboy's career. Facility in verse composition, especially in elegiacs ('longs and shorts'), provided an elegance and style of language which gave one the mark of a scholar, or so the public schools liked to believe. As a schoolmaster at Eton College in the 1840s could say to his pupils:

If you do not take more pains, how can you ever expect to write good longs and shorts? If you do not write good longs and shorts, how can you ever be a man of taste? If you are not a man of taste, how can you ever be of use in the world?¹

Complete command of Latin at schools throughout England had to be in verse no less than in prose. Versification was one of the regular school exercises and rules of prosody were learnt alongside the 'theme' (a prose composition which appears to have been universally loathed), while for the upper forms the production of elegiacs on a set subject was a weekly task.

The seventeenth century schoolmaster John Brinsley details the steps required to attain proficiency at verse composition. Firstly, he says, the boy (few girls were educated in schools at this time) must already have reached a decent level of ability in prose composition (letter writing and themes). He should have read at the very least Ovid's *de Tristibus* or *de Ponto*, plus selections from the *Metamorphoses* or from Virgil, and he should be well acquainted with all manner of poetical phrases. Once this stage has been reached the pupil can receive a thorough grounding in the rules of versification. An excellent exercise, says Brinsley, is for pupils to 'contract' seven or eight verses of Virgil or Ovid into four or five lines of their own (a sort of verse *précis*). To facilitate their studies Brinsley strongly recommends that pupils maintain the use of a commonplace book in which to record choice phrases and quotations from Latin authors, with each page to have its own topic on marriages, funerals, triumphs and so forth.²

The prevalence of verse composition from the sixteenth century can be seen in school exercise and fair copy books. The *Carmen Gratulatorium* is a book of 42 poems written by the pupils of Winchester College and presented to Edward VI when he visited the school on 5 September 1552. This beautiful book, still extant, comprises Latin poems in elegiacs, hexameters and hendecasyllables. The following short poem in hendecasyllables was the work of one Henry Faulkner, and shows great facility for versification, if not for content:

Ride si sapis o puella ride.

Toto hic Rex triduo manere fertur,

¹ Leslie Stephen, *Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (1894), 81.

² John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius or the Grammar Schoole, 1627*, ed. E.T. Campagnac (London, 1917), 194–6.

Exacto triduo recedit. Ergo

*Plora, si sapis, o puella plora.*³

In 1573 Elizabeth visited St Paul's School, London and was likewise welcomed with a book of congratulatory verses from the boys. The following anonymous poem is in elegiacs:

Anglia prae reliquis tu terque quaterque beata es

Terris, quam Princeps ELISABETHA regit,

Quod te iam Princeps tam sacra et casta gubernat,

Qua verae floret religionis apex.

O Regina potens opibus, praestantior arte,

Stemma, decus, patriae gloria prima tuae.

Post Venerem tu pulchra Venus, post Pallada Pallas,

*Lauriger ad digitos astat Apollo tuos.*⁴

³ BL12AXXXIII, f.7.

Young boy, smile if you are wise, smile.

The King is said to stay here for three whole days,

At the end of which time he will leave. Therefore

Weep, young boy, if you are wise, weep.

⁴ BL12ALXVII Royal MSS f.15 (the poem continues for 10 more lines).

Anglia, you are thrice and four times blessed over other

Lands, you whom Elizabeth the Queen rules,

Because so chaste and sacred a Queen now governs you,

Where the apex of true religion flourishes.

O Queen, powerful in wealth, more ready in skill,

The stem, the honour, the first glory of your land,

After Venus you are beautiful Venus, after Pallas you are Pallas,

Laurel-bearing Apollo stands at your fingers.

Both pieces of work are indeed very creditable, especially when one takes into account the fact that they are original compositions rather than translations. The Latin is good, the sentiment shaky – but the boys are probably aged about 14 or 15, and for boys of this age the difficulty was not so much in the composition as in the thinking of what to say in the first place. The requirement for original writing in verse composition was, for the pupils, a heavy and unpopular demand.

Schools on the other hand took an increasing pride in the verses they produced. In the sixteenth century visiting monarchs were welcomed with compilations of verse written by pupils, but from the seventeenth century onwards schools took to publishing collections of their pupils' best compositions. During this period school editions such as *Lusus Westmonasteriensis* (from Westminster), *Carmina Wiccamica* (from Winchester), *Musae Etonenses* (from Eton) and *Sabrinae Corolla* (from Shrewsbury) start to make an appearance. The presence of verses as opposed to prose compositions or themes in display and celebratory books would suggest that verses were, as Brinsley says, as much for display and ornament as for linguistic training, whereas prose composition (the hated 'theme') was more simply to exercise the mind and provide moral instruction.

However, in many quarters the practice of verse composition was hugely unpopular, especially for the demands it made of original composition. In his later years, even the poet John Milton had little regard for the ornamental prose and verse composition of his youth and he derided the 'preposterous' task of 'forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses and orations' when they were too young to understand such things. For him, the Latin language was 'but the instrument conveying to us things useful to be known'; and he believed the primary purpose of learning Latin and Greek was to study 'the solid things in them'.⁵ And in 1693, twenty years after the death of Milton, the educationalist John Locke expressed his own hostility to the practice of verse composition in schools. He regarded it as 'the most unreasonable thing in the world, to torment a child' who has no flair for poetry, for 'it is very seldom seen that anyone discovers mines of gold or silver in Parnassus. It is a pleasant air, but a barren soil.'⁶

Calls for the reduction or even abolition of verse composition in schools grew louder in the nineteenth century. The Whig magazine, the *Edinburgh Review*,⁷ regarded verse composition as 'a topic so often debased' in a narrow school curriculum from which everything of value had been excluded. The periodical bemoaned the fact that most eighteen or nineteen year-old boys tended to leave school having written over 10,000 Latin verses, and thereafter never made another verse in their lives.⁸ It declared that facility at verse, 'a talent for fugitive poetry in a dead

⁵ John Milton, *The Prose Works of John Milton, Vol. III*, ed. J.A. St. John (London, 1848), 464–5.

⁶ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, eds. J.W. & J.S. Yolton (Oxford, 1990), 230.

⁷ *Edinburgh Review*, October 1809 (XXIX), 40–52; 42.

⁸ There is evidence to support the *Edinburgh Review's* criticisms. Sydney Smith, born in 1771, was sent to Winchester, followed two years later by his younger brother. The two of them were spectacularly

language', is a natural gift, one that cannot be acquired by any amount of labour and industry, and the system of education in England at present 'trains up many young men in a style of elegant imbecility'.⁹ The magazine could not resist mocking the English public schools' fascination with verse composition:

It is no uncommon thing to meet with Englishmen, whom, but for their grey hairs and wrinkles, we might easily mistake for schoolboys. Their talk is of Latin verses; and it is quite clear, if men's ages are to be dated from the state of their mental progress, that such men are eighteen years of age, and not a day older.¹⁰

Until the nineteenth century there was very little demand in schools for the type of composition which required a passage of English to be translated into Latin (or Greek). Pupil composition at this stage was entirely original, hence the need for commonplace books and notebooks, which might hold a rich store of words and phrases as an aid in composition. So much was the theory, though in practice there was a great deal of what today would be described as 'plagiarism'.

Richard Shepherd in 1782 wrote that

an indiscriminate imposition of original composition in Latin and Greek, such as themes and verses, without any regard had to the abilities of the boys, or their future destination in life, is a general and capital fault. This preposterous practice not only loads them with a useless and unnecessary burden, but robs them of time that might be advantageously employed.¹¹

It was not all so bleak. Isaac Williams was a pupil at Harrow School at the beginning of the nineteenth century. 'I took great delight in Latin exercises, especially Latin verse' he tells us in his autobiography, and 'the great charm of my life at Harrow was with [verse] composition'.¹² At the other end of the century Gilbert Murray, a pupil at Merchant Taylors' School, London, adored the composition of English into Latin, but particularly into Greek, verse.

I remember once being asked by a master how long I had taken in writing some Greek verses; he expected one-and-a-half to two hours, but I had really taken ten. The fact was that I had fallen in love with the verses and thought about them all day

successful composers. Indeed, the other pupils at school signed a petition, refusing to try for the College prizes if the Smiths were allowed to continue to contend, as they always won. Regardless of his youthful successes, when an old man Smith himself spoke of this aspect of his schooldays with some disdain: 'I believe, whilst a boy at school, I made above ten thousand Latin verses, and no man in his senses would dream in after-life of ever making another. So much for life and time wasted'. Mrs. Austin, (ed), 1855, *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith by Lady Saba Holland* (London, 1855), 6-7.

⁹ *Edinburgh Review*, October 1809, 48.

¹⁰ *Edinburgh Review*, October 1809, 46.

¹¹ Richard Shepherd, *An Essay on Education* (London, 1782), 16.

¹² Isaac Williams, *Autobiography*, ed. G. Prevost (London, 1892), 4-5.

till they were finished. It was, I suppose, the one form of art that the traditional education of that day provided. One read a piece of English poetry very carefully, trying to appreciate the meaning and the force of every line, and then came the excitement of trying to get the same effect into Greek or Latin. I generally enjoyed the Greek most...'¹³

Nevertheless, it was the excessive demands of versification, in Shepherd's phrase the 'indiscriminate imposition of original composition', that ultimately led to changes in the way schools in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries taught the Classics. The national mood shifted from original composition to translations from English, the precursor of prose composition we recognize in schools today.

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¹³ Gilbert Murray, *An Unfinished Autobiography*, eds. J. Smith, and A. Toynbee (George Allen and Unwin, 1960), 84

Plato in Polish philosophy and literature, 1800–1950^{*}

The vitality and universal character of our ancient heritage in general, and of Platonism in particular, is taken for granted by Classics teachers. Plato's dialogues can be read fruitfully and inspiringly today, as they have always been read. Readers of the dialogues throughout ancient times, and also in less remote times, were fascinated by this student of Socrates and his lasting influence. It is therefore particularly important in reception teaching to select appropriate supplementary materials to show how more modern times are reflected in the ancient material, or how, for example, 19th and 20th century authors related the problems of their times to ancient texts.

The approach of authors of different eras towards ancient tradition, especially towards Plato's multi-dimensional output, reveals more truth about the writers themselves than it does about Plato. The determining influences of every epoch and every philosophical current are reflected in the mirror of ancient texts. Attempting to understand different authors' approaches to Plato may provide the key to understanding the philosophical situation of the authors themselves, their intellectual background, the problems they faced and the issues they were beset with.

The aim of the present article is to report on the classical reception teaching which I have conducted at my home university. This may be of interest to teachers, especially with respect to how some issues in classical reception are taught in far-away Poland, while others may find the report useful from the viewpoint of material selection.

The seminar *Plato in Poland 1800–1950* has so far been taught twice (2010/2011, 2011/2012) at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Zielona Góra (Poland). The course was not obligatory, and it attracted students with diverse backgrounds: in philosophy, political sciences, literature and mathematics. The following remarks on the general contents of the course, on the teaching and on the possible future improvement of this course and reception teaching in general, will be presented not on the basis of continuous reception teaching, but only on the experience of the two semesters mentioned above.

The textual source for the course consisted in an anthology of primary works of Polish poets, historians of philosophy and philosophers, who represented diverse intellectual traditions¹. The spectrum of the selected authors and their works is briefly outlined below in order to give some understanding of the main idea of the seminar².

^{*} My thanks to Una Maclean-Hańckowiak for proof-reading the English text.

¹ *Platon w Polsce 1800–1950. Antologia* [*Plato in Poland 1800–1950. Anthology*], ed. T. Mróz, Zielona Góra 2010.

² Out of 18 texts selected for the anthology, only 11 of them will be briefly presented below, as they attracted the greatest attention among students and led to heated discussions.

The opening text, written by F. Karpiński (1803), presented Plato in the form of clumsy and, to be honest, boring dialogues with his pupils. The main emphasis of Karpiński's Plato seems to have been on certain thoughts, the origins of which should be sought in the Augustinian tradition of Christian philosophy rather than in Plato's dialogues.

J. Jeżowski (1829), a pupil of G.E. Groddeck in Vilnius, set out to undertake a systematic criticism of the Russian translation of Plato's *Laws*. Although he failed in this task, he proved, in the process, to be a devoted enthusiast of F. Schleiermacher's translations and studies on Plato.

F.A. Kozłowski (1845), the first Polish translator of the dialogues, was not a philosopher but a philologist. He therefore had to supplement his knowledge with some philosophical reading on Plato for his introduction to his translations, and decided to draw on the then philosopher *per se*. As a result, many of the reflections in this introduction were influenced by, or sometimes directly translated from, G.W.F. Hegel's lectures on ancient philosophy.

The following three texts were created at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The extracts from W. Lutosławski's works (1897/1899) presented Plato as an adherent of socialism evolving in his later years towards spiritualism. Since the Polish scholar considered spiritualism to be one of the foundations of Polish Messianism, he interpreted Plato as a remote progenitor of Polish Romantic philosophy.

T. Miciński's text (1897) – retrieved from the manuscript – is a testimony to the inability of a young poet to meet the requirements for a Ph.D. degree in Ancient Philosophy. His supervisor, Lutosławski, demanded simple, scientific jargon, without any unclear intuitions, poetical visions or metaphorical expressions. The text was retrieved and published with the supervisor's critical notes on Miciński's work.

The fragments from *opus vitae* of S. Pawlicki (1903), a priest and a member of the *Congregatio Resurrectionis*, provide evidence of the difficulty of reconciling Christian morality with the ancient notion of love, *Eros*. Discussing Plato's *Banquet* and especially the homoerotic issues in the speeches presented in this dialogue, Pawlicki, in spite of his general and profound adoration of Plato, had to voice his disapproval of the fact that Plato's extraordinary literary talent had been wasted on such "ugly matters".

The article by the most influential Polish historian of philosophy, W. Tatarkiewicz (1911), who gained his Ph.D. in Marburg, bears testimony to the influence which neo-Kantianism had on Polish philosophy.

Another, posthumously published, chapter from the *History of Greek philosophy* by S. Pawlicki (1917) contains a refutation of Plato's alleged socialism. Since Pawlicki intended to incorporate Platonism into the teaching of the Catholic Church and the neo-scholastic movement, he had to reject the socialist interpretation of Plato's political philosophy. Otherwise, he would have attributed socialism to Catholicism, and this would have been unacceptable.

Contrary to these discussions on the socialist character of Plato's thought, E. Jarra, in his Ph.D. thesis (1918), argued that Plato was an early supporter of the contemporary democratic system, since the position of the individual in Plato's political project was dependant on the capacity and skills of the individual human being, without regard to one's origins or family.

The last two texts were taken from the works of an internationally recognized Polish Plato scholar and from the most productive translator of the dialogues. Lutosławski, already mentioned above, argued (1946/1948) – on the one hand – that the only way to save European culture was to return to Plato and to rediscover his evolution from idealism and socialism towards spiritualism and personalism, which he considered to be close to the idea of Christianity. On the other hand, W. Witwicki (1947/1948) drew attention to the continuity between Plato's political thought and the ideology underpinning totalitarian and communist states.

As we have seen, the selected texts represent a wide variety of subjects and approaches. The most popular dialogues, which formed the subject matter of the above texts, were: the *Banquet*, *Phaedo*, *Politeia*, *Timaus*. The texts were selected to meet the students' needs and interests. All the students attending the course could find authors whose texts fell within the area of their field of studies or interests. While reading the texts of the poets, Polish literature students were able to broaden their knowledge of the history of Polish literature and its ancient philosophical inspirations. Students with a background in political sciences (re-)discovered the political embroilment of Plato's thought, its topicality and its susceptibility to diverse interpretations, resulting from the influence of the political situation at the time of interpretation, or of the individual political preferences of the author who chose to analyse particular issues from Plato's *Politeia*. Perhaps philosophy students benefited the most, broadening both their knowledge of Plato and of their own intellectual tradition, since the study and teaching of Classical reception combines the remote ancient material with the cultural context, which was much closer to the participants of the seminar. It combines Plato's dialogues with 19th and 20th century philosophical currents.

While discussing the selected texts, the genetic method was applied; the aim of every meeting was to answer the following questions: Why did the authors express their particular views on Plato? What were their sources? What was their motivation? What trends were represented? Not all the questions could be easily answered, but they were attempted.

The influence of modern currents of thought on the interpretation of ancient texts was analysed. Some of the texts were considered as supplementary sources for the influence of European philosophical phenomena on Polish philosophy, with particular emphasis on the issues related to Platonism: Schleiermacher's works had an effect on Jeżowski, Hegelianism – on Kozłowski, neo-Kantianism – on Tatarkiewicz, neo-Scholasticism – on Pawlicki. Though the stress was laid on the reception and interpretation of philosophical problems, almost every text included some additional issues to be discussed, which were loosely connected with Plato, e.g.: the controversies of the conflict between ancient manners and 19th century morality were touched upon (Pawlicki); or the old cooperation methods of supervisors with their students were observed (Miciński).

By reading and discussing texts originating within the last 200 years, the participants of the seminar were able, hopefully, to gain new insights into the philosophy and culture of the period and to understand better their own, Polish – in this case – philosophical and intellectual traditions.

The interdisciplinary character of Classical Reception Studies constitutes its strength and attractiveness as a teaching subject. Courses on philosophical reception are, however, still not very common in the curriculum for philosophy students. My experience as a Plato Reception teacher shows that the diversity of the authors under examination is the key to success. One ancient author is a single inspiration – but when the works go under reception, a stimulating diversity of reflections and approaches appears. Another teaching suggestion is to put emphasis on local issues and on well-known and recognized works and authors, presenting them in the new light of classical tradition and its reception, finding their ancient inspirations, and, at the same time, showing the continuity of European tradition, in all the corners of the continent.

The reception of the classics may be discovered anywhere in modern art, literature, and culture in general. Classical Reception Teaching is therefore a vivid mirror in which old, recent and contemporary culture is reflected.

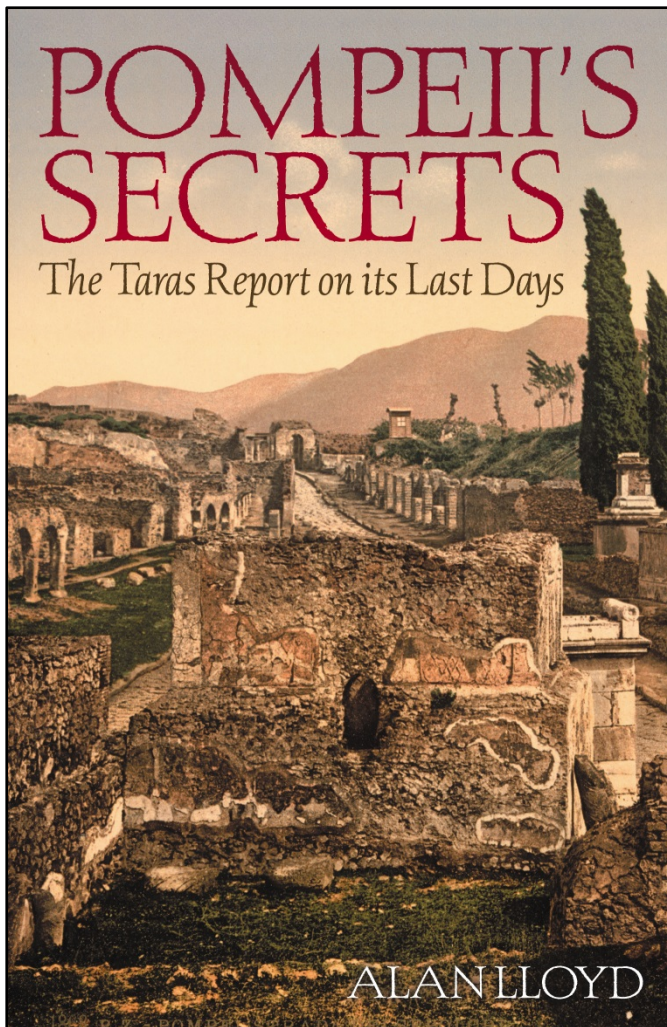
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Pompeii's Secrets: the Taras Report on its Last Days

Lloyd, A., Kindle edition, Souvenir Press 2013

Whether teacher, student or Classical novice *Pompeii's Secrets: The Taras Report on Its Last Days* ties the fiction's life of Taras, a Parthian scribe, with the very real setting of Pompeii. As a teacher of Classics I often have my head buried in articles and excavation reports, disregarding works of fiction as educational tools; Lloyds' work has converted me being easily accessible to students. Each chapter is easily manageable, touching on almost all of the content of a student's studies on Pompeii. Having said this I must note my disappointment at Taras' description of the eruption, neglecting many of the finer details required for students, such as the umbrella pine eruption and pyroclastic surge which hit Pompeii; here in lies the restriction of fiction as it is quite understandable that Taras could not have experienced this and lived to tell the tale! With this in mind, for the experienced reader it may seem all too clear that Lloyd is educating us through the



sometimes disjointed adventures of Taras, having him zigzagging through the streets of Pompeii mingling with the dredges of society right up to Pompeian officials and Roman senators. However from a teaching perspective each encounter brings to life the ancient city of Pompeii and illuminates that which for students can often be a hard concept to grasp; that Pompeii was once a busy and bustling community not too dissimilar from our own society.

Overlooking the seemingly random wanderings of Taras, I found myself compelled to read on as topic after topic was brought to life. Taras' wanderings see him learn about the early settlement of Pompeii, religious conflict, entertainment and the importance of the forum. In addition to this, key characters such as the duumviri, aediles and senators make appearances, with their roles and importance explained. While textbooks such as *In Search of the Romans* by James

Renshaw offer a comprehensive guide to Pompeii, Lloyds' vivid descriptions breathe life into Pompeii's ruins, skeletons and casts, describing the high octane atmosphere of the Amphitheatre, people's motivation to remain in Pompeii and the realisation of their ultimate doom.

The inclusion of footnotes and a postscript provide useful further research for the inquisitive student and hammer home that Lloyd has, where possible, tied the fictional life of Taras with real places, artefacts and people of Pompeii, however with the book being written in 1975 it neglects more recent research and findings from Pompeii. This makes the book a perfect pre-course read for students or as in-class reading to extend higher order thinking. Although the book has omissions and lacks some finer points of detail I have found this serves as an excellent post-topic reading task in which my students have evaluated the relevant chapter regarding its effectiveness as a source for understanding Pompeii.

On the whole, for teachers wishing to go beyond the obvious textbooks to enlighten, challenge and engage their students, *Pompeii's Secrets: The Taras Report on Its Last Days* is a book well worth a read!

Ben Greenley

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Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.20–23, 33–45—Latin Text, Study Aids with Vocabulary, and Commentary

Owen, M. and Gildenhard, I., Open Book Publishers, 2013

Late September in London and the weather has turned prematurely chilly after a glorious summer. Autumnal cold notwithstanding, the end of the second full week of teaching gives fresh welcome to yet another Classics textbook from [Open Book Publishers](#), its arrival more than sufficient to warm the heart of a busy Classics department head. This latest offering, as it happens, now marks the third volume released by the publishers in less than two years, following the successful advent of publications devoted to Cicero, in *Verrem* 2.1 (the prescribed AS prose text) and Virgil, *Aeneid IV* (one of the alternate verse prescriptions for A2).



Maintaining the fresh initiative in rapidly resourcing A Level studies, this most recent text deals with the Latin prose author who likely represents the more popular choice amongst teachers and students for the A2 Latin Prose module, Publius Cornelius Tacitus; more specifically, his *Annals*, XV. 20–23, 33–45. Placing secondary Classics departments even deeper in his debt in the process is Dr Ingo Gildenhard (University of Cambridge), sole author for the preceding [Cicero](#) and [Virgil](#) volumes; Mathew Owen (teacher in Classics at Caterham School, Surrey) now joins him as co-author for this latest outing on the *Annals*.

After an informative Preface and Acknowledgements, the Tacitus volume opens with an extended Introduction: a collection of six essays in total explores the Tacitean background, legacy and style, providing an astute overview of the ancient author's life, times and subject matter, with particular focus on the political environment of the developing Principate. Especially useful for the A-Level prescription are twin essays devoted to the Neronian period: "Tacitus' Nero-narrative: Rocky-Horror-Picture Show and Broadway on the Tiber" and "Thrasea Paetus and the so-called 'Stoic opposition'". The wording of the former, I suspect, reflects Gildenhard's dry humour (of which we enjoyed many examples in his previous volumes) as well as his obvious delight in the salacious content of much of the prescribed text. The latter piece, meanwhile,

provides a convenient overview of the difficult Thrasea Paetus passage and speech to the Senate that (perhaps somewhat incongruously) constitutes the first section of the prescribed lines chosen by the examiners. This excursion should prove a genuine life-saver in illuminating what for many students must prove a baffling detour away from the star of our prescription, the emperor Nero himself. Overall, the essays work hard to provide useful context and interesting insights into the set text. As our authors readily admit [page 8], none of these essays “offers anything close to an exhaustive discussion”—but neither do they need to for A Level students.... Succeed they will, nonetheless, as well-rounded and convenient springboards for wider reading and thematic discussion with interested students.

The protracted business of coming to grips with the text itself, of course, represents the greatest challenge, week on week, with regard to effective classroom provision and delivery. The difficult prose style of Tacitus, his *brevitas* and *varietas*, serves further to complicate this necessary task; it is here, however, that the authors’ efforts prove the greatest boon. In the third section of the present volume, therefore, the successive Tacitean ‘chapters’ from the prescription are laid out conveniently for student use, neatly combining the Latin text with study questions and vocabulary aid. The text, of course, we already possess in the ‘official’ Bristol Classical Press publication of the prescription (ed. Norma Miller, 1994), together with many useful notes and commentary. Making the third, Study Guide section in the new publication most effective, however, is the ‘bite-sized’ presentation of each chapter in turn—Tacitus’ somewhat fitful presentation of the events and characters of Nero’s reign during the years 62–64 AD / CE, as it happens, lends itself well to this approach.

Particularly useful in this regard is the outcome of the authors’ stated aim to provide a structured, yet varied pattern to the study of the set passages, thereby avoiding the tedious, hard slog that might otherwise be required merely in translating one’s way through a lengthy and difficult text, making useful observations on the way. The latter approach, I suspect, will be all too familiar to A-Level Classics teachers. Rather, each Tacitean chapter has been provided with three levels of activities for student study: in the first place, a pleasing variety of shorter grammatical, syntactical, stylistic and content questions, encouraging students selectively to unpick the intricacies of Tacitus’ style and narrative; secondly, a ‘Stylistic Appreciation’ question for each chapter, promoting the deeper, extended analysis of the language that must feature in the higher value questions for the examination, thereby providing useful student experience; thirdly and finally, a ‘Discussion Point’ asking students to reflect on their understanding of the larger text as a whole, inviting them successfully to relate their reading to the larger world and their wider knowledge and experience. It is this last feature, the present writer believes, that serves best to justify the value of reading Tacitus in the first place: Just what can historical writings of the developed Principate teach us in the modern world? The Study Guide goes a long way in providing ready, if not exactly easy, approaches to answers to this question.

Ideally to be kept from students—at least initially, while they explore the text and associated study questions—is the truly extensive fourth section of Gildenhard and Owen’s publication, the Commentary. Exploring in depth both the language and content of the prescribed excerpts from

the *Annals*, these pages will provide an invaluable and detailed guide for the busy classroom teacher when preparing discussion of the text with his / her students. What they also offer, however—and herein lies a trap for the unwary practitioner!—are a great many of the answers to the Study Questions from the preceding section.... Were a clever student able to peruse these pages ahead of time, their information could provide an all-too-convenient shortcut away from independent thought and application. The reviewer's advice therefore, founded on experience to date, would be to retain the Commentary separately in one's teaching armoury, releasing additional insights only gradually, when and as they are needed.

In concluding this review, one might ask: Should we invest in the (extremely reasonable) cost of this new publication? (Note that [the convenient digital provision of the publication](#) makes this vanishingly small when compared to traditional textbooks...!) Will it, moreover, make life easier, both for myself and my students? Will it, above all, make Tacitus even more enjoyable and interesting? The answer to all these questions is a resounding 'Yes'. Although not a complete 'one-stop shop' for all needs and teaching styles—I will continue, for example, to make use of [David Carter's excellent Classical Workbooks](#) interlinear study guide, in making an invaluable 'first pass' over the text with students—the combined efforts of Gildenhard and Owen are nonetheless highly to be commended as a first rate teaching tool. I look forward with anticipation to future releases from these and other authors, now backed by a truly progressive publishing house, in the pursuit of our common, Classical ends.

Paul J Cowie

Head of Classics

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