

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Popular Classics: Introduction to selected classical reception papers from the Celtic Conference in Classics, St Andrews, 2018**

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In 2014 the Celtic Conference in Classics had no classical reception panels. It had two reception papers in the panel organised by Nancy Rabinowitz and Fiona McHardy, on 'Forms of Violence, Forms of Hierarchy', one from Justine McConnell on 'Postcolonial Sparagmos in the Work of Toni Morrison and Wole Soyinka', and one from Amanda Potter and Hunter Gardner on 'Violence and Voyeurism: Watching Ancient Violence in the Area and in the Home in Starz' *Spartacus*'. Consequently, Potter decided to organise a reception panel for the 2016 conference in Dublin in 2016, on 'Modern (Ancient) Epic', bringing together scholars from the UK, US and Israel to speak on a range of topics. By 2018 classical reception studies had become front and central within the discipline of classics, and the 2018 Celtic Conference in Classics in St Andrews featured two reception panels, '21<sup>st</sup> Century Classics' organised by Amanda Potter and Caitlan Smith, and 'Democratising Classics' organised by Jenny Messenger and Rossana Zetti. The organisers of the two panels worked together as they created their programmes. At the conference cross fertilisation between the panels was encouraged. For this special edition of *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* the organisers have selected papers from presenters from the UK, Europe and the US from across the two panels that represent the diversity of 21<sup>st</sup> Century classics.<sup>1</sup>

PART ONE: FILM AND TELEVISION

Film and television programmes featuring or influenced by the ancient world have been a mainstay of classical reception studies from its inception, with two seminal early works being Jon Solomon's *The Ancient World in the Cinema* (1978 and revised and expanded in 2001) from the US and Maria Wyke's *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (1997) from the UK. Jon Solomon and Maria Wyke both took part in the panels at CCC in 2018, providing encouragement to the new wave of researchers. As accessible visual media, filmic and televisual representations of the ancient world are attractive to students, and have been the early impetus for the careers of many classical scholars. Generations of classicists have been inspired to study the ancient world by the epic films of the 1950s and 60s, the BBC series *I Claudius* (1976), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), and a new generation is being inspired by *Wonder Woman* (2017). Film and television are represented in this collection by papers across a range of genres; science fiction and horror films, long running drama series and reality television.

Rocki Wentzel's paper looks at the interplay of technology and love in Spike Jones' 2013 *Her*, particularly on how the characters in the film are representative of Greek mythology such as the Pygmalion, Pandora, Narcissus, and Orpheus' myths. Wentzel demonstrates how technology and the gods inform on the conception of human identity formation and vice versa.

Dan Curley's essay, "Benefits of a Classical Education": The Dynamics of Classical Allusion in ABC's *Revenge*, focuses on the US prime time soap opera/revenge thriller series *Revenge* (2011-2015). Curley draws attention to the series' use of the culture of the ancient world to create characters with wealth and erudition, in opposition with the lower-class characters with the moral values viewers are invited to identify with.

Lastly, Fiona Hobden and Amanda Potter's joint essay scrutinizes two very different but interlinking television series on the Roman gladiator: *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (STARZ, 2010) and *Bromans* (Electric Ray, 2017). Both examine female agency that the TV series' female characters display. Hobden and Potter argue the relationship between 'woman and gladiator' allow for female dominance on screen, but still endorse conservative moral codes, privileging heterosexual relationships.

## PART TWO: DRAMA, ART AND FASHION

The three papers in this section share an interest in the close proximity, and often interchangeability, between contemporary life and antiquity, be it the Cyprian “buffer-zone” viewed from the fresh angle of Euripidean drama, the street art taking myth to the masses, or the fashion show recreating an imagined antiquity for the purchasing public. Through different creative forms, ranging from modern drama to visual art and fashion, each paper in this section explores aspects of performativity and uncovers dynamic interactions with a classical past that continues to exist and evolve in the present. These receptions of antiquity are site-specific, public, and often subversive, juxtaposing a range of ancient references and challenging both ways of thinking about contemporary issues and approaches to the ancient world.

Magdalena Zira discusses complex issues of authenticity, ownership and national identity in her Cyprus-based production of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*. By staging the play on the line of separation that has divided Cyprus’ capital Nicosia since 1974, Zira frames her revival as reflecting the city’s political problems and creating a meta-narrative for the audience. Her specific interpretation of the play, the adaptation of the text and its setting are inseparable and contribute to create an explosive performance, relevant and potentially influential for current sociopolitical issues.

Colleen Kron uncovers different dimensions of myth present in contemporary urban artists such as Sandor Rácmolnár, MP5, PichiAvo, and Banksy. For each piece of street art, she discusses both its classical antecedents and its contemporary implications and uncovers issues of reception, the role of street art as public pedagogy, the political dimension and art’s ability to construct multi-layered narratives that “democratise” Classics in new ways.

Finally, Stacie Raucci argues that the fashion world also brings antiquity to the viewing public in significant ways, recreating the “imagined spaces” of ancient landscapes. Spectators are fully implicated in this newly created world as they become “part of the spectacle”, filling in the narrative gaps themselves and connecting their lives with the vision of fashion labels like Chanel, Gucci, and Mary Katrantzou.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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