

## I. FROM THE CLASSICAL TRADITION TO RECEPTION STUDIES

On 30th January 1943, Adolf Hitler's close associate Goering made a radio broadcast to the beleaguered Sixth Army at Stalingrad on the eastern front. He compared the German army to the Spartan soldiers at Thermopylae in 480 BCE when they stood, fought and died to prevent the advance of the Persians ('the barbarians') into Greece. Goering's broadcast was not well received. The dispirited and starving listeners described it as 'our own Funeral Speech' and some officers joked ironically that 'the suicide of the Jews', besieged by the Roman army on the top of Masada in 73 or 74 CE was a more apt comparison.<sup>1</sup> This episode raises a host of questions about the reception of classical texts and ideas in later cultures. In this instance, not only was the classical allusion used as a model to sanction expectations of behaviour but further allusions were used as a counter-text to challenge the rhetoric of the high command.

At the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a translation by Edwin Morgan of Racine's *Phèdre* into modern Scots was staged at the Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup> Morgan's translation into a Glaswegian-based Scots was part of a move to give status to the Scots language as part of the emerging classical theatre in Scotland. He also wanted to find out what it was about the play which would survive and transcend what he described as 'a jolt into an alien register'. The translation and the staging represented the latest point in a continuing commentary on the migration through successive languages and theatrical traditions of the story of Phaedra – Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Seneca's *Phaedra* and Racine's *Phèdre*. The function of reception studies is to analyse and compare the linguistic, theatrical and contextual aspects of this kind of migration.<sup>3</sup>

These examples demonstrate the extraordinary diversity in the range of classical receptions. Each has its own reception history and requires appropriate methods of investigation. Each yields insights into the texts

<sup>1</sup> The broadcast and reactions to it are described by Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London, 1998), 380. Beevor comments drily, 'They did not realise how accurate they were. Hitler was indeed counting on a mass suicide, above all of senior officers.'

<sup>2</sup> Published text, E. Morgan, *Phaedra* (Manchester, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Amy Wygant, *Towards a Cultural Philology: Phèdre and the Construction of Racine* (Oxford, 1999).

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and contexts of ancient works, their subsequent interpretation and their situation in the modern context of reception. The aim of this book is to engage with this rich cultural field by outlining the main features of current work in reception studies and discussing in more detail some of the most significant recent developments. This chapter sets out the conceptual and critical framework which the rest of the volume will use in the discussion of specific examples.

The increasing prominence of reception studies in relation to Greek and Roman texts, images, ideas and material culture is a fairly recent development. Although *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (reception history) or study of *Nachlebung* (afterlife) has been an important strand in German scholarship, its development in the international field and especially its adaptation in Anglophone scholarship has involved significant reshaping of the scope of reception studies and of the sources and methods used. In particular, the emergence of this specialism signals a move away from previous ways of looking at the relationship between ancient culture and its subsequent interpretation and adaptation. One strand in classical scholarship has been what was called ‘the classical tradition’. This studied the transmission and dissemination of classical culture through the ages, usually with the emphasis on the influence of classical writers, artists and thinkers on subsequent intellectual movements and individual works.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the language which was used to describe this influence tended to include terms like ‘legacy’. This rather implied that ancient culture was dead but might be retrieved and reapplied provided that one had the necessary learning. More recent research has tended to move away from the study of a linear progression of ‘influence’.

The notion of some great chain of influence which linked great works of the Greeks and Romans to their counterparts in Renaissance, Enlightenment, Victorian and modern ‘high culture’ has fallen out of fashion. This is partly to be regretted since studies of transmission of texts and canon formulation and adaptation are valuable adjuncts to other aspects of classical study and help to explain how and why classical texts have been interpreted in particular times and contexts.

<sup>4</sup> Among outstanding works of this kind are G. Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (Oxford, 1949); R.R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge, 1954); M.I. Finley (ed.), *The Legacy of Greece* (Oxford 1981); R. Jenkyns, *The Legacy of Rome: a New Appraisal* (Oxford, 1992). It is interesting to compare their scope and methods with a recent study such as T.P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 2002), which contains chapters on ‘Contemporary Poetry and Classics’ (Oliver Taplin) and ‘Socrates on trial in the USA’ (Malcolm Schofield).

However, one good reason for the replacement of the methods of ‘the classical tradition’ as the sole means of studying classical texts through time is that such an approach was based on a rather narrow range of perspectives. Furthermore, it could carry an assumption, sometimes tacit sometimes explicit, that these works yielded a ‘meaning’ which was unproblematic, there to be grasped and to be applied in all kinds of situation far removed from the ancient one. Thus the associations of value carried with it were narrow and sometimes undervalued diversity, both within ancient culture and subsequently.

The diversity of ancient culture itself is now more widely recognized and interest has focused on ways in which some aspects were selected and used (‘appropriated’) in order to give value and status to subsequent cultures and societies and to inspire new creative work. This kind of study has proved valuable in that it has enabled people to distinguish more readily between the ancient texts, ideas and values and those of the societies that appropriated them. So, for example, we are less likely to simply confuse Greek and Roman cultural practices with those of the Victorians who filtered their appropriations of the ancient world into education, the arts and social values.<sup>5</sup> This increased sense of discrimination in examining the interfaces between cultures has had the further valuable effect of liberating the ancient texts for re-appropriation and reworking (‘refiguration’) by new generations of writers and artists. It is of course true that ‘guilt by association’ has sometimes remained a potent factor in causing rejection of the societies and values of Greeks and Romans as part of modern cultural studies. It can hardly be denied, for instance, that Athenian society in the fifth century BCE, a society which saw a flowering of the arts, was based on slavery of various kinds (in common with most of the ancient world and much of the modern) nor that the material improvements associated with Roman culture were disseminated as a result of the success of its imperial war machine. Appropriation of the practices, attitudes and values of Greek peasant society by the modern far right or of the public buildings, emblems and propaganda of the Romans by empire-builders and totalitarian régimes acts as an awful warning of the unlovely effects of uncritical adulation of any culture.<sup>6</sup> Such issues are of particular concern in reception studies,

<sup>5</sup> Particularly important in recent scholarship in this field are R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 1980); F.M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT, 1981); G.W. Clarke (ed.), *Rediscovering Hellenism: the Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of appropriation of Greek civic values by extremists in the USA see Page du Bois, *Trojan Horses: Saving the Classics from Conservatives* (New York and London, 2001). For

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where the focus is on the two-way relationship between the source text or culture and the new work and receiving culture. Analysis of the principles and assumptions underlying selectivity and contextual comparisons between source and receiving conditions are vital tools.

It is important also to be aware that interest in reception of classical texts is not just a modern phenomenon. Greek and Roman poets, dramatists, philosophers, artists and architects were also engaged in this type of activity – refiguration of myth, meta-theatrical allusion, creation of dialogue with and critique of entrenched cultural practices and assumptions, selection and refashioning in the context of current concerns. Reception within antiquity is an important mediating factor between classical and modern cultures. Greek drama, for instance, did not cease in the fifth century BCE. There were important fourth-century and Hellenistic activities and the Romans, too, selected and adapted in order to create their own cultural traditions of comedy, of distinctive tragedies by Seneca and others, and of pantomime.<sup>7</sup>

Because reception is concerned with the relationship between ancient and modern texts and contexts, as well as with those separated by time within antiquity, it has implications for the critical analysis of both. It used sometimes to be said that reception studies only yield insights into the receiving society. Of course they do this, but they also focus critical attention back towards the ancient source and sometimes frame new questions or retrieve aspects of the source which have been marginalized or forgotten.<sup>8</sup> Reasons for such marginalizations are often significant. This means that reception studies have to be concerned with investigating the routes by which a text has moved and the cultural focus which shaped or filtered the ways in which the text was regarded.<sup>9</sup> Reception studies therefore participate in the continuous dialogue between the past and the present and also require some ‘lateral’ dialogue in which crossing boundaries of place or language or genre is as important as crossing those of time.

discussion of the institution of slavery in Greece and its effect on scholarship see most recently Paul Cartledge, ‘Greek civilisation and slavery’ in T.P. Wiseman (ed.), *Classics in Progress: Essays on Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 2002), 247–62.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of this aspect see D. Wiles, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion and references in L. Hardwick, ‘Convergence and divergence in reading Homer’ in C. Emlyn-Jones, L. Hardwick and J. Purkis (edd.), *Homer: Readings and Images* (London, 1992), 227–48.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Text’ is used in its broadest sense throughout this discussion to include oral sources, written documents and works of material culture such as buildings or sculpture. Each type of text of course makes particular demands in terms of description and analysis of its form and content.

Reception studies, therefore, are concerned not only with individual texts and their relationship with one another but also with the broader cultural processes which shape and make up those relationships. The discussions in this volume will be concerned with two main aspects of reception studies:

1. *The reception itself*

- (i) The artistic or intellectual processes involved in selecting, imitating or adapting ancient works – how the text was ‘received’ and ‘refigured’ by artist, writer or designer; how the later work relates to the source.

In relation to this it is necessary to consider

- (ii) The relationship between this process and the contexts in which it takes place. These contexts may include: the receiver’s knowledge of the source and how this knowledge was obtained; a writer’s or artist’s works as a whole; collaboration between writer/translator or director and designer and actor; the role of the patron or financier; the role of the audience/reader/public (both actual and imagined). In other words, factors outside the ancient source contribute to its reception and sometimes introduce new dimensions.
- (iii) The purpose or function for which the new work or appropriation of ideas or values is made – for instance, its use as an authority to legitimate something, or someone, in the present (whether political, artistic, social, or educational or cultural in the broadest sense).

2. *How the reception is described, analysed, evaluated*

No description is neutral and the forms, concepts and categories used by reception critics need clearly to indicate the extent to which they are using ancient categories to analyse and judge modern receptions. For example, discussion of a modern production of Greek drama would almost certainly consider how the chorus was represented and staged and whether masks were used. It might, but frequently does not, include assessment of the degree of equivalence to other ancient practices such as how the chorus was awarded and financed, i.e. the social and economic values underlying the staging of the play.

Equally, reception studies at all periods have been shaped by current

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Fig. 1 Ajax carries the dead Achilles (both are named in the inscription). Detail from the handle of the François Vase (Black Figure Volute Krater from Chiusi, signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos). Florence 4209 (*ABV* 761).

conceptual and theoretical frameworks that shape and define ‘knowledge’. Trends in modern literary and cultural theory, for instance, have stressed ambivalence and indeterminacy in the meaning attributed to texts, and disjunction and fissure in what might earlier have been seen as broader cultural certainties. For those reasons, reception of classical texts is playing an increasingly important part in studies of the cultural politics associated with change – for instance in the emancipation of Eastern Europe in the last part of the twentieth century and in post-colonial drama and literature. The appropriations and refiguring of classical texts in these contexts provides a yardstick of comparison between writing in independent and in colonized societies and the nature of the receptions is a significant indicator of cultural change.

In addition to the general influence of literary and cultural theory there are some theoretical approaches which impact directly on reception issues. Three have been particularly influential. In the 1960s



Fig. 2 Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), *Study of a Canadian soldier supporting a wounded comrade*. Part of the design for a new parliamentary building in Winnipeg, entitled ‘Canadian War Record’. Photo: City of Birmingham Art Gallery.

Hans Robert Jauss developed a theory of the ‘aesthetics of reception’ (*Rezeptions-ästhetik*).<sup>10</sup> This asserted that the historical character of an artwork could not be captured merely by describing it (as did the Formalists) or examining its production (as did the Marxists). Instead Jauss developed a theory of the interaction of production and reception. This involved dialogue between producer/artist and reader/audience/consumer. To frame this dialogue Jauss used the notion of a ‘horizon of

<sup>10</sup> H.R. Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, tr. T. Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982).

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expectation'.<sup>11</sup> Jauss's adaptation of the concept focused on a horizon of experience of life and thus rooted the receiver's mind-set in his or her social and cultural context. This was what could be said to shape expectations and interpretations of texts.

A related theoretical response was that of Wolfgang Iser. Iser's main theoretical work appeared in the mid 1970s. Jauss's background was in literary history, Iser's is in English literature and his work focuses on reader-response as a trigger for the construction of meaning in literary texts (and by extension in drama, although comparable theoretical work on audience response is still lacking).<sup>12</sup> Iser's work covers the input to interpretation of a literary text by both the 'actual' reader and the 'implied' reader, that is the reader to whom the structure and language of the text speaks.

The third major theorist whose work has influenced reception studies is Hans-Georg Gadamer. His major work was published in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Gadamer's main, although indirect, contribution to reception studies was his theory that the meaning to be attributed to a text is not 'essential', i.e. waiting to be drawn out, but constructed as part of the historical nature of understanding ('a fusion of horizons between past and present'). The implications for the study of classical texts are important since they suggest that the meaning attributed to an ancient text is shaped by the historical impact of its subsequent receptions. Even if one modifies Gadamer's theory to the weaker position that subsequent receptions have at least a contributory effect on the interpretation of ancient texts, this alone would justify a major scholarly role for the study of the histories of aesthetics of reception.

This possibility leads to a fourth theoretical approach which is sometimes used in reception analysis. This is the concept of 'critical distance' which uses the distance in time, place and culture that exists between ancient and modern versions of a text in order to enable the reader/spectator to move outside the limits of his or her own society and cultural horizons and thus to see these more clearly and more critically.

<sup>11</sup> This was based on the work of Karl Popper, the philosopher of science and Karl Mannheim, the sociologist and had been elaborated by Ernst Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, 1960). For discussion see Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: a Critical Introduction* (London, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London, 1978). On drama and the audience see S. Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: a Theory of Production and Reception* (London and New York, 1990). On the Audience as potential 'translator' see L. Hardwick, 'Who owns the plays? Issues in the Translation and Performance of Greek Drama on the Modern Stage', *Eirene* 37 (2001), Special Edition *Theatralia*, 23–39.

<sup>13</sup> H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, first published 1960; the translators G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York, 1975) used the second edition (1965).



This concept is important both for envisaging the possibility of the individual or group enlarging horizons of expectation or even transforming them and for its potential when classical texts are used as critical devices for outwitting censors and enabling current social and political concerns to be addressed through the apparently neutral, ‘distant’ (and safe) medium of classical culture.

*Towards a working vocabulary for reception studies*

The vocabulary used in this study is centred round the central questions of how the reception in question and its context relate to the classical source and its context.

Acculturation	assimilation into a cultural context (through nurturing or education or domestication or sometimes by force)
Adaptation	a version of the source developed for a different purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation
Analogue	a comparable aspect of source and reception
Appropriation	taking an ancient image or text and using it to sanction subsequent ideas or practices (explicitly or implicitly)
Authentic	close approximation to the supposed form and meaning of the source. At the opposite end of the spectrum from invention (i.e. a new work)
Correspondences	aspects of a new work which directly relate to a characteristic of the source
Dialogue	mutual relevance of source and receiving texts and contexts
Equivalent	fulfilling an analogous role in source and reception but not necessarily identical in form or content
Foreignization	translating or representing in such a way that <i>difference</i> between source and reception is emphasized
Hybrid	a fusion of material from classical and other cultures
Intervention	reworking the source to create a political, social or aesthetic critique of the receiving society
Migration	movement through time or across place; may involve dispersal and diaspora and acquisition of new characteristics

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Refiguration	selecting and reworking material from a previous or contrasting tradition
Translation	literally from one language to another. Literal, close, free are words used to pin down the relationship to the source as are phrases like ‘in the spirit rather than the letter’. Translation can also be used metaphorically as in ‘translation to the stage’ or ‘translation across cultures’. Free translations sometimes merge into adaptations or versions
Transplant	to take a text or image into another context and allow it to develop
Version	a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation

The approach adopted in this study is not limited by any one of the theoretical positions outlined above, although it is informed by them all. My discussion is framed by these key assumptions:

- (i) Receptions do in practice affect perceptions of and judgements about the ancient world and therefore need to be analysed.
- (ii) Receptions within antiquity need to be considered within the same framework of enquiry as subsequent receptions so that the diversity of ancient culture is more fully recognized and the impact of ancient reception approaches on intervening interpretations is investigated.
- (iii) Reception studies require us to look closely at the source text and context as well as at the receiving ones. This does not imply that the source is a yardstick of value but rather that a ‘critical distance’ between source and reception illuminates both. The traditional practices of classical philology have an important part to play in developing the broader cultural philology that reception studies needs.
- (iv) The concept of cultural horizon (with its ancient analogue *paideia*) provides a useful but not constraining framework for reception studies. How cultural horizons, with their assumptions, expectations, aspirations and transformations, relate to classical material is a crucial area in modern reception studies which also have to take into account the impact of new technologies and art forms (such as film).