

## Diversity and the Study of the Ancient World

### *Event Report*

This event, organized by Fiona McHardy and Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, was held at the Department of Humanities, University of Roehampton, on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2017. The event was sponsored by the Education Committee of the [Council of University Classical Departments](#) and the [Classics and Social Justice Committee](#) of the Society for Classical Studies. It drew together researchers and academics at various stages of their careers from a range of UK and overseas institutions. Researchers from several fields attended the event; classicists, archaeologists, teacher trainers and psychologists expressed their ideas and shared their practices aiming to the development of interdisciplinary, but common approaches on issues of diversity and inclusivity. Presenting my work as a PhD student and trainer of Classics teachers, I had the opportunity to meet Fiona McHardy and Susan Deacy and start a wonderful collaboration with both of them for the next months as a fellow in Roehampton University. Part of this collaboration is this report.

The programme of the event, with a brief description of each presentation, was as follows:

#### **Session 1**

##### ***Fiona McHardy (University of Roehampton): Inclusivity and Diversity in UK Classics***

This paper reflects upon work that we have been doing at Roehampton to address inclusivity and diversity in Classics, starting with our engagement in an HEA-funded project, 'Reimagining Attainment for All', which was investigating which factors might enhance the success of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, and which could be barriers to their success. As part of this project, we undertook a survey which was designed to gauge the thoughts of our students on the appeal and diversity of our classical curriculum. We then organised an HEA-funded workshop in May 2013 to explore the extent to which UK Classics departments can improve on inclusivity and diversity in their student bodies through changes to the curriculum and teaching methods. In 2016, we re-ran the student survey. This paper summarises our findings and

suggests future actions.

***Matthew Mandich (University of Leicester): Increasing Diversity in Classical Archaeology***

Classical Studies and, in particular, Classical Archaeology, has long lacked the demographic diversity present in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines despite the increasing application of scientific methods and methodologies, supercomputing and mathematics in the broader field of Archaeology. Furthermore, while Classical Archaeology necessarily incorporates the historical study of many diverse regions, peoples and religions, it is primarily taught by white male and female academics - as is especially the case in the UK (and much of Europe) and America. In addition, the organization and subsequent publication of excavations undertaken throughout the Mediterranean basin are often carried out by these same lecturers and professors, while the students working on such projects are largely homogeneous groups derived from their home institutions/countries, or those closely related. Although this issue might be recognized by anyone working in the field, it is frequently ignored, and few tangible steps have been taken to deliberately increase demographic diversity in the fields of Archaeology and Ancient History, despite the multiple benefits it has been shown to provide in other research-oriented disciplines. Thus, drawing upon the example of a successful earlier project at Ostia Antica (RM, Italy) carried out in conjunction with the non-profit, San Francisco-based youth organization, College Track, this paper seeks to highlight and propose a set of (easily-applied) approaches to increase multiculturalism in the fields of Classics and Classical Archaeology.

***Effrosyni Kostara (Hellenic Open University): The transformative power of Classics: teaching for inclusion***

Classical literature is abounding in diachronic and universal problematics. Recently, classicists have made a great progress in studying the role of women and slaves in antiquity, to identify issues of identity and diversity, and thereby to offer new readings of the classical texts. It is the purpose of this paper to bring these developments into use and to apply these themes and ideas in teaching practices within the framework of Adult Education. In particular, Classical texts can prove useful for practices aiming to 'transformative learning', as it has been theorized by Mezirow and developed since then. In the suggested method, previous knowledge is not expected, while the teacher follows the current pedagogical models for provoking critical reflection. By

reading examples of thoughts and dilemmas about war, justice, stereotypes, suppression, and ethics, the modern reader relates to the characters, realizes the value of the texts, and eventually faces his/her own preconceptions. The teacher then needs to bridge the distance between these ideas and the learner's development. Eventually, the modern reader/learner is motivated to reflect upon the agonies of war victims and suppressed members of the society and *transform* these preconceptions toward a fairer confrontation of today. The paper will provide examples of this process with the employment of extracts from Euripides's tragedies. The paper aims to contribute to the way classical texts can become more relevant, apply to our needs, and actively participate in the much-needed reshaping of modern society. It will be beneficial not only for adult educators, e.g. in prison educating systems, and those who seek a way to re-evaluate society and achieve self-development, but also for those who feel excluded and isolated because of their current life conditions.

## **Session 2**

### ***Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz (Hamilton College): Reading Classical Drama in Prisons,***

This brief presentation will focus on my experiences teaching Greek tragedy in prison—a marginalized and highly racialized space in the U.S. My program is a volunteer effort; four Hamilton faculty teach in a men's medium security facility. The prisoners don't receive credit, and we don't meet more than every other week. I was initially reluctant to teach tragedy because I assumed other modern texts would be more relevant to the students, but I have found that tragedy works. This paper will largely be based on what the men in my groups have said. They have interesting responses to the texts that often come from their position in prison. But in addition, they use the plays to think about themselves. As one man said, "The Greek tragedies really did provide me with an opportunity to think very seriously about what makes me tick. Why do I make the decisions that I make? Where is the precedent for this or that?" They think of the course as giving them tools: "a way of doing surgery on ourselves". The non-credit prison program provides a seminar setting in which we are actually leading an examined life. It is challenging, but well worth the effort for teacher and students.

***Trish Thomas (Independent scholar): Classics and Occupational Therapy***

This presentation was intended to promote mental health awareness and to highlight the therapeutic value of teaching and learning Classics outside, as well as within the academic world - reaching out to groups and communities with limited access to adult education. I referred to a number of unexpected opportunities I had experienced in my work as an occupational therapist, in a centre offering community care for a diverse group - most of whom had spent extended periods in psychiatric hospitals. The first of these was a woman inspired by Homer to renew her childhood longing to read Greek. The second - a man who retreated from the community to write Latin sonnets, then returned with English versions to share. In each case, an ancient language seemed to have served as a kind of asylum, and poetry had enabled both individuals to find their voices and build new relationships. Reflecting on these encounters, I encouraged participants to recognise that their teaching is likely to be valued by students challenged by mental health problems. Evidence suggests that this applies not only to ancient languages, but in less formal, social learning sessions for activities such as Roman cooking, which has been offered at universities including Roehampton.

***Nanci Santos (Independent scholar and Our Mythical Childhood Survey contributor): Can video games be a solution?***

Currently, the study of Ancient History and Classics is typically attributed to a group of individuals from the same social strata which many people claim monopolises the studies and often gives the wrong image of those studying the Classical worlds. This paper therefore seeks to offer a solution to this lack of diversity problem by using an ever-growing and ever popular technology: video games. The number of people who play video games has been rising exponentially since the 1970's, whether these be the so-called 'Hardcore gamers' - those who spend hours playing console, pc and arcade games - or whether they are simply 'Casual gamers', who spend much less time playing games and prefer browser, social media and mobile games. This platform provides Classicists with an exciting new way to potentially increase people's interest in Classics and ultimately increase diversity in the studies of Classics due to the diverse nature of the platform. This paper will therefore aim to look at the different types of gamers and how they access video games by examining existing Ancient History related video games. These will include looking at Ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian influenced games, which are some of the most common themes in Ancient History video games. This paper will also look

at the varied levels of success these games have had, look ahead at new technologies being developed, and how these can be used to further reach our goal. Above all, this paper will have at the heart of its focus the people playing the games, how the games are made to suit each group and how they are available to diverse groups of people.

### **Session 3**

#### ***Denise McCoskey (Miami University): Teaching race in the classical world***

Over the past decades, critical race theorists have demonstrated that the treatment of skin color as the primary demarcation of racial categories (e.g., “black” vs. “white”) was an invention of the modern era and can be tied specifically to the rise of scientific theories of race that emerged in the modern 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a discipline, however, classics has yet to fully integrate the conclusions of such research into its teaching and research practices. Indeed, many classical scholars continue to regard skin color and human biology as universal sources of race, even as they note the insignificance of such features in ancient thought. In most cases, this recognition that skin color had limited meaning in antiquity (e.g., Frank Snowden’s work) has led classicists to dismiss the relevance of race altogether, a stance that makes classicists increasingly out of touch with today’s students, while also leaving uninterrogated the historically poisonous misconception that the Greeks and Romans were “white”. My own research and teaching has sought, alternatively, to ask: since skin color was not the basis for race, what features might have been used instead to ground racial ideology and practice in the ancient world, and what we might learn from such differences? In this presentation, I would like to discuss how I approach the “Race and Ethnicity in Antiquity” class at my university, a class that is cross-listed in both Classics and Black World Studies. By treating the course as an opportunity for students to engage critically with a larger history of race and racial ideology, I find my students at the end both empowered to stop accepting race as “natural” and energized to re-examine the source, meaning, and consequences of race both in antiquity and in their own lives.

#### ***Chris Mowat (Newcastle University): Sappho's Legacy: the place of Classics in LGBT+ public history***

2017 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, which (partially) decriminalised (male) homosexuality in the UK. In the half-century that has

passed, the LGBT community has come a long way in terms of marginalisation, although there is, of course, a long way still to go. In a community such as this, the history of identities, and self-identification, is not only important but also of perennial interest, as attested by the sustained publication of popular history books such as Peter Ackroyd's *Queer City: Gay London from the Romans to the Present Day* and Jeffrey Weeks' *Coming Out: The Emergence of LGBT Identities in Britain from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present*. This paper intends to be a conversation about the place of Classics and Ancient History within public history events. Ancient sexuality and its similarity/difference to modern sexuality is a hotly debated topic within our field but, though the debate is led by queer classicists, it is rarely taken to a queer public audience. "Lesbian" may be the most frequent word for homosexual women, but the world of Sappho is seldom a topic in queer public history. The basis of this paper will be my experiences of working with the LGBT History Project NE, a charitable organisation that puts on public events through the North East of England. The majority of the Project is focussed on more recent history, but I think Classics as a subject has a lot to offer in initiatives such as this. Through collaboration with other historical periods, we can really add to the positive feeling that, regardless of contemporary homophobia, diverse sexual and gender identities have always been around: "we're here, we're queer, and we always have been".

***Annie Sharples (University of Warwick): Classics and Physical Disability***

Classics has long been associated with the study of the physical elite. Idealised images of Greek gods, heroes, and athletes have continually permeated and shaped our perceptions of the classical world and the bodies that inhabited it. However, this understanding of the classical body, although rooted in the outputs of Greek culture, is a falsehood. Indeed, given the rudimentary medical knowledge, poor sanitation, and subsequently high disease rates, a large proportion of Greek bodies would have been disabled to some degree. This understanding of the classical body is also rooted in the cultural outputs of the Greeks but, until now, we have been far less willing to discuss it. As a student of Classics with a physical disability, I have long been drawn to this overlooked aspect of Greek culture, and have continually found myself surprised at its neglect. After all, Greek culture is hardly lacking instances of disability with figures like Hephaistos, Oedipus, and Tiresias immediately springing to mind. In part, this neglect has been caused by the anxious reluctance of able-bodied scholars to discuss issues of disability, citing that they feel unable or

unqualified to contribute to the debate. In order to alleviate such anxieties then, the voices of the physically disabled desperately need to be heard within Classical scholarship. For this to happen, however, those who identify as having a physical disability must realise the power that their marginalised position holds for the future enrichment of the discipline. This paper will, therefore, aim to display the following: that Classics and disability are a natural and fruitful combination, that the physically disabled community have a critical role in enabling its future success, and that such an endeavour will positively and detrimentally challenge the misplaced physical elitism that has prevailed within the study of the classical world thus far.

***Susan Deacy (University of Roehampton): Classical myth: bearer of hope for autistic children?***

I am embarking on my second year as a team member of [Our Mythical Childhood...](#) a European Research Council-funded project on classics and children's culture. It is a global project - for which Roehampton is the UK base. My key role for the project is to produce a series of mythological-themed resources for use with autistic children, disseminated through my blog [Mythology and Autism](#). In this paper, I shall focus on an area that is particularly relevant to the current stage of my project, namely the potential of mythology as source of hope. It might be thought that hope is something particularly needed for autistic children - not least the hope of a cure. As I shall discuss, this is not the approach I am taking. Rather than seeking to cure someone of autism - or to separate autism from a person - another approach is to recognize that autism represents a particular way of thinking and a particular kind of experience. The kind of hope that I am seeking the hope for a means for non-autistic people to 'reach' autistic people and, vice versa, for autistic people to engage in a non-autistic world. My paper will discuss my initial attempts to create this gateway via a set of activities associated with Hercules, a hero with especially rich potential in relation to autism.

During the workshop, all the participants had the opportunity to engage in an in-depth discussion concerning the ways in which the study of antiquity could enrich and empower the lives of diverse populations. Video games were extensively discussed in this context. There was a lively discussion, guided in no small part by Helen Slaney, over how far the knowledge gained from playing video games is of a value that is comparable to that gained from studying

ancient texts and physical artefacts. Matt Mordue, a PhD student at Roehampton, shared the example of *NieR: Automata*, which needs to be played multiple times to understand the story, as later events in the narrative reshape earlier events. Matt made fascinating links with Pliny's *Letters*, where later book-units likewise reshape earlier book-units and so re-reading the collection is essential for understanding the collection's narrative. The participants also discussed the role of video games as a medium through which many people - including, as we explored, autistic children - can gain access to classics.

We also discussed how diversity and inclusivity could be achieved through future initiatives in Classics. This would include the organization of similar workshops and conferences, outreach activities, development of innovative pedagogic approaches for the diversification of the curriculum and inclusive approaches to learning and teaching in general. These initiatives would open the field to an even broader audience and would confirm the main conclusion reached at the end of the event, that, although Classics is sometimes perceived as an elitist subject, classical texts and material culture could become an active part of our teaching approaches, aiming to enhance the awareness of modern society concerning issues of race, gender, physical disabilities etc.

The following comments from participants bear out the wide-ranging and varied discussions that took place around how to create a more diverse and inclusive discipline.

According to Matt Mordue, whose comments on the potential of video games to open Classics to a wider audience, are quoted above:

This workshop focused on making Classics more inclusive, which I believe is important to all subjects. Papers were given on disability, race, gender, sexuality. There were papers on unusual topics, such as the use of Classics in prisons, as therapy and on the promotion of Classics via videogames. I greatly enjoyed the wide range of topics. There were some aspects of Classics I learnt which shocked me, even as someone committed to the diversification of Classics. One particularly stand-out moment was learning about the anachronistic and ableist history of Classical scholarship from Annie Sharples' paper on Classics and Physical Disability. This is something which, as far as I'm aware, is barely commented on or discussed in Classics.

The workshop was also a very welcoming environment, it was clear that everyone was genuinely invested in the diversification of Classics. There were students who had travelled to the event from a very long distance, including from Germany and Greece, for example. I thought this was particularly interesting, as different countries tend to have differing attitudes and approaches to making Classics a more inclusive subject.

Costanza Torrebruno, a graduate student at the University of Hamburg, commented:

I decided to take part in the 'Diversity and the Study of the Ancient World' workshop in October 2017 as a recently graduated Classics student from the University of Hamburg with an interest in social justice related issues. I was met with a multifaceted group of professionals and researchers, each with their own approach to the matter.

I had the opportunity to hear different points of view on how to render Classics and the related disciplines more inclusive. There emerged two main aspects of this central question: on one side, the need and the steps made towards the inclusion of diverse groups. On this side, case studies were presented on experiences in teaching different kinds of marginalized groups, such as people on the autism spectrum, students of colour, prisoners, and how to establish a connection that could spark some interest in Classics. The other main aspect that was discussed was how to render the subject itself more diverse, especially how to deal with the 'elite' past - and present - of classical teaching and research. Focus was given to creating a new narrative starting from the recognition of the problematic aspects.

The exchanges included not only the question rounds and the facilitated discussion, but it was also possible to meet and talk with like-minded individuals in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, both during the breaks and after the workshop in a nearby pub.

Chris Mowat's contribution during the event was also amazing including through his tweets, which managed to summon up all the important moments of the event. Please see Chris's storyfied tweets by following the link [here](#).

This event was only the beginning for a series of activities aiming to the enhancement of inclusivity and diversity through the Classics. All presenters

and participants expressed their intention to continue working on similar issues as a way to promote this common goal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank some of the aforementioned participants for their contribution in this report: Professor Fiona McHardy and Professor Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, both for the excellent organization of the event and for their initiative to give the opportunity to people from different disciplines to present their work and ideas; Dr Helen Slaney and Matt Mordue for their important comments concerning the use of video games; Costanza Torrebruno for her interest and beautiful comments concerning the day of the event; Chris Mowat for his enthusiasm to share the ideas and the intensity of this event through his tweets; and Professor Susan Deacy for her inspiring comments on this report and for her great patience until its final submission.