Classics and the new faces of feminism

Sandpit *Libellus*

Abstracts, notes, questions and provocations

Frida Kahlo, *My Dress Hangs There*, 1933, oil and collage on masonite, Private Collection
Barbara Gold, Hamilton College, USA

Twenty-two Years of Feminist Theory and the Classics: Now What?

I want to talk about what has been going on not just in the past 22 years but since the founding of the Women’s Classical Caucus 40 years ago, then look to the present and the future. What are we doing now and what is still missing? How and why did we get to where we are today, where we not only accept gender, sexuality, narrative theory and intertextuality as inseparable from our reading of texts but are (most of us) so informed by such approaches that we cannot conceive of a scholarly analysis or pedagogy that does not engage with one or more theoretical approaches? How did we reach a place where we no longer have to explain (to most people at least) that “sex,” “gender” and “sexuality” are socially-constructed categories, that they are performative and evolving, and that these elusive categories need to be seen in a grid intersecting with other constructed categories like class or race (an often elided or ignored category)?

Where do we go from here? What collaborations among feminist classicists in North America, Europe, Australia, South America and elsewhere lie ahead? Thanks to the work of EuGeStA and its founder, Jacqueline Fabre-Serris (along with Judy Hallett, who helped to found the journal), collaborations have started among colleges and universities in at least seven countries with conferences, journal issues and other venues for interactions. The triennial meetings of “Feminism and Classics” continue to attract classicists (mostly, but not entirely, women) from many countries, both young and older; another is planned for Seattle, Washington in three years time. In a piece I wrote on FCII (Princeton 1997), I described the conference as a “laboratory for working feminist/classicists, not only in the topics it covered but in the way that the participants, speakers, and audience interacted (“Feminism and Classics: Framing the Research Agenda,” Brief Mention, American Journal of Philology, 118.2 [Summer 1997] 328-32); this continues to be the case and I hope will be the case here today.

What could we be doing more of and better? More collaborations among feminist classicists in many countries; more work on race (still very far behind); more intense discussion of what categories like “feminist theory,” “sexuality,” “queer theory” mean and do; getting more young scholars involved in this work; offering more courses on these topics, especially in the major PhD-granting/post-graduate departments; promoting greater awareness of activism outside our classrooms and research; spreading out papers focused on gender and sexuality beyond the obvious silos at meetings. I am very eager to hear what our younger colleagues are going to say today – why are they doing Classics? how do their interests and approaches differ from what classicists like Nancy Rabinowitz and I have done and do now?
Nancy Rabinowitz, Hamilton College

22 years of feminist theory and the classics

I want to be both retrospective (thanks for the recognition of FTC) and prospective in my brief talk here, noting where we have come from and where I hope we will continue to go.

The passion and drive that we felt in our early days as scholars was tied to an active women’s movement. Moreover, some of us who defined ourselves as feminists felt a conflict. Since Classics was exactly what the liberation movements were struggling against, we who were antiracist feminists studying the ancient world had our work cut out for us. There were many approaches taken, and some are represented in Feminist Theory and the Classics.

What about now? On the political side, there is still a lot to do. But there is a less coherent feminist political movement in the face of these continuing problems. In my conclusion, I will talk briefly about research and teaching as ways of addressing problems, in addition to traditional political activism.
Ika Willis, University of Wollongong

22 years of feminist theory and the classics: No, Now

In her 2010 book *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed devotes a chapter to the figure of the ‘feminist killjoy’, saying ‘Feminists might kill joy simply by finding the objects that promise happiness not so promising’ (65), and ending the chapter with the words: ‘There can even be joy in killing joy’ (87).

One of the great feminist killjoys in Classics is Amy Richlin, the author of ‘Reading Ovid’s Rapes’, which came out in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* in 1992, the year before *Feminist Theory and the Classics* (I will talk more about the later volume at the sandpit). I reread Richlin’s essay a couple of months ago for the first time since I was an undergraduate in 1997. Rereading it, I saw the history of my own feminist work in academia, from an undergraduate dissertation on gender in Ovid which besottedly repeated Richlin’s readings – often using the same passages in the same poems – to the journal article I submitted last month, on anachronism in *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Rereading it, I’ve also been provoked to try and make some connections between two words that I’ve been thinking about for the past few years: the word now and the word no.

In 1997, Richlin’s essay gave me permission to make connections between classical texts and my own experience, my own now. It staged such a connection in its opening epigraphs, juxtaposing a line from Ovid’s retelling of the story of Daphne with a quote from Brian De Palma: ‘I don’t particularly want to chop up women but it seems to work’ (158). It also gave me permission to find the promise of happiness in Ovid not so promising, and to find joy in watching Richlin kill the joy that so many scholars have found in Ovid’s cleverness: ‘Like an audience watching a magician saw a lady in half, they have stared to see how it was done. I would like to draw attention to the lady’ (158). Near the end of her essay, Richlin writes ‘How ephemeral, how dry this essay is compared with Ovid’s poetry!’ (178) But how exciting, how energizing, how powerful in its refusal, compared with Ovid’s tedious, repetitive insistence on the fuckability of women.

My strongest memory of the article was the conclusion, where Richlin called for a moratorium on Ovid: saying we should simply stop reading him. It turned out on rereading that this doesn’t appear in the book; what I was remembering was that Richlin’s article gave me permission to say no to Ovid, as well as permission to situate my reading now.

No and now are both powerful words for both feminists and classicists. Because of their resistive power, there are powerful forces making these words unavailable to us as feminists, as classicists. Women, we know, are really never supposed to say no to anyone; classicists look unsophisticated, joyless, if we say no to Ovid. ‘Now’ works a little differently.

In 1997, I was told by my dissertation supervisor that my understanding of feminism was dated. In 1998, *Time* declared feminism dead for the 119th time since 1969 (Baumgardner & Richards 2000: 93). In 1968, Shulamith Firestone wrote that ‘To be called a feminist has become an insult, so much so that a young woman intellectual, often radical in every other area, will deny vehemently that she is a feminist, will be ashamed to identify in any way with the early women’s movement’. Consigning feminism to the past has been one of the most consistently effective anti-feminist tactics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

As classicists, though, we know how to retrieve powerful ideas from the past: how to rescue them, as Walter Benjamin puts it in ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’. Maybe it’s time to start treating *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, and *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, as classics: powerful texts, in dialogue with us, resources for thought and action in the here and now.
Jocelyn Cole, Royal Holloway, University of London

Classics and feminisms in philosophy & science: Encounters in the Thirdspace

As feminist philosophers and psychoanalysts have sought to move away from the polarising categories of “self” and “other”, many, such as Braidotti, Irigaray, and Kristeva, have drawn upon the spatial theory of Lefebvre and De Certeau to theorise a *thirding*, an intersubjective space, the marginal and interstitial place of change through encounter. As embodied subjects we create and use these third spaces as we move through the process of ‘becoming’ (whether that is the process of becoming woman, minority, animal or cyborg).

However, this *thirdspace* remains characterised as a separate, marginal space, the peripheral home of the “other”. It is only by becoming-minoritarian that we gain access to *thirdspace*, as we align our “self” with the “other”. They are momentary, arising at the moment of encounter and ending nearly as abruptly.

In contrast I would like to argue that the *thirdspace* permeates all space, providing the framework within which all intersubjective interactions can occur. This changes the nature of *thirdspace* from momentary to continuous. This state of connectedness might give rise to constructive subject-subject interaction alongside more traditionally recognised destructive subject-object relationships. As we are embodied subjects these both types of encounter are physical as well as psychological, and can occur with, within and outside of the body.

In order to explore the further possibilities of the creative web of *thirdspace* I shall be looking at ideas from feminist theory (Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic), alongside those from psychoanalytical practice (Jessica Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity), post-colonial theory (Inge Boer) and spatial theory (Edward Soja’s *Thirdspace*).

Throughout my reading of Statius’ *Thebaid* I have seen how interstitial spaces of encounter, such as a sacred grove, the body of a river god, or the marital bedroom, form the backbone of the flow of the narrative. Even within the grand telos of epic it seems that it is within the small spaces, created through and forming the dialogue between individuals, that crucial decisions are made, identities formed and lives created and lost.

Taking hold of the critical theory surrounding *thirdspace* may enable new approaches to predefined areas of study within epic, such as the epic hero or epic women. By encouraging us to think around the interactions between characters it could be possible to break down the binaries that construct our understanding of the genre, opening out epic to new readings and new interpretations.

The self is not diluted by or through a state of connectedness with the other, on the contrary it is only through intersubjective connection that the self can grow, can continue in its process of becoming.

Katie Fleming, Queen Mary, University of London

Classics and feminisms in philosophy & science: Bracha Ettinger

Extract from: ‘Seduction into Reading: Bracha L. Ettinger’s The Matrixial Borderspace’ by Noreen Giffney, Anne Mulhall and Michael O’Rourke, Studies in the Maternal, 1 (2) 2009, www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk

Bracha L. Ettinger, born in Tel Aviv, is a contemporary artist (mainly producing drawings and paintings), a senior clinical psychologist, and a practicing psychoanalyst, who interweaves and enmeshes all three domains by practising what she calls ‘matrixial painting’, a process which challenges the phallic structuration of the Symbolic. Her visual poiesis uncovers the complicities between the twin erasures of sexual difference and Jewish difference and this disclosure (rather than foreclosure) of the feminine and the Jew in her writing/painting brings about a wholesale reconfiguration of both Western aesthetics and of the (putatively masculine) gaze. Her matrixial artworks have been exhibited extensively in major museums of contemporary art, including The Drawing Center in New York (2001) and most recently in exhibitions at The Freud Museum in London curated by Griselda Pollock (2009) and The Finnish Art Academy in Helsinki (2009). Bracha’s oeuvre, or, better, her oeuvre, a corpus which emphasises an open gravitational mobility, includes a number of books and essays on topics relating to psychoanalysis, philosophy, visual culture, feminism and ethics. Her writing extends and challenges the work of contemporary philosophers and psychoanalysts (many of whom are her friends) including Emmanuel Lévinas, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Edmond Jabès and Luce Irigaray.

A groundbreaking theoretician, Bracha works at the intersection or borderline between feminism, psychoanalysis and aesthetics and for over two decades she has been forging or weaving a new ‘matrixial’ theory and language with major aesthetical, analytical, political, and most crucially ethical implications. If for Deleuze and (especially) her friend Guattari philosophy is the ‘creation of concepts’ or ‘idea theft’ then Bracha’s is a body of work — a neologistic machine — that uniquely wrenches the French language, invents with it, unveils its power and its possibilities both in its lexicon and its syntax. Bracha’s language is an event; it does something with the French language while simultaneously undoing all the accepted and formal codes of its sovereignty. Her magical use of words opens new horizons, stretching language in excess of, beyond, even beside, itself: trans-subjectivity, co-emergence, wit(h)nessing, com-passion, communicaring, erotic co-responsibility, transconnectivity, borderlinking, partial-subjects, borderspace, metamorphosis, fascinance, link a, co-poiesis, encounter-event, artworks, trans-ject, connaissance, transcription, emoving, erotic antennae of the psyche, in-tuning. This is just a partial list of the words Bracha confects, as she forces language (or languages: in her notebooks she works with French, English, and Hebrew) to swerve and dehisce, in a way which, as Adrian Rifkin describes it, is ‘appeasing, assuaging, almost enjoyable’.
According to ecofeminism and posthuman feminism, gender and species boundaries are but aspects of a cultural process aimed at fixing hierarchical identities for human beings in our societies. Ultimately this results in twin patriarchal dominations over women and over animals. A perspective that intersects gender issues with a focus on human-animal relationships in ancient times reveals a new body of evidence about gender strategies enacted by the Greeks.

In ancient times gender identity was not confined to human beings. Besides the male vs. female difference within the species, *the species as a whole* was often thought of as a gendered category, particularly when coupled with another species showing opposite traits. To the Greeks, for example, the dog (*kyōn*) was a ‘feminine’ animal – submissive, parasitic, shameless – as contrasted to the ‘masculine’ wolf (*lykos*); the pig (*sys, hys*) was ‘feminine’ as contrasted to the wild boar (*syagros, hyagros*).

This cultural construct had consequences for the Greek language: common gender nouns such as *kyōn* and *sys* were often used in the generic feminine (as shown by gender agreement of articles and adjectives) due to their structural opposition to *lykos* and *kapros* (“wolf” and “wild boar” both masculine). Semantic gender was thus employed as a metaphoric representation of cultural polarities embedded in folk zoology.

The rationale of this process is not always clear. One wonders why, for example, *hippos* was treated as a ‘feminine’ species. In other cases the rhetorical strategy that lies behind this gendered zoology appears clear and proves to be helpful in understanding gender biases, gender politics and relationships with animals in ancient societies.

The power of this type of cultural construction resides precisely in not being explicitly stated. The process remains hidden and runs as follows:

1. the socially constructed gender opposition with all its role requirements is projected onto the animal kingdom;
2. it is articulated in a variety of implicit assumptions, self-evident statements, and linguistic uses that conceal the cultural and arbitrary nature of the process;
3. the result – the gendered species – are summoned to prove how true and rooted in nature is the human feminine/masculine polarization.

The discursive strategies employed to enact and support the process are obviously circular and almost totally implicit: the wolf is a “manly” animal; his “brother”, the dog, is not as “manly”; when a dog does not behave the way one would expect, it becomes clear that the dog is, in fact, a “she”, treacherous and coward like all “shes” in the world, and so on.

The shortest version of this argument runs more or less as follows: “Men are braver than women. What proves this? Well, look at the lion!”. This is after all what ancient physiognomists used to do all the time: a man who looks like a *pardalis* is “of course” a *kynaidos*.

Although highly effective in confirming cultural stereotypes, the process of extending gender differences to the animal world was not always a reassuring move: the lion as a ‘manly’ species questioned the femininity of the lioness (Clitemnestra); Theseus risked his reputation by confronting a wild sow instead of a boar. Moreover, the animal mirror could send back disturbing reflections, such as hermaphrodites and sex-shifting creatures (hyena, chicken).

Humans appeal to animals as to a ‘foreign court’ to get fair judgments about what is ‘natural’ for them to do (Plutarch, *De amore prolis* 493 B-C); yet inquiring into gender roles of other species can either reinforce the supposed universality of the male/female opposition or reveal its fragility. Crisscrossing boundaries between human/non-humans and male/female, ancient people experienced a special kind of ‘gender troubles’.
In her 2005 article for *Signs*, ¹ Anne Fausto-Sterling contrasted the ‘limited view of sex differences’ in medicine with emerging feminist explorations of the body, commenting that, for those aware of feminist theory, ‘biomedical researchers interested in tracking down all of the medically interesting differences between men and women live in a time warp.’ In Fausto-Sterling’s work, gender has been expanded from a binary to a spectrum. ² Since 2005 medicine has continued to search for differences. It has been argued that, in terms of diagnosis, testing new drugs, and prescribing, women are best served precisely by seeing them as ‘different’ rather than by assuming that conclusions based on male bodies can be transferred across to female bodies. This medical work assumes a binary; nevertheless, it can have real benefits for women’s health.

I want to think about how studies of gender and of sex difference in the ancient world can now speak to contemporary discussions in medicine. It is only relatively recently that ancient medicine has moved beyond retrospective diagnosis —the application of ‘modern’ diagnoses to ancient texts— to be understood on its own terms. The line in the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women* 1.62 singled out by Paola Manuli as the founding act of gynaecology is that ‘The diseases of women differ greatly from the diseases of men’. ³ When I first started working on ancient gynaecology I assumed that the focus on women as entirely different from men, in every part of their flesh, was an ancient Greek cultural phenomenon: a negative feature obscuring the inclusion of women as part of humanity, to be linked to Pandora as a late creation, and to men as the norm, with women as the aberration and not just the unmarked term. This assumes that gender binaries are by definition also hierarchical. I’ve also connected classical statements of the level of female ‘difference’ with a shrewd move by physicians to market themselves as the best option within the medical marketplace, something which links the ancient world to 16th c Europe where male physicians moved into the territory of the midwife; by playing up ‘difference’ a physician can create a subfield of medicine.

When I began talking to medical audiences, I found that this classical foregrounding of difference was seen not as a reflection of ancient patriarchy but as a progressive and impressive step. So I would like to think more about how a conversation between ancient medicine and modern medicine may help us to think about not only the ‘medically interesting differences between men and women’ but also what gender has to say to the interplay between culture and biology. Today, women seek medical assistance more readily than men; why? Physicians take some symptoms in men more seriously than those in women; why? An example would be cardiac pain, which is less likely to be taken seriously in a woman. But very recent studies of how women are far more likely than men to suffer from ‘persistent, debilitating chest pain’ argue that this condition is less benign than has previously been thought. Rather than dismissing the pain because current testing methods can find nothing wrong, the solution may be to look for a cause existing beneath what can currently be visualised. ⁴ Studies of this kind argue that everything exists at the level of biology and that culture obstructs science in its quest to locate gendered differences. So, can ancient medicine help us to put feminism back into medicine?

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⁴ See e.g. [http://cache.ads-video.com/elsevier/CardiacPain/3-Arthur_Broadband-Women.m4v](http://cache.ads-video.com/elsevier/CardiacPain/3-Arthur_Broadband-Women.m4v) (accessed 16 December 2014)
Irene Salvo, Royal Holloway University of London and Gerda Henkel Stiftung of Germany

Classics and feminisms in philosophy & science: Non-binariness, gender identity, and social stigma: lessons from the past?

My starting point will be the question of how hermaphroditism was represented in Greek and Latin societies as a monstrum/teras/prodigium. On one side, the pollution linked to a child born with both sexes required a ritual purification for the whole city. On the other, sexual ambivalence was accepted on the level of mythology, ritual, and cult. Therefore, to what extent social stigma against an ambiguous sex affected the life of individuals? I am interested in how the layers of anatomy, ritual, and society interacted. The influence of third-wave feminism in the field of ancient history and literature has prompted to reduce the importance of sexual difference as the only category structuring social realities, and to highlight how other factors as social status or citizenship could intervene in the classification of individuals. Feminism, then, has enriched Classics. Wishing for a mutual relationship, what ancient sources can teach us about the definition of gender identity, transgenderism, and non-binariness? How can we use the Graeco-Roman evidence in order to eradicate homophobia and transphobia today? In particular, I will focus on the difficulties experienced by transgender academics during and after a transition.
Rhiannon Easterbrook, University of Bristol

Poster/Powerpoint Presentation: Intersectional Approaches to the Performance of Venus and Aphrodite in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

My presentation posits intersectional feminism as a valuable and flexible analytical tool for classicists. Scholarship within classics, including works of feminist criticism, can and does take into account the ways in those at the intersection of different groups experience oppression differently. However, there is little explicit engagement with intersectionality. I argue that a conscious interaction with intersectional feminism can create more nuanced analysis and retain the experiences of more marginalised groups.

The categories of identity under consideration can be adapted to the historical context of the enquiry. Through interrogating the points at which these categories intersect, we also develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which an individual category of identity is constituted within a particular historical context.

My research into performances of Venus and Aphrodite draws on Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (1995). This work shows how the 19th century construction of gender drew on concepts of race and vice versa, while also working alongside class status. These constructions are part of the imperial project, both in Britain and abroad. For the preservation of the empire, maintaining correct boundaries was just as important in the home as it was in the colonies. Women were often seen to be at the metaphorical boundaries of the empire and civilisation.

Frequently, the labels Venus and Aphrodite draw the audience’s attention to apparently timeless qualities of womanhood and feminine seductive power, and can therefore be understood as part of the reification and naturalisation of unstable gender constructs. Nevertheless, an analysis of how gender interacts with race, colonialism and class illustrates how these portrayals of the goddesses are frequently used to test and explore the boundaries of social structures and norms and alternative ways of living while in a liminal performance space before those boundaries are finally reasserted.
In *Hipparchia’s Choice*, Michèle LeDoeuff identifies the particular difficulties of being both a female and a philosopher. These issues include, among others, gaining access to a philosophical school or mentor for training, reconciling contradictions between norms of female behavior and the demands of a philosophical lifestyle, interacting with male peers and superiors, and confronting philosophical doctrines (often from within one’s own school) propagating misogynistic ideas.

My dissertation will explore these issues as they extend through several time periods. First I will consider how female philosophers of the ancient Mediterranean position themselves vis-à-vis their femaleness and their philosophy, focusing on several figures, literary and historical, of various schools, including Diotima of Plato’s *Symposium*, Hipparchia the Cynic, the Pythagorean women, and others. I will then examine the Renaissance reception of ancient philosophical women and their schools in the works of four Italian women: Laura Cereta, Cassandra Fedele, Tarquinia Molza, and Clemenza Ninci.

In my concluding chapter I will apply my findings to the status of women in philosophy and academia today. In so doing I hope to clarify the ongoing tension between the female and the philosophical as it extends from the ancient schools to the modern.
There are many voiceless women in Histories — e.g. Phocian women, victims of a fatal gang-rape by Persians but women’s speech is an integral part of the Histories.

Herodotus uses speech to denote agency and authority in some women.

The personal is the political — Herodotus explores the characters and motivations of men and women in their private hinterland as well as through their public actions. What women say matters.

The oikos is not a refuge from the serious concerns of polis life.

Respect for nomos, including gender performance, is necessary but contingent on reciprocity within a framework of relationships.

Nomoi change with time and circumstance, destabilising communal norms.

Characters express essentialist views of women but Herodotus is more interested in how people live and how they perform roles in communities — nurture rather than nature.
Fiona Cox, University of Exeter

Classics and contemporary women’s writing: Hélène Cixous and the Classical World – Beyond the Third Wave

In May 2014 Hélène Cixous published a memoir of her mother detailing her mother’s dying and death entitled Homère est morte. The book forms a nostos that closes in the Underworld of her mother’s death and, of course, echoes Odysseus’ own search for his dead mother. Cixous’s œuvre has been shaped by her responses to classical literature, so it is not surprising that she claims that ‘toute ma vie a été homérisée’ (for which we might borrow Michael Longley’s marvellous adjective ‘homer-haunted’). Her use of Homer to depict phenomena that are not, at first sight, Homeric or even epic (the rocks and islands that obstructed Odysseus’ journey are here the trials and tribulations of ageing) is the most recent instance of a contemporary author expanding both thematic and generic boundaries in the connections that they are establishing with Homer.

My aim in this contribution is to consider this memoir within the context of Cixous’ history of engagement with classical material, from texts that have played a vital role in shaping second-wave feminism, such as ‘Le Rire de la Méduse’ and ‘Sorties’, to the third–wave agenda evidenced in La Ville parjure ou le réveil des Erinys (1993), where she issues yet another rallying cry to alert the world to outrages that are being perpetrated. The Furies have been woken by the stench of blood corrupting the modern world. In her Préface Cixous observes:

Mais il y a une odeur aigre dans les rideaux de ces palais, - vous la reconnaissiez? C’est la «pourriture des royaumes». Celle que l’on sentait au royaume de Danemark. Une telle puissance c’est un cri. C’est ce cri qui réveille bien des personages de notre pièce. Certains, comme les Érinyes, dormaient sous la terre depuis cinq mille années, d’autres depuis huit jours à peine. Un cri d’horreur, d’alarme, de révolte.

The cry and the rotten odour belong to the scandal of the contaminated blood transfusions that horrified France in the 1990s. Once more Cixous is asking us to be alert to the cries that indicate the outrage of injustice, but this play’s rallying cry is on behalf of all those whose lives are destroyed by a society too deadened and corrupt to remember them.

Cixous’ journey from these anger-charged works to her latest books leads her from political engagement to a quieter lament, but a lament in which ‘Homère’ becomes synonymous with ‘la mère’. Issues that I’d like to probe are the implications of Cixous appropriating the ancient world in her examination of grief – the blend of classical reception and autobiography – the ways in which his intensely personal reception is filtered through male-authored responses to classical literature, especially those of Proust and Shakespeare, and the implications of considering Cixous’ stance in the light of Woolf’s claim that ‘if we are women we think back through our mothers’.
‘Gynesis: a new kind of writing on the woman’s body, a map of new spaces yet to be explored, with “woman” supplying the only directions, the only images, upon which Postmodern Man feels he can rely.’

Ruth MacDonald, Royal Holloway, University of London

Classics and contemporary women’s writing: contemporary/fourth-wave feminism

My PhD thesis is examining the reception of the Homeric hero in contemporary British women’s literature, specifically Elizabeth Cook’s *Achilles* (2002), Gwyneth Lewis’s *A Hospital Odyssey* and Kate Tempest’s *Brand New Ancients* (2012), interrogating the intersection between feminist thought and current literary engagements with the ancient world. Of course, the study of classical texts and acts of classical reception through the lens of feminist criticism has a long history; however, in my chosen texts, I can sense a change in the debates surrounding contemporary feminist thought. Thus, I would like to pose a few questions from my thesis for us to think about, namely: how is feminism changing? What are the questions and concerns of contemporary/fourth-wave feminism? What role is classics playing in this discussion? Why are contemporary female writers drawing from ancient texts in order to address feminist issues?

The concerns which fourth-wave feminism addresses are varied. It is not a homogeneous organisation but could perhaps be better described as a series of movements with differing ideas and agendas. However, one issue which seems to universally trouble contemporary feminist thought is the importance, or lack thereof, of the physical body to one’s sense of self. We can detect a turning away from gender abolitionist feminism, as exemplified by Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), towards a more nuanced analysis of the issues surrounding embodied subjectivities, with particular reference to concerns of sexual difference.

What is more, we have seen an increasing democratisation of feminism, away from the ivory tower of the academy. Social media in particular has served to bring feminism to a wider demographic of women, often with significant backlash. It is my argument that writers of popular fiction and poetry also serve to bring feminist issues into the consciousness of the general public, with female writers increasingly turning to the classical in order to discuss these concerns.

Thus, how are these writers using the classics and how does the classical affect their work? It cannot be said that these writers are engaging in a simplistic re-writing or feminist correction of a perceived patriarchal canon. Instead, we should look at the ways in which writers engage with issues of the body and experiences of embodiment from within the ancient texts themselves. Although the classical text is in many ways considered ‘separate’ and the carrier of literary values, in many writers’ work, it is often positioned within the context of everyday life, mixed in amongst other references, such as to the Bible, other mythologies and popular culture. Thus, in bringing this culture so separate and apart from our own down to our level, the ancient text is positioned neither on a pedestal nor is it dismissed. Instead, in viewing issues of fourth-wave feminism through the lens of the classical, a very contemporary debate is removed from its usual context, creating a new space for dialogue. In this way, classics is not only transformed by but also transforms other works in a move which serves not only to shed light on the everyday but also illuminates aspects of the classical text itself.
Today I hope to open up a discussion about feminist writing practices, and particularly the incorporation of critical theory into translations and creative classical receptions by contemporary women writers.

The very act of translating or retelling ancient texts so loaded with a history of male privilege, as a woman, is radical in itself. As Meghan Purvis puts it so brilliantly in the introduction to her translation of *Beowulf*, it is like sneaking in through the gates when the gatekeepers are otherwise occupied (and I would add - following in the footsteps of Woolf climbing in through the pantry window one hundred years ago). But, as feminist scholars, writers, and translators, can we be more radical? What gates are still left to breach?

In *Girl meets boy*, Ali Smith has created a retelling of the myth of Iphis and Ianthe (*Met. 9*) that also incorporates and acts out Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* through her gender-queer protagonists. The mythological realm has always been a place to fantasise transgressions (see: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a key intertext for Smith here), but Smith uses Ovid’s text to envision a specifically queer utopia. At the close of the novel, ‘Iphis and Ianthe’ marry in a fantastical setting attending by classical gods and goddesses, and at the time that Smith wrote *Girl meets boy*, gay marriage was still just a fantasy. It is now a reality, and I think this poses crucial questions about the potential use of classical reception in future feminist and queer activism, using canonical classical texts to sneak in ideas through the gates. So, looking forward, for example, the myth of Iphis can also be discussed critically - and retold creatively - as a *trans narrative.

I will focus on a key scene in the novel, in which the two lovers discuss Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, disassembling and then reassembling Ovid’s text together, and thus providing a meta-commentary on Smith’s feminist writing practice.

The previous wave of contemporary women’s writing rewrote classical myths to re-right/write the wrongs of the past and to reclaim lost women’s voices; it is now for the next wave to re-tell classical myths not only in a feminist way, but in a way that uses classical texts to further the cause of feminism itself.
The overwhelmingly female face of contemporary classical reception pays testament to what is now a longstanding relationship between feminism and Classics. The momentum gained over two decades of intense literary production means that women writers’ engagement with Classical myth, literature and thought often finds itself at the forefront of feminist Classics, responding to and even initiating interactions between the discipline and feminist methodologies.

During my time as a doctoral student, I have been drawn to the idea that women’s writing of classical reception could hold the potential to function as an arm of feminist activism. Akin to the politically-minded form of early consciousness-raising, these works may serve not only as a counter to misogyny but also to educate and inspire readers towards feminist engagement.

What dampens my enthusiasm for the potential of women’s writing as feminist practice, however, is the susceptibility of feminist discourse to misreading and appropriation. The very openness to interpretation that provides the climate for women’s reimagining, in turn, renders the transmission of a feminist message from author to reader vulnerable. Is there a way that we, as feminist classicists, in our writing and teaching, can ensure that the feminist potential of women’s writing is realised? If so, what form would this ‘intervention’ take and is it even desirable?

The re-workings of Peleus’ rape of Thetis in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (11.221-265) by Carol Ann Duffy, Jo Shapcott and Elizabeth Cook, will serve as case studies to explore my ideas about women’s writing of classical reception, its potential as a vehicle for feminism and the role of the feminist classicist therein.
Elena Theodorokopulos, University of Birmingham

*Classics and contemporary women’s writing: Anne Carson and Catullus*

In this paper I will explore aspects of Anne Carson’s translations and adaptions of Catullus’ poetry, especially in the collage-book *Nox* of 2010. Some of the questions/issues that the book provokes are:

- collage and feminism
- women and translation
- women’s translation and playfulness
- women’s translation and visibility
- women and autobiography
- women and dictionaries
- feminism and postmodernity
- feminism and opacity
For me this meeting could not be more timely, as teaching feminism in Classics is an issue on which I have been reflecting (and struggling) over the last few years. Teaching feminism is embedded in my personal experience; I have taught classes on feminist approaches to Classics to undergraduate and Masters students for nearly twenty years, and the changing experience of the classes has been marked.

Initially the topic was very much seen as ‘cutting-edge’ – the students found the concepts raised in the classes exciting and liberating, and there was a sense of new vistas opening up within a very traditional subject. Then, as time passed, the concepts were not quite so new, and the ideas behind feminist studies began to seem quite traditional in themselves, but it was still a theory the relevance of which was clear – one could point to ways in which classical scholarship had changed under its influence.

In the 2000s there was a notable change, and the classes started to become harder to teach. It was not that students were not receptive to the ideas, but their responses tended to diverge: many seemed to find the ideas quite new, and to react either with enthusiasm (rediscovering texts like Pomeroy’s Goddesses, Whores… as though they were recently-written) or hostility (those who had come to Classics via a ‘Great Books’ approach were most opposed, and I began to find myself in the odd position of having to explain feminism from first principles in the classes). Students also began consistently to find the theoretical material challenging: Nancy Rabinowitz’ introduction to Feminist Theory and the Classics (which I consider a core text) and other important pieces from the 90s were found to be ‘too aggressive’ in tone, fighting a battle which the students thought was over.

I’d like to bring two questions to the meeting: first, how to teach students about feminist approaches to our subject in the ‘fourth-wave’ context, in which feminism is seen by students as a battle long over, and now simply one of a number of competing approaches to understanding the past which has no contemporary relevance. Second, a larger question which arises from this: has feminism in fact made a difference to Classics, changing the way that we study the past, or has it been segregated into its own separate area (the ‘Women in the Ancient World’ course) with the result that no other course has to engage with women? I find it striking that my current classes will move very rapidly to saying, ‘Of course we should study all aspects of ancient society, women, children and slaves, but our sources are all written by men, so it’s not really possible’: even though they are studying or have studied an undergraduate degree in the UK, US or Europe, they don’t see a classical world which is any different from the one students saw in the 60s.
This paper will discuss the goals and challenges of creating a new textbook for classroom use on women in ancient Greece and Rome. Over the past three decades, courses on women, sex and gender in the classical world have and now represent a popular staple of many history and classics departments across the U.S. and in Europe. While several textbooks, sourcebooks and essay collections on sex and gender in the ancient world have appeared since the late 1970s, it has been almost two decades since the publication of a major work for classroom use. Since then, scholarly discourse on the subject has grown rapidly, becoming more sophisticated in its methodology and more wide-ranging in its focus. Important developments include an increased emphasis on gender as a social construct, dissatisfaction with structuralism as a theoretical model and heightened interest in articulating aspects of female agency and authority. The standard approach of most textbooks has been to consider women and their representation chronologically, from archaic Greece to the Roman Empire. This framework requires inserting topical discussions into the periods for which there is major literary and artistic evidence, regardless of whether it fits the overall discussion. It also hinders in-depth consideration of important subjects across genres and time periods. The proposed textbook aims to address several of these problems through a topical treatment of the sources organized around the stages of female life, from birth to death. It is hoped that this structure will result in a more accessible narrative for students as well as facilitate a more holistic incorporation of a diverse range of materials. This talk will first briefly outline the progress of the textbook thus far and then invite participants to share their views of the goals and challenges of transmitting this exciting body of research to undergraduates both in the U.K. and the U.S. today.
Critical overview of the influence of feminist theories on classics so far.

Need to reveal inconsistencies rather than validate the norm through continuities and similarities within the subject. Outside the subject, diversity and (dis)continuities should also affect teachers and students alike (variants: place, time, gender, teacher’s theoretical orientation, level of study, ethnic/minority groups).

Need to elucidate the limitations as well as the strengths of literary texts in the study of classical antiquity AND revise the construction of canons of major Greek and Latin literary works. Move from canons (literary, thematic, methodological) to non canonical texts (inscriptions, papyri, medical and legal texts, magical spells) and /or alternative media (i.e. material evidence of everyday life, graffiti, oil lamps, wall decorations, fabrics).

Need for interdisciplinary engagement, which will generate further interest in theory (from feminism to theories on family, gender, sexuality), will encourage group work and will cause eventually a reappraisal of mainstream methodological tools and procedures. Interdisciplinarity in the sense of collaboration, multiple views and voices, plurality, diversity, dialogue and debate.

The revision of canons will affect the construction of syllabuses and reading lists for undergraduates and postgraduates, even anthologies for (non) classicists and the general public. Reference to women and gender in classical antiquity should be organically integrated in every type of module; women should not be treated as ‘extra’ or as ‘exception’ (no matter how bright) to the main core of the module.

Need for the convergence of classics with feminist pedagogy (cf. McClure 2000) through an eclectic employment of some of its methods, e.g. the use experience as resource, transformative learning, the challenge of resisting a single, dominant, institutionalized narrative. Circumvent the danger of popularizing the subject by lowering the academic standards.

The question of mentoring should also be addressed: how we can encourage students to take up feminism in their study of classics. Also how to support and guide student coming to classics from feminism.

In our globalised environment of crisis and within the interconnected network of socio-political and economic exchange, politics, feminism and classics should not operate in separation or in void. A feminist reappraisal of classics offers the opportunity to question phallocentricism as the modus operandi of our world today, to question male as the norm, and start listening to the ‘other’. The ‘other’ is not just women, but every silenced human being, every victim, every poor, every immigrant, every marginalized non-male-elite person of our society.
New Perspectives, Theories and Practices: EuGeStA

Update on “Integrating Gender into North American Classical Studies: Challenges Ahead” (delivered at the EuGeStA workshop at [the final] meeting of the American Philological Association, Chicago, January 3, 2014)

*Defining terms: A bipartite “American” [pragmatic and democratic] definition of “feminism” as it relates to the discipline and profession of Classics: “The use of gender as an important category of analysis in the study of classical (and classically inspired) texts and material artifacts, combined with a recognition of, and commitment to eradicating, gender asymmetries and inequities in the ancient works that all classicists investigate and illuminate, as well as in the contemporary workplaces where classicists labor, and in the organizations that foster and sustain the academic field of classics.” [this quote will be included on my handout]. Ancient gender studies should, therefore, be synonymous with feminism in/and Classics.

*Assessing value: What has feminist scholarship done for Classics [lately]? Hazel Barnes’ recollections of her years as a graduate student in the Yale University Classics Department, 1937-1941, from The Story I Tell Myself: A Venture in Existentialist Autobiography (Chicago 1997) 76-77.

“Classical scholarship at that period was itself restricted in a way that it is not now. When not concerned with the establishment of texts and purely historical questions, it too often concentrated on minutiae, on ringing one more change on worn out topics already over-debated. Naturally it could not provide the kind of excitement, enrichment, and opening up that the field has enjoyed — and suffered — in response to the recent challenge of feminist classicists, Deconstructionists, and other iconoclasts. But American classicists then (certainly at Yale, and I believe that was usually true elsewhere) mostly looked on psychological interpretation and on literary criticism as suspicious — “subjective,” not scholarly. The ideal was the pure Wissenschaft of German universities.”[this quote will be included on my handout]

*Premise: North American classicists have successfully integrated the study of ancient Greco-Roman gender into our discipline and profession. Over the past four decades, ancient gender studies have taken distinctive shape as a theoretically capacious, methodologically evolving, intellectually rigorous and constantly expanding realm of interdisciplinary research. At the same time, they have become a vital component of many university classics curricula, often through undergraduate courses in translation—on women, or gender, or sex in antiquity—for students majoring in other fields. As a category of analysis gender occupies a prominent position in teaching and research on classical reception, Nevertheless...

Challenges:
*that “our well meaning, culturally inclusive concern with “gender” has diminished the much-needed, long overdue focus on Greek and Roman women in both research and teaching. We can only understand women’s lives and images by situating both in larger ancient historical contexts that privilege men as both social agents and surviving witnesses. But much work remains to be done in collecting information about historical women and analyzing their representations (cf. McManus WCC proposal).

*that recent changes in the US secondary school Latin canon have substantially reduced the amount of reading about women (i.e. removing the poetry of Catullus, Horace and Ovid and Cicero’s Pro Caelio in favor of [selections from] Caesar’s Gallic Wars as a complement to Vergil, Aeneid 1, 2, 4 and 6) — limiting opportunities for secondary school Latin students, and incentives for present and prospective Latin teachers, to engage with texts foregrounding women and to familiarize themselves with scholarship on gender issues.
*while the faculties of several prestigious North American classics doctoral programs number senior faculty specializing in gender studies, others do not, limiting the exposure of their PhD students to research in this area as well as support for such research.

*the erasure of “women” and “gender” in areas of specialization collected by the Society for Classical Studies on its membership form and published as a directory database in the members section of the society’s data base: Proposal to the Women’s Classical Caucus from Barbara McManus, January 10, 2015 [to be quoted in full on my handout]

*the erasure of feminist research, through selective citation, omission and the use of such evaluative categories as “profile” and “strengths” (vs. “productivity”) [quote from department review and evidence/response to be included on my handout]

Conclusion: By fostering and widely sharing European and North American feminist research on women and gender in antiquity, EuGeStA is increasing opportunities and incentives for secondary school Latin students and their teachers, classics graduate students and faculty members to raise awareness of women and gender in the classical world, strengthen acquaintance with an array of analytical tools for investigating and illuminating both, and reflect upon the application of different theoretical approaches to our ancient testimony. And we need EuGeStA more than ever.