SCREENING CLASSICAL RECEPTION IN THE CLASSROOM: A TEACHING EXPERIMENT AT A FRENCH UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper comments on a pedagogical project carried out with second-year undergraduate history students, designed to raise awareness of the different uses of classics in contemporary creations, especially films and TV series (*Troy: Fall of a City*, *Cleopatra*, *Astérix et Obélix…*). Classics reception is a growing concern and, using an approach inspired by the concept of interculturality, we highlighted multiple contemporary issues in these works and pointed out the ways in which classical Antiquity can be reinterpreted, adopted and adapted.

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Resumo

Este artigo comenta um projeto pedagógico conduzido com estudantes do segundo ano de graduação em História. O projeto tinha como objetivo desenvolver a percepção dos alunos com relação aos diferentes usos da Antiguidade clássica em criações contemporâneas, especialmente filmes e séries de televisão (*Troy*, *Troy the fall of a city*, *Cleopatra*, *Astérix et Obélix*…). Os estudos sobre Recepção são uma preocupação em grande desenvolvimento e, utilizando uma abordagem inspirada pelo conceito de interculturalidade, tentamos conscientizar os alunos sobre diversas questões contemporâneas e como a Antiguidade clássica pode ser reinterpretada, adoptada e adaptada.

Palavras-chave

Recepção dos clássicos; Interculturalidade; Filmes; Séries TV; *Tróia*; *Cleópatra*.

An intercultural pedagogical project

This paper comments on a teaching experiment that spanned two academic years (2019-2020 and 2020-2021), involving second-year undergraduate history students at the University of Haute-Alsace, in Mulhouse, France. In the first year, the activity was intended as a complement to two traditional topics on Roman history and historiography. In the second year, the entire "Antiquity – modernity" (*Antiquité-modernité* in French) curriculum focused on this project, with a total volume of 12 teaching hours and requiring active student participation.[2]

The project was conceived with two main goals in mind: first, to reinforce students' knowledge on Antiquity in their second year; second, reflect on the integration of the "Other" in the European cultural heritage (*cf.* Said, 1978), presumably constructed on the basis of the classical tradition. Contemporary audiovisual creations, among others, are subject to debates on the updating of ancient literature and history, made to become metaphors of contemporary issues. Indeed, new audiovisual creations suggest intercultural comparisons between ancient Greeks or Romans and our society, and reflect a constantly renewed reappropriation of the ancient past. In this perspective, we sought to turn students into actors of a double critical effort, consisting in deciphering the contemporary audiovisual language and using the concept and themes of interculturality (White, 2018).

Within this framework, our goal was to "dust off" the study of Antiquity with a contemporary point of view on societies of the past, echoing a famous quote by Neapolitan historian Benedetto Croce (2011 [1941]: 14) "*Ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea*" ("All history is contemporary history"). A second aspect of the project relates to the issue of Classical reception and recreation. The Italian expression says "traduttore, traditore" (literally "translator, traitor" with the sense that "to translate is to betray"). Indeed, any translation of a text from one language to another, and even more so from one culture to another, is a perilous task, full of pitfalls. In the translation of an ancient text, the dilemma between "literality" and "literarity" is posed with even greater acuity: should the

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terms be translated philologically so that the target text is as faithful as possible to the original vocabulary? Should the text be made readable for a contemporary audience? Or should we translate the idea, the supposed intention of the author and, more specifically, the impact of the original text on the public of the past? In short, should we render the "perception" of the text rather than its letter? Such an exercise involves many risks of overinterpretation and anachronisms. Navigating between these two antipodes is a particularly difficult practice.

The contemporary audiovisual creations discussed here thus constitute a double translation: not only the actual translation of ancient texts but also, and foremost, a transformation, adaptation and updating of a tale or of a specific history (a battle, a historical figure…). It is common sense that an audiovisual work of art must attract contemporary audiences, even at the risk of indulging in anachronisms in the process.

Therefore, our project draws on the perspective of interculturality, in particular to distinguish us from the ancient Greeks and Romans. The modern European society, increasingly multicultural and multiracial, challenges the presumed values of contemporary identification with a classical heritage. We live in a time of questioning, in the light of recent social and cultural changes, and of constant renewal of the dialogue between current issues and ancient traditions. In this context, our project invited students to decode audiovisual languages (in their revisiting of the ancient past) using the concept of interculturality.

Although this approach has not yet gained much currency among academic historians, the concept of interculturality has the potential to make a valuable contribution, as has been demonstrated by its influence in sociology, communication, psychology, management and the education sciences (Dervin, 2017; Smolcic; Arends, 2017). This approach may also be perceived as an instrument of a political project. At a time when globalization fuels communitarian or xenophobic discourses, interculturality is first and foremost a tool for dialogue between people from different cultural backgrounds, so as to enhance the various cultures without hierarchy and to remove any ethnic or religious determination. In a very contemporary sense, the notion emphasizes multifaceted relations between cultures, but from the point of view of individuals – not in a monolithic way for an entire given community. Thus, the term "intercultural" primarily invokes a dialogue between cultures for mutual improvement (Unesco: https://fr.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/). Secondly, it also refers to the cultural heritage perceptible in the practices of individuals and groups.

Beyond these rather vague definitions, it is fundamental to specify what we can really draw from this approach. First of all, it allows us to go beyond the traditional and essentialist vision of culture, largely inspired by the anthropology of F. Boas. To borrow the definition proposed by Michel Rautenberg (2008: 36):

> La culture, nous la comprendrons comme le résultat de la mise en œuvre par les acteurs sociaux des logiques de distinction et d'excellence, de l'expression des identités collectives, de la production et des échanges commerciaux et des pratiques et des représentations sociales qui pourront être reconnues, ou non, comme relevant du domaine de l'art.

This definition needs to be adapted so that it can be operative in ancient contexts; nonetheless, it has the advantage of underlining the polymorphic and dynamic character of "culture", understood as a constantly evolving process, as a plural construction, developed on several scales, that adapts itself according to the groups that use it (*cf.* Bauman; Raud, 2015. See some criticisms by Benessaieh, 2010).

Furthermore, interculturality does not require physical contact and can be used to go beyond categories linked to ethnic identities. According to A. Hammouche (2008: 5),

> l'interculturalité est un processus généré par la relation aux autres : cette relation est tout à la fois pratique et symbolique et concerne aussi bien les situations de contact physique que des rapports à distance et des représentations. L'attention, positive ou négative, que cela génère est, à bien des égards, un des fondements anthropologiques des processus de différenciation entre groupes se distinguant culturellement.

Applied to the social sciences, the concept allows us to analyze the personal choices of individuals who move between two or more cultures. In this sense, Paul Blanquart (1986: 48) stresses the correspondence between this approach and a general crisis in the definition of collective identities and in the emergence of a new type of individual, one that does not necessarily follow the predicted behavior of their community. On the other hand, the study of the Classics has been recently recognized as a means to emancipate some individuals from their social conditions and personal experiences (Padilla Peralta, 2015a; 2015b).

Coming back to our pedagogical project, the application of this theoretical background was understood in multiple forms. Firstly, the long period of time that separates us from Antiquity creates a highly pronounced cultural distance. Secondly, using a contemporary approach to the themes addressed, films and TV series produce a somewhat fantasized tradition, leading to the coexistence of two ancient cultures: one that can be

understood by the analysis of sources by academics and another, anachronistic one, forged from scratch in the image of our modern world. Finally, as they project contemporary debates onto Antiquity, they are perceived in different ways by different viewers: reactions and assessments may differ depending on nationality, position on the political spectrum (conservative or progressive groups), and level of knowledge of ancient realities (scholars, cultivated individuals or the general public).

The students' research on these different reactions, gleaned in particular on social media and on various message boards, yielded very interesting findings, and informed our discussions following the screening of some of the most representative excerpts from each of the selected works. During the first year of the project, the feedback from the students' research was particularly enlightening regarding what issues provoked the most reactions; on the other hand, it also showed that the reactions were themselves fantasized by an audience that obviously had not watched the series they were criticizing. The students thus gained a very clear understanding of the ideological dangers of social media, ignorance, fake news and manipulation.

In the second year of the project (2020), without the possibility of screening films in the University's classroom, each group of four or five students was free to select one contemporary work of art (following a broad definition), in order to present it to the class and to comment it. Their choices varied, including a majority of films but also a painting and a metal-rock music group.

Classical reception: a brief overview

The pedagogical project was intended as an experiment in the growing field of classics reception, which has developed among scholars as a means to spark students' interest and knowledge about Antiquity (*cf*. Martindale, 2006). From the beginning, one of the main purposes of the Classicists studying reception was pedagogical: by gaining students' attention in this way and then, through the analysis of the recreation of the ancient past, making them learn about Greeks and Romans. The benefits of this approach have recently received increased recognition. For instance, Oxford University Press has published a series of volumes on classical

reception in English literature[3] and chapters on reception have been included in a number of its handbooks[4].

The study of intertextuality and tradition (*cf.* Hobsbawm; Ranger, 1983) is not new: one can go back as far as some classical Greek writers when they considered themselves as heirs to prestigious older authors and invented different versions of known tales or myths.[5] Likewise, we need not dwell again on the very long succession of uses and misuses of the classical past across the historical eras (*cf.* Finley, 1975; Momigliano, 1990; Mignolo, 1992; Da Silva, 2007). Also, well-documented are the criticisms of the common opinion that our present time is a form of linear heritage of the ancient past, and the historiographical approach to the creation of a fantasized and idealized ancient Greece (among others, see Bernal, 1987; Vlassopoulos, 2007, even though their criticisms are still being debated).

Reception studies innovate by emphasizing the distance between the original message and its later recreation and the instrumental use of the past in creating new meanings (*cf.* Hartog; Revel, 2001; Da Silva; Funari; Garraffoni, 2020). Beyond this critical approach, classical reception has also broadened its scope to consider popular media and popular culture, such as films (*cf.* Apostol; Bakogianni, 2018), music, comics, video games, etc.[6]

When it considers popular media and culture, the reception studies approach does not rely on the authority of a single original work. Indeed, several contemporary recreations are not based on a distinguished text, but on an array of texts and legends. Some films draw on mythological legends that were compiled in different works, from different periods, from Hellenistic or Roman times to the Byzantine period. Most often, we have first encountered those legends in children's literature or school handbooks. These are sometimes used as source for scripts, as was probably the case for both versions of *Clash of the Titans* (1981 and 2010). A

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[3]   https://global.oup.com/academic/content/series/o/oxford-history-of-classical-reception-in-english-literature-ohcrel/?lang=en&cc=fr.

[4] Among others, see also Blackwell Publishing's *Classical Receptions* series: https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Classical+Receptions-c-2437.

[5] Examples are plentiful, from Historians claiming to continue the works of a predecessor, like Xenophon who starts his *Hellenica* (1,1,1) as the follow-up to Thucydides's incomplete work ("After this, not many days later"), to tragedians who invented alternative versions of Homeric legends, as in Euripides's *Helen* in which the titular character goes to Egypt instead of Troy.

[6] A great deal of discussion also occurs through channels that parallel formal academia, especially blogs and websites such as *Eidolon* (https://eidolon.pub/), *SCS-blog* (https://classicalstudies.org/scs-blog),   or   *Antiquipop* (http://antiquipop.hypotheses.org/), among others.

few decades ago, Moses Finley (1968) already noted that our readings of Sophocles and Greek tragedy are influenced by the Shakespearian interpretation. In the case of classical reception on screen, likewise, we watch the Greeks and Romans through the lenses of children's books, filtered with the memory of our own childhood's bedtime stories. What is screened is actually the result of a long chain of multiple and successive receptions.

Sometimes, the ancient past only serves as a pretext to convey a contemporary message, for screenwriters who have actually very little knowledge of Antiquity and who draw on a fantasized and completed recreated past. For instance, *300* (2006, by Zack Snyder[7]) promotes a very conservative political ideology based on an imagined Spartan set of values (Bond, 2018). Ultimately, the film is mostly the adaptation of a comic book: ancient Spartans and Leonidas are represented as comic book warriors and classical reception seems merely incidental, functioning only as a means to make a fictional hero more acceptable to audiences by naming him after an ancient historical character. The same message could have been delivered using any other fundamentally good and brave hero of any simplistic black-and-white comic book.

Moreover, when depicting the Trojan war for example, films not only reinterpret the *Iliad*, but they invariably tell the story that happens before and after. Homer's long poem, it should be noted, covers only some fifty days of Achilles's feud against Agamemnon sometime between the ninth and the final year of a ten-year-long war.

As a result, the analysis of classical reception on screen poses a heightened challenge as in many cases no actual "original" text may have been adapted. It is therefore necessary to try to determine what kind of reception one is dealing with when seeing a representation of Antiquity on screen.

Classics on screen and at the university

Film and television are media of choice for the discussion of classical reception. In the first year of our pedagogical project, we screened excerpts from the TV series, *Troy: Fall of a City* (BBC and Netflix) and *Rome* (BBC and HBO) in a large university auditorium. With the collaboration of the students' association, whose members handed out popcorn, we were able

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[7] Snyder directed several adaptations of comic books and superhero narratives on screen: *Watchmen*, 2009; *Man of Steel*, 2013; *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, 2016; *Justice League*, 2017.

to recreate a very pleasant cinema-like environment, intended to foster student immersion and participation. The entire experiment and the discussions were guided by the two coordinating professors. In the second year (2020), as remote teaching became the rule, we were forced to adjust: during the first two sessions, I presented the theoretical background of classical reception, picked two characters, Achilles and Cleopatra, and analyzed their representation on screen in different films and TV series. Afterwards and during the following four sessions, I asked groups of four or five students to each select a contemporary creation to present and discuss in class.

For the Achilles session, I limited comparisons to the film *Troy* (directed by Wolfgang Petersen and released in 2004)[8] and the TV series *Troy: Fall of a City* (created by David Farr and released on the BBC and Netflix in 2018).[9] After giving the students theoretical background on classical reception beyond the basic question of accuracy in adaptations of an ancient text for contemporary entertainment,[10] the goal was to identify and discuss the depiction of present-day issues. The central discussion was about the representation of the main hero, Achilles.[11] In the film *Troy*, the character was played by the white, blond, stereotypically handsome and masculine actor Brad Pitt; his most beloved friend Patroclus is very far from the *Iliad*'s description and is depicted as a younger and more fragile cousin, with no sexual tension whatsoever. Although some Trojan characters, like Hector or Priam, are presented as virtuous men, the whole film captures the Greek point of view and mostly centers on Achilles. On the other hand, the TV series *Troy: Fall of a City*, takes the Trojan point of view: the main character is Paris and not Achilles. But one supporting character is particularly controversial: the chosen actor, David Gyasi, is a black man, his beloved Patroclus is also black (Lemogang Tsipa), older, and one particular scene shows both of them partaking in a consensual interracial threesome with war-captured slave Briseis, portrayed by a white actress (Amy Louise Wilson). The contrast between the two representations of the same character could not be more striking.

The first-year project included student research into social media responses to the TV series with the black Achilles. They found that many pointed that Achilles should not have black skin (this was referred to as

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[8] Trailer: https://youtu.be/UsqWKo1hdkY.
[9] Netflix trailer: https://youtu.be/NZxVghfY6dk.
[10] For a commentary on some inaccuracies see Trusty, 2018.
[11] Other very contemporary issues could be stressed, such as women's political roles (Hecuba and Helen) or representation as crazy (Cassandra), international imperialism, and war.

"blackwashing"),[12] but they rarely commented his homosexual encounter with Patroclus. Even fewer people noted that some gods, such as Zeus and Athena, are played by African actor and actress (Hakeem Kae-Kazim and Shamilla Miller) or that Aeneas is also played by a black actor (Alfred Enoch). As Achilles is clearly described as equal to the gods (*Iliad*, 9, 485), it makes sense that the king of gods, Zeus, should share some physical similarities. That the black Zeus was more rarely mentioned suggests that most of the individuals who criticized the show had clearly not watched it and only reacted to the mere idea of a black actor playing a Greek hero. Some of the students, even if they could understand the intent to affirm diversity and support equal rights, expressed some discomfort at the idea of representing the "blond" Achilles (*cf. Iliad*, 1, 197) as a black person.

From a Classicist's perspective, there is an irony at work here, considering that Achilles, like all Greek heroes and gods, was routinely depicted in black on archaic Attic vases. Obviously, the black color was due to the technical process for firing figurative vases – oxidation turned the glaze color into black – and there was no intention of representing a Greek hero or god as black skinned. Nevertheless, craftsmen used the possibility of applying white pigment on a vase to differentiate the skin colors of some figures: white skin was commonly used to represent women, whereas men usually remained in black. A very good example of this differentiation can be seen in the black-figured Attic amphora by Exekias, which shows a black Achilles slaying a white Penthesilea.[13]

Moving on from myth to history, the representation of Cleopatra was the second theme to be tackled by the students. We started by recalling that our rendering of Cleopatra is mostly indebted to Shakespeare's skewed portrayal in *Antony and Cleopatra*, performed in 1606 or 1608 and published in 1623. Then, Claudette Colbert's incarnation of *Cleopatra* in the 1934 Cecil B. DeMille film[14] created our stereotypical image of the historical character. Better known to contemporary audiences, Elizabeth Taylor's take on the titular role of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1963 *Cleopatra*[15] drew heavily on Colbert's work. More recently, Monica Bellucci's Cleopatra in the French

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[12] For some comments and on the point of view of the show's creator and team, see Hughes, 2018 and Clarke, 2018.

[13] This is the representation on face A of the vase. The inscriptions on the vase leave no doubt on the identification of the scene: ΑΧΙΛΕΥΣ in front of Achilles and ΠΕΝΘΕΣΙΛΥΑ in front of Penthesilea. The vase was also signed by the artist: Ἐχσηκίας ἐπτοίησε. British museum, 1836,0224.127. Black-figure Attic amphora by Exekias, dated *circa* 530-525 BCE, found in Vulci. Images, description and bibliographical references: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1836-0224-127.

[14] Trailer: https://youtu.be/Dhz00dsSrMk.

[15] Trailer: https://youtu.be/K5gIjthOya4.

production *Asterix & Obelix. Mission Cléopâtre* (directed by Alain Chabat in 2002)[16] was based on the same fictitious stereotypes.

A different representation was proposed by Lyndsey Marshal in the TV Series *Rome* (created by Bruno Heller, William J. MacDonald and John Milius, BBC and HBO, 2005-2007).[17] A concern for "historical accuracy" is displayed: the actress physically resembles some ancient images of Cleopatra.[18]

Even when no explicit identification is made, videos for songs by Katy Perry (*Dark Horse*, 2013, directed by Mathew Cullen)[19] and Beyoncé (*Apeshit*, 2018, directed by Ricky Saiz)[20] are clearly inspired by Cleopatra. While in *Dark Horse*, Katy Perry draws on the most famous portrayal of the character (Liz Taylor's), Beyoncé attempts an appropriation and revalorization from an African perspective. Her video's reference to Cleopatra is more subtle. Shot at the Louvre, *Apeshit* shows a number of Western art masterpieces, including Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*[21], as well as an ancient Egyptian sphynx.[22] Whereas the entire video plays on the contrast between black dancers and artworks featuring white figures, the sphynx is the only non-Western, African art piece shown in the video, reflecting an African-American intent of self-identification to an idealized African past. In its attempt to "decolonize" contemporary perception of artwork in the world's most famous museum, the video falls into another kind of anachronistic misconception of the African (Egyptian) past.

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[16] Trailer: https://youtu.be/DR1a7R5usts.

[17] Scene with Cleopatra: https://youtu.be/CKyDjOIT0is.

[18] The main source is the sculptural portrait attributed to Cleopatra (Altes Museum, Antikensammlung Berlin, 1976.10: https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view[layout]=objekt_item&search[constraints][objekt][searchSeriennummer]=53322). See also the silver tetradrachm struck in Ascalon, Phoenicia, with the diademed portrait of Queen Cleopatra (British Museum, 1875,1102.3: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1875-1102-3);
silver tetradrachum struck in Syria (British Museum, TC,p237.1.CleMA: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_TC-p237-1-CleMA); seal impression with a similar portrait, Edfu, Upper Egypt (Allard Pierson Museum, 8177.056).

[19] https://youtu.be/0KSOMA3QBU0. See commentary by Bièvre-Perrin, 2018a.

[20] https://youtu.be/kbMqWXnpXcA. See commentary by Bièvre-Perrin, 2018b; Acuff & Kletchka, 2020.

[21] Musée du Louvre, 779: https://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/portrait-de-lisa-gherardini-epouse-de-francesco-del-giocondo.

[22] Musée du Louvre, A23: https://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/grand-sphinx-de-tanis.

Following these two introductory classes, students' choices and commentaries were notably varied. Our remote seminars included presentations on several films (*Gladiator*, 2000, by Ridley Scott;[23] *Hunger Games*, 2012, by Gary Ross;[24] *Astérix et Obélix mission Cléopâtre*, 2002, Alain Chabat; *Alexander*, 2004, by Oliver Stone;[25] *300,* 2006, by Zack Snyder;[26] and *Troy*, 2004, by Wolfgang Petersen), a painting (*Léonidas aux Thermopyles* by Jean Louis David[27]), a number of characters (Herakles, Medea, and the athlete Milo of Crotone), and a few less expected themes such as a metal rock band (EX DEO[28]) and a French animated series (*50 Nuances de Grecs[29]*).

Their findings were, as usual, a mixed bag, but some produced high-quality commentaries. For example, a group convincingly pinpointed the conservative, radical right-wing ideologies underlying the representation of Sparta and of the Battle of Thermopylae (*cf*. Bond, 2018) in *300*. A *50 Nuances de Grecs* episode[30] ran the gamut of contemporary conservative reactions to a new French law on medically assisted reproduction so explicitly that it facilitated the students' task of analyzing and deconstructing classics reception considerably.

In some cases, the research presented by students lacked a more in-depth critical view. Of course, generally speaking, knowledge of Antiquity has dwindled in recent years, after years of education budget cuts and as opportunities to study Greek or Latin in high school have become very limited. Our students have entered university having had virtually no contact with ancient history or languages. As a result, they struggle to get rid of common contemporary misconceptions about Greeks and Romans. However, most importantly, having also relatively limited knowledge of current events, they still strive to propose deeper political interpretations on the possible (and probable) intentions of producers, writers and directors who tackled specific ancient themes such as Alexander's

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[23] Trailer: https://youtu.be/owK1qxDselE.

[24] Trailer: https://youtu.be/mfmrPu43DF8.

[25] Trailer: https://youtu.be/Bh6LKIdxqCU.

[26] Trailer: https://youtu.be/UrIbxk7idYA.

[27] Musée du Louvre, INV 26080: https://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/leonidas-aux-thermopyles.

[28] For example, *I, Caligula*, song videoclip: https://youtu.be/NSW01sWSPQY. See an analysis of classical reception in metal rock music: Swist, 2019.

[29] Videos on: https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/RC-019877/50-nuances-de-grecs/. The TV animated series was inspired by a two-volume comic book: https://www.dargaud.com/bd/50-nuances-de-grecs.

[30] Episode entitled *PMA* (*procréation mythologiquement assistée* – Mythologically assisted procreation), a wordplay on PMA (*procréation médicalement assistée* – Medically assisted procreation): https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/077330-028-A/50-nuances-de-grecs-saison-1-28-30/. On classical reception in animation, see Sulprizio, 2020.

conquest of Asia or the allied Greek heroes' war on Troy shortly after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Conclusion: Antiquity can be modern to students

The first takeaway from this teaching experiment is that students find it difficult to grasp the interculturality between us and ancient Greeks or Romans. As they have so often heard that our modern world is based on the classical tradition, students are prone to looking at Antiquity in fantasized or anachronistic forms, and to perceive ancient characters either as very primitive or as close forebears who invented most of our modern way of life. While even scholars embrace the common-sense idea that a linear heritage can be traced from classical Antiquity up to our contemporary society, the classical reception approach can raise awareness of the multiple and successive recreations of the Ancient past, in a more practical and visual form than past theoretical warnings (*cf.* Finley, 1968 and 1975; Momigliano, 1990). When very recent media examples used such recreations of the past, classical reception brings the phenomenon in sharp focus for the young generations of university students.

The biggest challenge for students is their lack of knowledge both on Antiquity and on contemporary events. They in turn also struggle to grasp more subtle and nuanced messages: beginning with the *Iliad* and the Trojan war, which must be placed somewhere between fiction and reality, as it features elements of both. The *Iliad* is obviously not a historical narrative, but the poem contains important elements that may constitute an important source for the writing of a realistic history.[31] Any comment based on the *Iliad* must accordingly recognize that the "original" source as we know it was itself composite, and included descriptions of different time periods (e.g., bronze or iron weapons are both mentioned).

Also, trained Classicists have gained a glimpse of ancient scales of values over the course of their careers and learned to put less stock in the contemporary quest for accuracy. Indeed, throughout Antiquity, Greek and Roman authors constantly reinvented well-known legends, proposing different and alternative versions of the same tale. As future historians

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[31] There are countless bibliographical references on the *Iliad* and on the "Homeric context". However, since Finley (1954), most scholars have tended to acknowledge the composite character of the poems (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and of the historical context depicted in this "world of Odysseus", mixing legend and realistic descriptions of different periods from Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age and the "Dark Ages".

whose critical sense still needs to be sharpened, our students tend to focus too heavily on the accuracy of representations.

Despite these hurdles, which are not specific to our students, the experience has proved highly rewarding. The classical reception approach proved successful in motivating students to deepen their knowledge on certain elements of the ancient past. Most importantly, the interculturality approach has allowed us to raise awareness of the fact that ancient Greeks and Romans were peoples with different cultures, rather than simply our founding fathers. Having to defend their case study choices, students became personally invested in the work and in their own interpretations. Ultimately, they were in a position to critically decipher some methods of using Antiquity to address contemporary issues in the entertainment industry.

Those students will no longer watch Greeks and Romans on screen through their memory of children's books or Shakespeare. Hopefully, they will now be watching films through a Finleyan critical lens.

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