

****Teaching the Classical Reception Revolution****

3. Livy, Latin Pedagogy, Revolutions and Receptions

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For anyone researching or teaching in the field of classical receptions, the question of reception's relationship to the rest of classical studies is often an important preoccupation. Although we are now much less inclined to see it as an interloper, an ill-fitting and even unwanted 'add-on' to the real business of studying antiquity proper, still the very nature of classical reception studies means that they remain – in important and valuable ways – distinctive. Reception's role within (and alongside) a classical studies program is always up for negotiation, as is the extent to which its impact on other aspects of classical studies might be felt. Discussions around reception's contribution to an undergraduate curriculum, or the extent to which reception research can and should inform research in more traditional areas, remain lively and necessary – and these debates underpinned many of the contributions to the *Revolutions and Classics* colloquium. In my own paper, and in this short article, I set out to reflect on my own personal experiences of teaching and researching at the intersection between 'traditional' classical studies and reception, with a particular emphasis on how my reception research has come to inform my approach to pedagogy and learning design more broadly.

Initially, working on a reception PhD topic (on the relationship between cinema and classical epic, in a Classical Studies department) at the same time as gaining early experiences of teaching felt like maintaining a double life. I was fortunate enough to be able to engage in research-led teaching from early on, designing and running successful modules on Film and the Ancient World, so it was not the case that my reception research had nothing to do with my teaching. But at the same time, I was also (again very fortunately) contributing to a wide range of mainstream modules, from elementary Latin to Roman history to visual culture, in which my 'other life' in reception scholarship was often irrelevant. Indeed, it sometimes felt like that 'other life' had to be positively suppressed. Throughout my postgraduate days, the notion that I would only be able to secure an academic post in classical studies if I had a strong profile of teaching traditional classics – especially, in my case, the languages – became something of a mantra, and I was glad, at the time, to have received that advice. When I was lucky enough to gain temporary posts, and then a permanent one, it seemed fairly clear that I was only able to do so because of my proven track-record in all aspects of teaching. And yet, at the same time, it was self-evident that my academic identity was as a reception specialist, and my research and teaching expertise in that area also undoubtedly helped my job prospects.

This apparent need to maintain a double life represented a challenge, in terms of how I focused my energies, planned my activities, and maintained a sense of authenticity and purpose. Of course, these deep-seated challenges are hardly unique to the reception PhD or ECR, but they seem to be particularly keenly felt in such quarters, and their implications are certainly not receding, in an increasingly competitive job market. There are urgent debates to be had over what we can reasonably expect reception-focused PhD students to acquire, in terms of broader teaching experience, and over the special nature of the contribution that they can make. Embarking on a research and teaching career today, the reception specialist still needs to argue quite hard for what their expertise can offer the discipline, so that it is not seen (and dismissed) as mere propaganda for (or distraction from) 'real' classics. Through CUCD, and the activities of the Classical Reception Studies Network, these debates and discussions should remain active and visible.

From my own perspective, though - now as a mid-career academic with the relative security of a permanent position and experience of a wide range of teaching in a number of different institutions - I've been reflecting on how my journey along the interface of classics and reception has progressed. Now, instead of seeing it as a somewhat shady double life, I've developed a sense of a more holistic academic identity, one in which both my teaching and research set out to meaningfully integrate these two elements, rather than continually hopping between them. The most obvious way in which this has played out has been in my teaching of Latin language and literature. To begin with, I found myself combining my interests in reception in children's literature, and in receptions of Pompeii, into a case-study of the Cambridge Latin Course (which famously uses Pompeii as the setting for its first book). This study of pedagogical history began as an attempt to understand an important element of our discipline's history - specifically the ways in which the CLC democratised access to classics - but it soon prompted me to reflect more on the way in which we teach Latin today.

Soon after, upon joining the Open University in 2011, I was presented with a fantastic opportunity to turn those reflections into action. Over the past few years, I've been chair of the module team working on a new level 2 undergraduate module, *Classical Latin: the language of ancient Rome*. Working closely with an excellent team of colleagues, we developed a 60 credit module which was presented to its first cohort of students in 2015. Our experiences in designing and delivering the module touch on a number of the issues that were pertinent to *Revolutions and Classics* themes, and to my discussion above: in particular, it gave us the opportunity to think about how reception might intersect with and inform the teaching of classical languages, and to utilise some of the benefits that a post-classical perspective might bring. Although we would hardly claim that our module amounted to a revolution in Latin pedagogy, it certainly benefitted from a fresh approach. We were lucky enough to be able to develop bespoke teaching materials, based on an unpublished course written by the Scottish Classics Group. Although specifically aimed at the OU's distance learners, our textbooks offer a supportive and intuitive way of getting students from beginners' level to a good level of reading competence over the course of an academic year, and were well supported by a range of online interactive resources (some of which are available as [open access](#) taster materials) and [audio](#) podcasts.

Particularly distinctive, though, is the way the module blends language learning with in-depth study of Latin literature in translation, and cultural and historical contexts. Taking a cue from

the language sections, which include adapted versions of Livy as texts for translation, the module uses the theme of exemplarity – in a wide range of authors, including Livy, Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Suetonius, and Ovid – to introduce students to Augustan culture. (A sample of a unit on Virgil is also free to access [online](#).) The amount of time spent on each aspect of the module is roughly equal; crucially, though, we were concerned to make sure that students did not regard the language study as a separate entity, but rather as part of an integrated whole. So, when reading texts in translation, students are encouraged to engage with key Latin words – such as *furor* in the *Aeneid* – and there is a strong thread, both in the core teaching and the assessment, which requires students to reflect on the process of translation, and the different interpretive effects of different choices. Towards the end of the module, for example, students read a variety of different translations of an episode from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and are encouraged to participate in an online forum where they can discuss the different versions. More generally, students are introduced to key principles of the reception of texts through discussions of, for example, poetry as a performance medium, both in the ancient and modern worlds. These emphases are, again, hardly unique to the OU’s approach, but explicitly connecting language work with a detailed study of literature and culture that is particularly alert to reading and reception practices is not one regularly followed by other beginners’ modules, to the best of my knowledge. So far, it has seemed to be a successful strategy. At the end of the module’s first year, many students commented favourably on the balance and integration between the linguistic and literature/culture elements; in the end-of-module survey, over 95% of respondents agreed that ‘The teaching materials and learning activities were well integrated and helped me to learn’, and the module’s overall satisfaction rating was nearly 94%, above the Faculty’s average.

In these ways, then, what might be called a reception ‘world-view’ permeates the module. To a somewhat lesser extent, we also found ways of integrating modern receptions of the texts under study, the aim always being to ensure that they contributed meaningfully to the core material, rather than functioning simply as a kind of ‘add on’. To take one example, our module materials contain a number of images of paintings by the 18th century artist Jacques-Louis David, such as his *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799) and his *Oath of the Horatii* (1784). These obviously provide useful and eye-catching illustrations to many of the stories from early Rome that our students are reading, but where space allowed, we also lead students through discussion of the ways in which the paintings might help to elucidate or shed new light on the Augustan narratives they were reading. In fact – and in keeping with the colloquium’s theme of ‘revolutions’ – we tended to find that a modern image could be most helpful when discussing narratives with a particularly powerful political subtext, since it provided a useful cue for exploring the complexity of the ancient text. So, David’s *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) plays a small but significant role in the second block of the module, when students read (in translation) Livy’s account of the sons of Brutus and their role in the plot to restore the monarchy (2.3-5). The main function of this passage is to present Brutus as an *exemplum* of self-sacrifice for the cause of the Roman Republic, placing the state above his family. It is not difficult to detect the emotional cost of this self-sacrifice in Livy’s account, as he recounts how ‘the gaze of everyone was directed to the expression on Brutus’ face, which revealed his natural feelings as a father as the state’s retribution was administered’ (2.5, trans. Warrior); but David’s painting is a useful tool for bringing these conflicts to the fore. It vividly illustrates Brutus’ grim and steadfast commitment to his actions, foregrounded yet in the shadows, while at the same time the obvious grief of his wife and daughters is literally in the

spotlight. The potency of the image is then underlined by pointing out to students that the painting was exhibited in 1789, the year of the French Revolution. Thus, and with a light touch, a classical reception enables students to gain a brief insight into how questions of revolution, self-sacrifice and so on could be transplanted from the Augustan context to a more recent one too, extending their appreciation of the significance of the ancient story.

Another artistic reception, Poussin's *The Rape of the Sabines* (1637-8) plays a similar role. By encouraging students to take the time to look closely at the painting, and to compare its depiction of the event with the narratives that they have just read (again in translation) in Livy and Ovid, another angle on the practice of close reading is provided. Although the ability to analyse visual material in depth is not one of the module's core learning objectives, nevertheless it is a valuable illustration of the many different ways in which one Roman myth can be depicted. So, for example, we draw attention to the apparent lack of fear and violence in Poussin's scene, aligning it more with Livy's account of the seizure as a necessary stage in Roman history. Focusing on Romulus' commanding pose, perhaps recalling the Prima Porta Augustus, opens up discussion about the different interpretations of Romulus' leadership qualities, and indeed the extent to which Augustus himself appropriated his status as a founder of Rome.

These are just two brief examples of how modern receptions of ancient narratives play a small but significant role in the module. They also indicate how the intersections between language, literature, and reception could be made particularly meaningful when dealing with complex political situations – again, the 'revolutions' of our colloquium's theme. Indeed, any module that focuses primarily on the Augustan era must confront the issue of a 'Roman revolution' – but a module that is already trying to teach a lot of linguistic content, alongside cultural and literary material, does not necessarily have the time to delve deeply into complex historical and political contexts. This, then, is where the module's theme of exemplarity – and its use of reception – played another helpful role. By encompassing not only the establishment of the principate, but also – through the use of Livy Books 1 and 2 – the establishment of the republic, we found many opportunities to draw attention to the similarities and parallels between those two historical changes. Most importantly, we draw attention to the ways in which the Romans *themselves* saw them as parallel, exemplary events – Augustus' 'refounding' of Rome as a reception and refraction of the city's first foundations. Key units take the time to think about how the actions of the first Brutus were paralleled and indeed actively appropriated by the second one, for example. Extending beyond antiquity, we see how, just as the overthrow of a tyrant could be exemplary for the Romans, so too it became a powerful exemplar for the proponents of the French Revolution, like David. Through these echoes and recurrences of revolutionary motifs, and their reverberation down the centuries, we found a more economic, concise way of conveying the importance of these events.

The early success of this module, then, has been gratifying on its own terms. It has demonstrated that even reluctant language learners can make significant progress, partly through providing them with good quality learning materials and support, but also, we feel, by taking the time to demonstrate why learning Latin is valuable and, crucially, relevant to the rest of their Classical Studies endeavours. It has also helped keen linguists to gain a deeper sense of the significance of their language, by locating it firmly alongside the culture to which it belongs. And while an eye on reception is by no means the only strategy that has proved

effective here, it has nevertheless been central to the pedagogical principles of the module – and for me, personally, it has been a welcome way of bringing those different parts of my academic identity together.

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