

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Scan the Programme

CLASSICAL RECEPTION 2.0



DIGITAL ANTIQUITIES AND THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

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Facultad de
Filosofía y Letras

PANEL 1. CLASSICAL RECEPTION IN/AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Sappho is my Roman Empire

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This paper explores the way that reception of Sappho has both flourished but also fragmented in fascinating ways in the era of contemporary online culture, with special attention paid to TikTok as the heir to earlier Tumblr culture. TikTok features a vast network of creators who operate in a generally decentralized context with standards of fact-checking that are fundamentally different than those used for peer reviewed scholarship. Rather than lamenting the creation and dissemination of unattested "quotes" from Sappho, as is often the academic's first impulse, this paper explores the way that online spaces have contributed to and shaped a contemporary understanding of the poetry and legacy of Sappho, particularly among a younger and often queer audience.

Online Sappho: Negotiating Forms, Meanings and Platforms

Sara Palermo

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The presence of Sappho of Lesbos on social media has been a constant in recent years. Whether it is to recall a genealogy of women writers or to identify oneself with her as a boundary object, Sappho has permeated platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, and Tumblr. However, it is possible to observe differences, sometimes significant, in the reception processes that bring the poet of Lesbos to social media.

The aim of this paper is to provide a preliminary approach to the classification of the main trends in contemporary non-normative receptions of Sappho in digital environments. To achieve this, I will consider statistical variations in user profiles on each platform — serving as informative factors for the purposes of these receptions — as well as the intermedial relationships that often arise between different spaces.

This study begins with specific methodological questions, from the perspective of the interaction between Classical Reception studies and social media: how to handle data, considering both the stability of the material and the vast amount of information? To what

extent is it ethically possible to navigate this study? What weight do the unique characteristics of the platforms carry in the reception processes? What kind of relationship does the contemporary user establish with Greco-Roman antiquity?

The Rise of the #RomanEmpire on TikTok and the “Decline” of Hegemonic Masculinity in 21st Century: Trends in Social Media as a Research Topic for Classical Reception Studies

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Today, social networks are one of the main spaces for transmitting information and creating public opinion. Various figures, episodes, monuments, and ideas associated with classical antiquity have a considerable presence in these public forums of the digital age. The reception of a historical period through social media is an emerging field of study, although little explored so far. This line of research does not have a consistent methodological definition yet, and only a few proposals have been put forward in relation to very specific case studies (Gálvez 2018; Sumikawa & Jatowt, 2021; Caso, 2022; Pons, 2022; Casamayor, 2022). More recently, with reference to a viral trend on the motives that would lead so many men to think so often about the Roman Empire, we stated that “the dynamics of social media are undoubtedly a novel research topic” within the field of Classical Reception (Aguado-Cantabrana, 2023).

In this paper, we intend to reflect on the aforementioned trend, which went viral in September 2023. We believe it is an interesting case study that can shed light on different patterns of ancient Rome’s receptions on networks such as Instagram, X, and TikTok. We will analyse various material that has come of this viral trend, such as videos, reels, tweets and memes, as well as news and interviews with classicists and historians of antiquity. We argue that Gender Studies and, moreover, Classical Reception Studies provide the best theoretical framework within which to analyse this trend in depth. In fact, it cannot be understood without looking at the “hypermasculinity” in the current depiction of ancient Rome, which has a long tradition in various contexts and formats, and which in recent years has continued to be popularised in cinema, television and video games, among other media. All in all, the analysis of this particular viral trend serves to illustrate long-running patterns in the classical reception processes that take place on social networks.

Finally, we would like to point out the existence of interactive material and a considerable number of social accounts that (re)create a reductionist, limited and distorted idea of Roman antiquity, often under the ideological umbrella of the far right. In the face of this reality, we argue that these viral trends, and social networks in general, can provide us with particularly interesting opportunities to make a case for the field of Classical Reception.

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PANEL 2. CLASSICAL RECEPTION AND FANDOM

Conversations with Practitioners: How Technology can Facilitate Collaboration

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Creative responses to the Classics are the engine that powers the field of Classical Reception. In the new millennium technology has not only helped facilitate a closer dialogue between practitioners working in a variety of artistic mediums and reception scholars but has also widened the dissemination possibilities via open-access websites hosted by universities, with dedicated social media accounts that support this work. This paper testifies to this established, but still growing phenomenon with reference to examples of dedicated websites that help promote the work of practitioners using the interview format updated for online presentation (which can include audio-visual elements).

Not surprisingly institutions that specialise in distance learning have invested significant resources in this type of website, but so have an increasing number of other education providers. This paper is based on the work I carried out as a contributing interviewer for The Open University's Journal of Practitioners' Voices in Classical Reception Studies (2014-2018) and as the lead investigator of Massey University's Classical World New Zealand project (2017-present). Inspired by my work as a guest interviewer for Classics Confidential (2013-2016) I wanted to promote the work of practitioners who helped me revise the way I thought about the reception process itself, while adding new and exciting chapters to the long reception history of the Graeco-Roman Classics.

Can the Internet Erase the Abduction of Persephone?

Cristina Salcedo

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This paper explores the profound influence of the Internet on shaping contemporary interpretations of the myth of Persephone. I argue that the Internet moulds a homogeneous

reading of the myth, creating a meme-like replication across various platforms. This interpretation omits the goddess's abduction by Hades and presents a romanticised version of the classical story. The dissemination patterns of the Internet, prioritising popular content and burying less liked/reposted/saved elements, play a crucial role in shaping the dominant narrative.

The impact of the Internet is further explored in its ability to expand creative responses to the Persephone myth. I note that online platforms facilitate diverse and active engagements, such as performances, singing, and multimedia responses. In this context, the Internet becomes a catalyst for more meaningful interactions with the myth, requiring increased user implication for a deeper understanding of the myth in its modern form. This paper also underscores the importance of intermediate receptions and the process of “mediation” in comprehending how the Persephone myth is received and recast in the era of contemporary online culture.

The question of erasure alluded to in the title of this paper is ultimately addressed with a discussion on fact-checking strategies within online platforms and the role of scholars in effectively communicating the abduction in the language of the current generation.

Beyond Slash and Het?:

The Romantic Possibilities of Circe Fanfiction

Amanda Potter

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The range of fanfiction available to read/research on archiveofourown, the online database of choice for many fan writers, can be overwhelming. A PhD student currently starting on research into Harry Potter fiction is presented with 444,973 stories (as at 2 January 2024) and growing, more than a life's work to read, categorise and analyse. And the work in progress nature of this fiction can be particularly troublesome for ancient world scholars, who generally work with a static canon of texts. However, by choosing a manageable and defined sample a researcher can gain useful insights into the interests of modern fan

readers and viewers, including how they position themselves in relation to the ancient world, and intermediate modern texts.

Here I will draw on research into fanfiction including the character of Circe in Madelaine Miller's novel *Circe*, focusing on the romantic possibilities explored by the fan writers. I have argued elsewhere that Madeline Miller's *Song of Achilles* is Achilles/Patroclus slash fiction, in that it focusses on the homoerotic relationship between the two characters that is only subtly hinted at in the main text, the *Iliad*,¹ following in the tradition of the early female writers of Star Trek Kirk/Spock fiction.² In *Circe* the protagonist's relationships are various but all het. However, freed from any commercial constraints, fan writers, who predominantly identify as female, move beyond the canonical relationships included within the mythic/ancient literature tradition (Odysseus/Circe) and the published modern texts (Circe/Glaucus, Circe/Odysseus, Circe/Daedelus, Circe/Telemachus, Circe/Hermes). I argue that fanfiction offers the means for writers and readers to explore radical new possibilities, and propose a new, female-centric alternative mythology.

Visualizing Homer: Remediating *The Iliad* in Eric Shanower's Age of Bronze

Henry Jenkins

USC

Starting in 1999 and continuing down to the present day, comic book creator Eric Shanower has undertaken the project of translating the Trojan Wars into a series of comic books and graphic novels, *Age of Bronze*, which has won extensive critical acclaim and multiple industry awards. Before undertaking *Age of Bronze*, the artist had tackled a series of graphic novels which extend L. Frank Baum's *Land of Oz* for a new generation. Shanower's project was clearly rooted in Homer's *The Iliad* but was inspired by Barbara Tuchman's account of the Trojan Wars in *March of Folly*. As he explained his goals, "I was fascinated with the challenge of reconciling all the different versions and coming up with one long, coherent storyline." Across the books themselves, interviews, and blog posts, Shanower has traced the choices he has made in this project and why. A key goal from the start was to tap the works of historians and archeologists to provide a more authentic

representation of the classical world: “I am placing the characters in an environment which, I hope, looks something close to what the Aegean world may actually have looked like in the middle of the thirteenth century B.C.E.” Homer was a blind bard whose techniques have been central to debates about oral composition, so what is involved in translating that story into a visual medium like comics? Shanower seems especially conscious and reflective about the process of remediating Homer, Shakespeare, and other storytellers, across media, who have written about the Trojan wars. He has never been to Troy but has built a consistent representation of the battlegrounds using photographs taken by a friend and a range of other reference materials. He has constructed distinctive representations of each of the major characters as they would have looked at different life stages, and he has brought replications of a range of historic artifacts to help convey our current understanding of their life world. His densely detailed images are complimented with his experimental comics techniques which actively remediate the text-based descriptions of these events. Shanower’s origins in Oz fandom help us to understand the comics as a form of fan fiction, helping us to root this project in the logics of textual poaching.

PANEL 3. VIRTUAL REALITY AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

The Future of the Classical Past: Teaching of Classics through VR

Antony Makrinos

University College London

Classics already engages with VR in its archaeological research, teaching of ancient history, and public engagement with diverse communities, while companies such as ClassVR are developing ways to immerse users in animated worlds that offer Classics teaching scenarios. This talk will investigate how ancient languages and literature can be taught through Virtual Reality. The talk will examine VR teaching in modules taught at UCL and will refer to the experience of both students and staff.

By working with students as partners, the project presented aims to explore VR in the world of education as an innovative way of teaching Classics (languages and literature). The talk will present a springboard for transdisciplinary knowledge exchange between academics, students, and civil society organisations (museums, libraries, galleries, theatres, etc.) working together on the possibilities of immersive learning about antiquity.

The talk will address the following issues:

- What are the aspirations of Zuckerberg's Meta and Microsoft Mesh for the teaching of Classics and how can Classicists contribute to them?
- How can VR technologies enhance student learning in digital environments that relate to teaching Classics?
- How can we involve students in building secure and learning-efficient environments to advance learning?
- What are the challenges (isolation, security issues, availability of resources, health issues, etc.) and how can they be addressed?
- How can we include successful teaching and learning practices (OBL, Blended Learning, Museum environments...) in VR teaching?
- What resources and spaces do we need to advance our VR teaching?
- How can VR teaching help interdepartmental and external collaborations?

- The talk will invite the audience to share their views on the advantages and disadvantages of VR in teaching and will include a demonstration of how Classicists can use VR apps in their classes.

Virtual Rome - A Digital Model of the Ancient City

Matthew Nicholls

University of Oxford / University of Reading

In this talk Matthew Nicholls will describe his research and creation of a large-scale digital model of ancient Rome, and its use in education, outreach, and research. Its applications have included teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level (for which it has been recognised with various awards), for outreach and public-facing work with broadcasters, publishers, museums, and as part of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) now taken by over 60,000 people around the world. The model provides new ways for students and the public to appreciate Roman architecture, and as visualisation technology continues to evolve new uses may help us imagine ‘the future of the past’.

Digital Animations of Ancient Artefacts for Pleasure and Pedagogy.

The Panoply Vase Animation Project

Sonya Nevin

University of Warsaw

Digital technologies have created new methods and opportunities for viewing and analysing classical antiquities. Since 2009, Sonya Nevin and Steve K Simons have operated as The Panoply Vase Animation Project, making animations from real ancient antiquities (www.panoply.org.uk). These animations are a mode of classical reception; they are informed by scholarship but are nonetheless creative works of art. The dissemination of these artefact animations online fuelled an appetite for their use in the classroom and lecture hall. Panoply responded by increasing the pedagogical aspect of their work, including the provision of further supporting educational materials and guidance on using the animations in teaching contexts. Dr Nevin conducts teacher training on the animations and supporting materials at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, and 2024 will see the publication of her multi-author volume: *Teaching Ancient Greece. Lesson Plans, Vase Animations, and Resources* (Warsaw University Press). The online aspect of

Panoply's work has enabled collaboration with educators all over the world, reflecting the nature of classics as a global phenomenon. This talk will explore the course of the Panoply Vase Animation Project and what has been achieved through creative engagement with antiquity and technology.

PANEL 4. CLASSICAL RECEPTION AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES

Textual Corpora, Databases and Classical Reception Research

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Since its inception (Hardwick 2003), Classical Reception studies have been notoriously and typically characterized by a certain qualitative bias and a predominantly bottom-up approach, driven by case studies (Goldhill, 2017). This hermeneutic practice, crucial to achieve a detailed knowledge of specific classical reception phenomena (especially in literary studies), attributes “exemplary” value – and even greater scope than they deserve – to such studies.

Moreover, given the use of different analytical techniques, these studies tend to offer results that cannot be homologated or aggregated, which would allow for a broader vision of the complex dynamics that govern classical reception processes, that must often be understood as “emergent processes” (Unceta Gómez 2024). To achieve this last objective, it is essential to apply top-down approaches that allow us to handle large-scale materials and reach wide-ranging conclusions. Following this line of thought, the automatic processing of a large volume of textual data can offer interesting results.

In this paper, I will offer a first approach to this possibility and some preliminary conclusions. Using an ad hoc built test corpus, I will apply the textual analysis software Sketch Engine. With it and utilizing some elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1993). My aim is to seek meaningful trends in the use of classical mythological references.

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Webs of Classical Reception Studies

Henry Stead

University of St Andrews

The impact of the social web on Classical Reception Studies has been vast and varied. This paper reflects on the influence of such tech-driven phenomena as mass digitization, database projects, social media, commercial web platforms and blogs on the thriving sub-discipline of classical reception. It discusses several online initiatives that have made their mark on the discipline, and also introduces some more recent initiatives.

PANEL 5. CLASSICAL RECEPTION AND ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Theurgy 2.0:

Antiquity, Esotericism, and the Internet

Carlos Sánchez Pérez

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Many of the tendencies and ideas usually associated with esotericism in the cultural space of the West are indebted to those currents from Antiquity that can be classified under the label of "Platonic Orientalism" (such as Hermeticism or Gnosticism) (Hanegraaff, 2012: 12-16). In recent decades, popular culture has played a fundamental role in the dissemination and transformation of esoteric ideas. Thus, esoteric traditions have been transformed and appear unexpectedly in various media, formats, and genres. In this sense, the emergence of the Internet has profoundly transformed contemporary esotericism and occultism (Davies, 2015; Partridge, 2013: 113-133); Similarly, the currents of Antiquity on which esotericism is built have also been transformed, directly or indirectly, with the emergence of the Internet.

Thus, in this paper I will explore how some esoteric concepts rooted in Antiquity have been transformed by the appearance of the Internet, with a special focus on theurgy: a set of ritual practices mainly associated with Neoplatonism and Hermetism in Antiquity whose ultimate goal is the approach to divinity. As we will see, the very idiosyncrasy of the internet has allowed the transformation of certain theurgical practices: this is the case of some communities that try to manifest imaginary beings (such as "tulpas", "servitors" or "daemons") or contemporary "Chaos magick" communities, with websites like 4chan or Reddit as the new spaces in which these practices are discussed and developed.

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Fictionalizing Ancient Narratives on Wattpad: A Comparative Look at Collaborative Writing

Patricia A. Gwozdz

Universität Potsdam

Today's library of Babel is not situated on the shelves of scholars but is created by social reading and writing in transmedial worlds of storytelling. Its new place is called Wattpad. The Canadian entrepreneurs Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen invented a room of own's one for people all over the world talking indifferent languages (about 500 Mio. stories in 50 languages) and sharing the same sense for collaborative working on popular contemporary narratives which move the world: from queer thinking to class struggle to climate fictions and fan fiction of figures from pop culture to dreams of ancient Gods and Gladiators. The network with the slogan "Where stories live" works very efficiently between different media from book industry to Netflix and connects mass media of youth culture with experiments in style, genre, and history of literature in the broadest sense of the word. Readers and writers come together to talk about creative writing about themes they love, and narratives in art they want to change. For literature and media scholars it is a new Babel where one can observe the habits and the taste of a growing community.

In my talk I would like to develop a media netnography of collaborators on Wattpad who are especially interested in the narratives of the past of the Greek and Roman empire. I will mainly focus on the Spanish and English writing/reading community that develop continuously fictions with historical references to ancient narratives with special interest on popularizing knowledge about historical facts, such as figures, places, cultural habits, and ancient philosophy. I will concentrate on the finished writing project "Emérita Augusta" by Maria Isabel Díaz González who has reached rang 5 on the fiction list genre "romance historico" (out of 242 fictions in this genre, reads 77.313,8.822 comments) and completed her story by an appendix explaining terms and notes on the region the story takes place. Comparing to the account of Lillianna1125 who started her new book series "The Fall of an Empire Trilogy" with more than half a million readers and more than 10.000 comments on different stages of writing the author creates fiction of Greco-Roman

culture seen from the point of view of a little boy from the lower classes. My research interest will not just focus on style of writing and fictionalizing “nerdy” images of Greco-Roman world, but the narratives created by the readers during their reading experience.

PANEL 6. CLASSICAL RECEPTION AND BLOGGING

Mixed Media:

Past and Potential of Social Media for Classics

Tori Lee

Boston University

This talk argues that social media is a neutral but necessary medium for classics: it is so much an integrated part of our cultural conversation that the discipline cannot look towards the future without it, and it brings with it both benefits—opening up new pathways for reception and for interaction with students and wider audiences—and drawbacks—exposing scholars to political and ideological threats and harm. I pose the question, recently discussed among members of the Society for Classical Studies’ Communications Committee, of what purpose social media should serve for organizations, for departments, and for individuals in the field.

I draw on personal experience as Assistant Editor in charge of social media at *Eidolon*, an online journal that ran from 2015-2020 that was designed to be digital first; free and open-access; and explicitly first-person, feminist, and subjective. Because of its digital nature, social media played a major role in the promotion and discussion of articles. This was generative at times—reaching audiences of undergraduates and graduate students and non-specialists—and damaging at others, leading to trolls, name-calling, and even death threats being leveraged against authors and editors.

**Classically Inclined:
Reflections on a Dozen Years of Blogging**

Liz Gloyn

Royal Holloway, University of London

In the paper, I talk about the journey of the Classically Inclined blog alongside my own career development as I have gone from PhD student to mid-career faculty; how the content I've shared has changed over the years; and some general reflections on the place of the blog in the digital world at the current moment. Considering the rapid pace of change in the digital space, what I think about that at present may have changed drastically over the next few months, but that's the Internet for you.