The Official Opening

At 6.30 on 17th December 2007, Professor Mike Edwards, Alumnus of RHUL Classics and Director of the Institute of Classical Studies, led 100 guests in the celebration of the opening of the Centre.

Mike Edwards with Sara Monoson, Chair of the Classics Department, Northwestern University

Maureen Almond (Centre's Poet), Edith Hall (Director), Nick Lowe (Senior Research Associate), Mike Edwards (Honorary Research Fellow), Ahuvia Kahane and Richard Alston (Directors) at the opening of the CRGR, 17th December 2007

Conference:

Classics and the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill

The Centre was launched at its inaugural conference, *Imagining Slavery: Celebrating Abolition of the Slave Trade*. This marks the 200th anniversary the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill by exploring ancient representations of slavery as they have been

reconfigured over the last 250 years. The conference was made possible by the generosity of Professor Marianne McDonald, The Gilbert Murray Trust, the SPHS, the CA, and the CRSN. We are very grateful to all of them.

The Conference took place at Royal Holloway on the 17th December and the British Library on the 18th. See the finalised conference programme.

Conference Report

Ahuvia Kahane and Patrice Rankine get serious

Despite some exasperating technical hitches (too little coffee, too much traffic, keen delegates kept away by broken bones and influenza), the winter sun shone on our conference and the glow of supermarket claret cast a rosy hue over our evenings in the Egham dormitory kitchen.

Brycchan Carey, author of *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (2005), kicked the conference off to a rousing start with his masterly opening address, in which he offered a trenchant overview of the uses to which ancient Greece and Rome and their literature were put by **British abolitionists**, from Thomas Day to Hannah Moore and Edward Rushton. His stirring performance of abolitionist poetry set the mood for the entire proceedings.

Listening to Greg Thalmann (left to right): Steve Hodkinson, William Fitzgerald, Lydia Langerwerf, Brycchan Carey, Laura Proffitt

The **panel on the representation of slavery in ancient Greece** was begun by Greg Thalmann, author of the seminal *The Swineherd and the Bow: Representations of Class in the Odyssey* (1998). In a fascinating commentary on a variety of Athenian vase-paintings, he focussed on some neglected dimensions of the visualisation of slaves in art, especially the differentials in size and posture between slave and free figures. This paper was complemented in fascinating ways by Kelly Joss's analysis of the contradictions inherent in the visual representation of slaves -- they are both attractive and repellent, for example. We look forward to her book on the Greek representation of slaves and the psychology of slavery.

CRGR Co-Director Ahuvia Kahane, whose *Diachronic Dialogues: Continuity and Authority in Homer and the Homeric Tradition* was published in 2005, developed his interest in the phemonology of time in a pyrotechnic reappraisal of theoretical models of the past and the role played by slavery within them. He offered a radical new interpretation of Marx's configuration of the culture of classical Greece as the 'childhood' of Europe. Leanne Hunnings, the conference's instigator and chief organiser, argued that the execution of the slave girls in *Odyssey* 22 can be seen as a powerful paradigmatic exemplum for slave owners throughout and beyond antiquity, which has performed a quasi-didactic social function with precriptive force.

Two papers on Greek drama offered different theoretical approaches to the problems of using slavery in staged fictions in relation to 'real-world' concerns. Boris Nikolsky came from Moscow to argue subtly that in Euripides' *Cyclops* the institution of slavery offers a series of discursive opportunities for discussing delevlopments in political theory more widely; Laura Proffitt drew on the Bakhtinian model of the polyphonic text and feminist theory to show how Menander's Habrotonon has been severely misread by male critics who come to her with judgemental preconceptions of appropriate conduct in both slaves and women.

Leanne Hunnings (conference instigator and organiser) delivers her paper on the execution of Odysseus' slave women, chaired by Edith Hall

A lively **panel on the representation of slaves in ancient Rome** was guaranteed by William Fitzgerald's brilliant reading of the slave addressee Lygdamus in Propertius 3.6. Professor Fitzgerald's *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (2000) is a foundational work on slaves in Roman poetry, but this discussion took the analysis of subject/object relations and the difficulties of untangling them in the elaborate and complex genre of Roman elegy further than ever before. Deborah Kamen's dominant research has been conducted in the area of Athenian social life, but her paper on erotic relationships between slaves and masters in Martial put some difficult questions about the possibility of recovering slave agency from ancient sources. This panel was summed up in a sparkling response from Sandra Joshel, who cogently argued for the importance of investigating historical documents recording barbaric exploitation in a world that is threatened by new forms of compulsion and violence. We look forward eagerly to the publication of her *Slavery in the Roman World* with CUP.

On day 2 of the conference we minibussed into the luxurious Conference Suite that the British Library had generously allowed us free of charge, and despite traffic problems managed to start only an hour later than scheduled.

Edith Hall with some of the speakers and delegates at the British Library on 18th December

The first panel of day 2 of the conference, chaired by CRGR Honorary Research Fellow Lorna Hardwick, was focussed on the **reception of Greece and Rome in discussions of slavery since the 17th century**. It opened with CRGR Co-Director Richard Alston's dicussion of the good master in Pliny and in Hobbes, a paper whose philosophical range covered the entire history of thinking about slavery in Europe.

Richard Alston speaks at the British Library

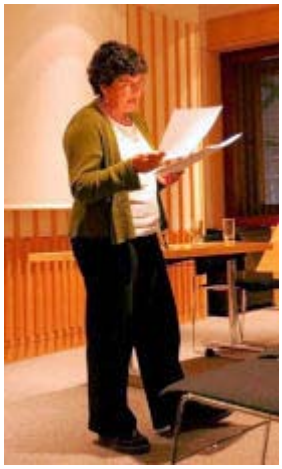
Stephen Hodkinson, Director of the Institute for the Study of Slavery in Nottingham, offered an in-depth analysis of the particular role played by Spartan helots in abolitionist controversies, drawing on sermons, pamplets, archived papers and parliamentary debates that have been previously overlooked. The documentary richness of his paper was maintained in John Hilton's vivid analysis of allusions to Rome in debates about slavery at the Cape in South Africa, where the flourishing slave trade has too often been neglected in discussions that have focussed on the transatlantic trade.

Edith Hall was the third Drector of the CRGR to speak, and her paper used early 19th-century poetic and theatrical sources to show how the campaign for abolotion of the trade in slaves and subsequently of slavery provided a conceptual platform on which the Chartists could build in the campaign for universal male suffrage in the late 1830s and 1640s. Emily Greenwood, who has written several articles on the Caribbean and Postcolonial reception of Classics, delivered a riveting study of the poetry of Phyllis Wheatley (a former slave), and in the ways that it has been appropriated and often denigrated since the 18th century. In the final paper on this panel, Lydia Langerwerf read C.L.R. James' picture of Toussaint and the slave rebellion in Haiti against narrative models in ancient authors including Pausanias and Aristotle.

Professor Patrice Rankine (Purdue University) delivers the keynote lecture on Classics and Slavery in the 20th century at the British Library, 18th December 2007

The keynote speaker in the fourth and final panel, **The North American Experience**, was Patrice Rankine, the author of *Ulysses in Black* (2006), a

pioneering study of Ralph Waldo Ellison's epic novel *Invisible Man*. He proposed a new reading of the *Odyssey* that refracts the experiences of its aristocratic hero through a prism conditioned by theoretical discussions by Orlando Patterson and others of the irreducible elements of slavery, including total domination of one individual by another. Margaret Malamud, whose book *New Romes for a New World: Ancient Rome and Imperial America* is nearing publication, dazzled speakers with her array of arguments from antiquity used on both sides during the American Civil War.



Professor Margaret Malamud

Justine McConnell's analysis of Jon Amiel's movie *Sommersby*, meanwhile, showed how transplanting the plot of the *Odyssey* to reconstruction Tennessee illuminates the depiction of the ideal slaves Eumaeus and Eurycleia as well as focussing the reader/viewer on the economic issues at stake in a slave society.

Our delegate representing the associated institution at **Northwestern University**, their Classical Traditions Initiative (see 'Associates' webpage) was Professor Sara Monoson, a political theorist as well as a classicist. She rounded up the day's discussions -- which had returned time and again to the theoretical defence of slavery in Aristotle's *Politics*, with a pellucid explosion of how we need to understand Aristotle's empirical method if we are to make sense of his arguments and of their reception in abolitionist controversy.

We are all taking a rest, but will turn to the issue of the conference proceedings and their publication - both electronically and in a volume - in early 2008.

Conference Poem

The Centre's Affiliated Poet Maureen Almond, who will be attending the launch party, has written us a sonnet inspired by the conference's theme and the month in which it is being held:

Saturnalia Lip Service

And yet despite the freedom of December,
this so-called time when I can speak my mind,
I'm still a thing possessed. The daily grind's
relentless in this house. I can't remember

how it felt to lie alone. I sometimes pray
for death to come along and set me free.

Lie back and think of empire that's the key
and let your lord and master have his way.
Aristotle had it right he always said
that some are born to serve and some to rule.
Now go and pour the wine and warm the bed,
you've had your say you stubborn little mule.
Be thankful that you're mine, and get well fed.
You might have ended up with someone cruel.

Germaine Greer Lecture

4th February 2008

Under the aegis of the Classics Department, Germaine Greer delivered a paper as the 2008 Dabis Lecturer, 'Sappho: myth or history' at 5.30 pm, in the Windsor Building.

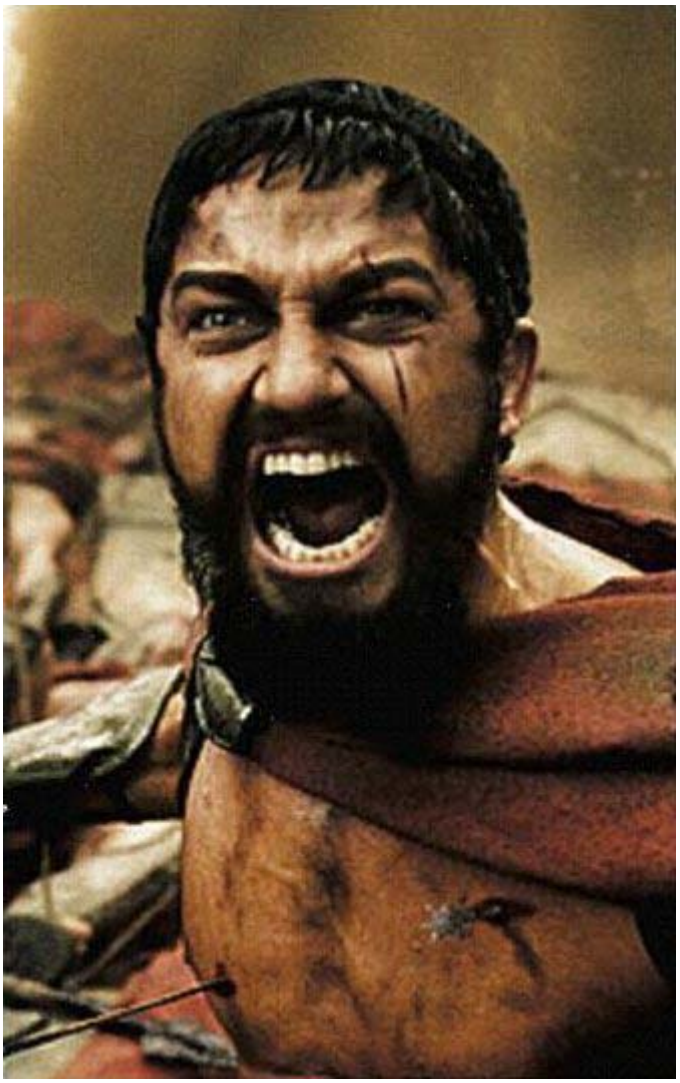
Zack Snyder's *300*

International Video-Conference

(organised jointly with HARC)

Wed 7th May 2008, 5.00 pm

RHUL meets New York Uni face-to-face



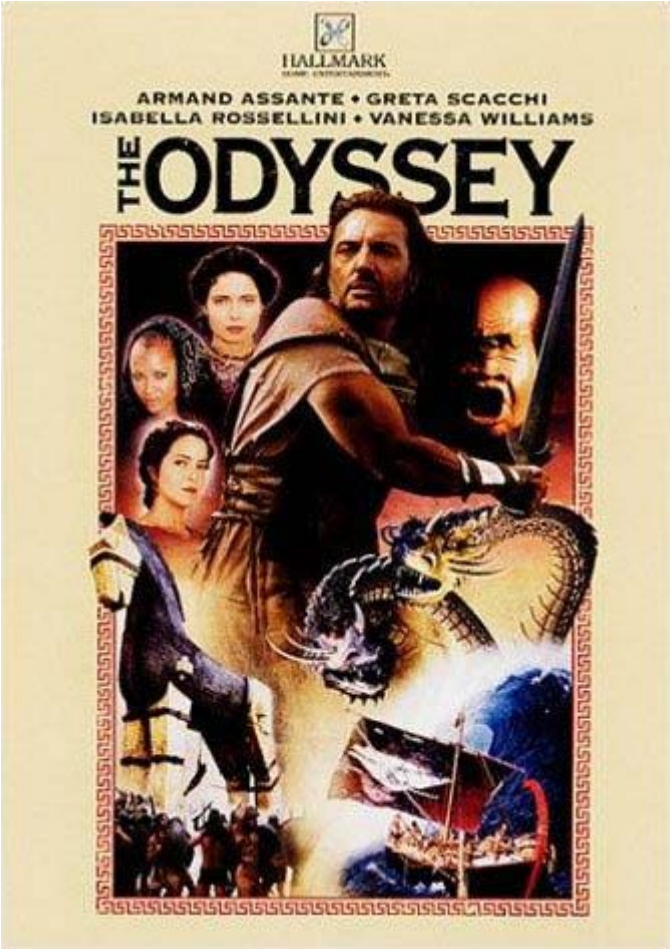
The *Odyssey* from Homer to Hollywood

International Video-Conference

(organised jointly with HARC)

Wed 14th May 2008, 5.00 pm

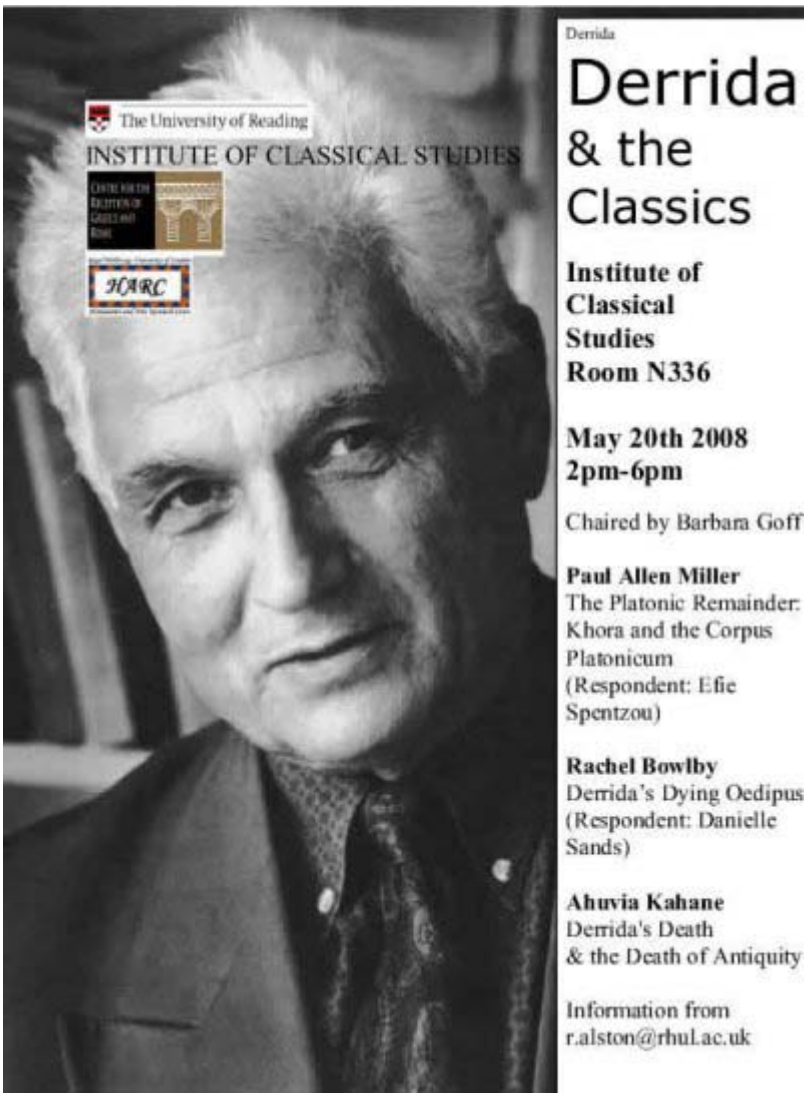
RHUL meets Kentucky Classics face-to-face



Derrida and the Classics

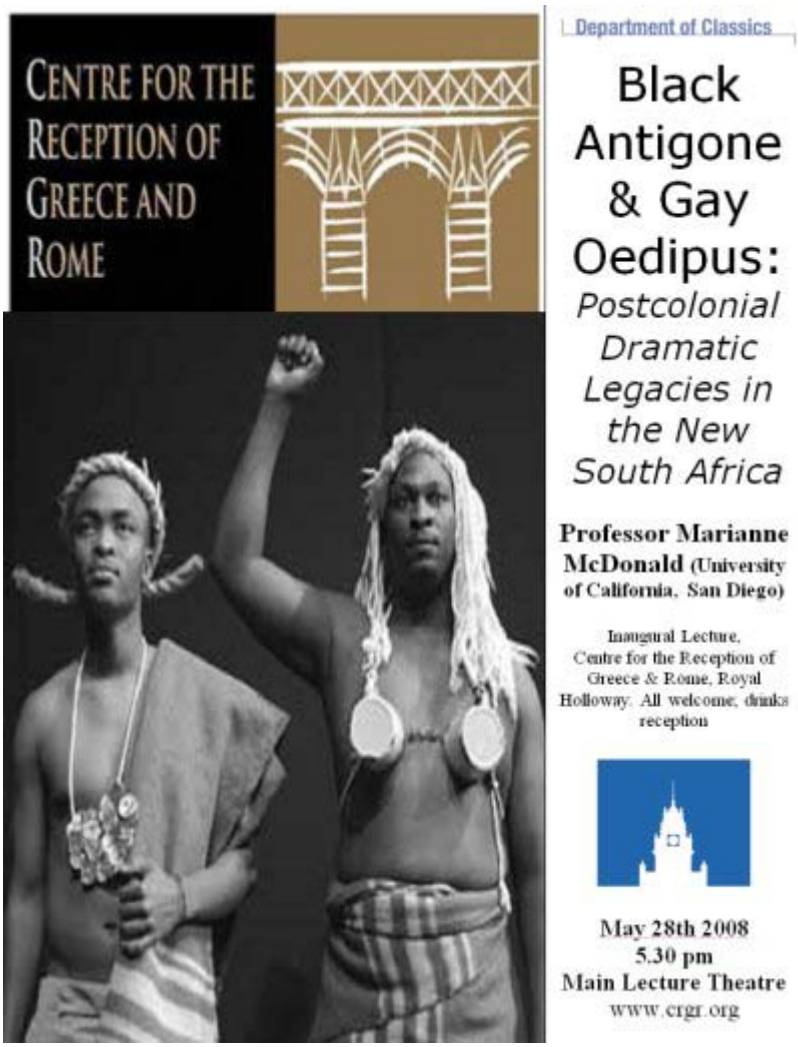
May 20th 2008

Colloquium co-sponsored by the Institute of Classical Studies, Centre for the Reception of Greece and Rome (RHUL), The Humanities and Arts Research Centre (RHUL), and Classics Department, University of Reading.



CRGR Inaugural Lecture

May 28th 2008, 5.30 pm



The Inaugural CRGR lecture was delivered by Professor Marianne McDonald, Professor of Classics and Theatre at the University of California, San Diego. See the full text of Marianne McDonald's lecture.

Professor McDonald after delivering the inaugural lecture with CRGR PhD student Charlie MacDougall

Black Antigone & Gay Oedipus: Postcolonial Dramatic Legacies in the New South Africa

Colonizers have used many tools to subdue the natives of the countries they occupied, and one of the most powerful was the 'civilizing' culture they imposed. The natives would often turn these tools into weapons to oppose their occupiers by beating their "masters" at their own games, and reassert their own rights and values. This applied to the classics also, and Greek tragedy in particular.

I take three examples from South Africa: a black Antigone, Athol Fugard's 1973 *The Island* (devised with Winston Ntshona and John Kani), and two gay Oedipus plays, Fugard's 2004 *Exits and Entrances*, and Ashraf Johaardien's *Happy Endings are Extra* (2006). In the first play, black prisoners enact *Antigone* in prison and make an impassioned plea for freedom. It may have helped influence the demise of apartheid, leading to the first free election in the new Republic of South Africa in 1994. The second play features Fugard as a young apprentice to the great South African actor André Huguenet, who introduced great European theatre to South Africa, a county that was not ready for it, or for an openly gay actor. There are allusions to the Oedipus story, arguably Huguenet's greatest role, ending with his exit in despair. Enter Fugard.

Just as Huguenet was the old actor, replaced by the young Fugard whose writings represented the new South Africa, perhaps now, since Fugard is seventy-five, Johaardien represents the new type of theatre that will replace his. Each pass on the torch of vital South African theatre that speaks to the world. The final play takes place in a society that is finally more accepting to gays. South Africa legalized gay marriages with the Civil Union Act of 2006, the first country in Africa to do so. This

play traces the story of a gay relationship that turns out to be disastrous when the partners turn out to be father and son. Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* helped shape these modern plays that place the ancient myth in its new historical and cultural context. Myth and Greek tragedy are ready to help us define and potentially solve the problems we face today.