CLASSICAL VICTORIANS

Victorian Britain set out to make the ancient world its own. This is the story of how it failed. It is the story of the headmaster who bludgeoned his wife to death, then calmly sat down to his Latin. It is the story of the embittered classical prodigy who turned to gin and opium – and the virtuoso forger who fooled the greatest scholars of the age. It is a history of hope: a general who longed to be a Homeric hero, a bankrupt poet who longed to start a revolution. Victorian classicism was defined by hope – but shaped by uncertainty. Packed with forgotten characters and texts, with the roar of the burlesque stage and the mud of the battlefield, this book offers a rich insight into nineteenth-century culture and society. It explores just how difficult it is to stake a claim on the past.

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CLASSICS AFTER ANTIQUITY

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Classics after Antiquity presents innovative contributions in the field of Classical Reception Studies. Each volume explores the methods and motives of those who, coming after and going after antiquity, have entered into a contest with and for the legacies of the ancient world. The series aims to unsettle, provoke debate, and to stimulate a re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship between Greek and Roman classical pasts and modern histories.

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Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity

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One loses one's classics. *(Pause.)* Oh not all. *(Pause.)* A part. *(Pause.)* A part remains. *(Pause.)* That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day. *(Pause.)* Oh yes, many mercies, many mercies. *(Pause.)* And now?

Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*

All of antiquity is itself a Quixotic dream.

Friedrich Nietzsche, 'We Philologists'

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Series editors' preface

This volume inaugurates the new series 'Classics after Antiquity', an initiative that strives to present innovative contributions in the field of classical reception studies. It is a series that aims to unsettle, provoke debate and, above all, stimulate a re-evaluation of assumptions about the relationship between Greek and Roman classical pasts and modern histories. In short, we aim to provide you with readable, incisive monographs the impact of which ripples outward, well beyond their specific areas of exploration.

Analysing the legacy of classical antiquity presents numerous traps, several of which have become well known. Above all, scholarship has moved beyond a picture of the classical tradition as one canon speaking to another, with great names lending their authority to other great names. Accordingly, this series seeks to stress the dynamism of the relationship between classical and post-classical worlds, in part through less familiar pairings of protagonists (and antagonists) on both sides. There have been patterns in this relationship, at once fatal rivalry and complicated love affair, but in the end, it forms no unified narrative. Nor do its single stories add up to an unambiguous legacy: while the reception of Greek and Roman classical pasts has been a constant fixture of European cultural history, ancient Greece and Rome were not 'European' civilizations in the modern sense of the word, and this series reflects recent debates in classical reception studies in viewing classical antiquity in a global perspective and with an eye on the comparative dimension. We are also mindful of the fact that engagements with the classical past have underpinned acts of horror and brutality as well as works of profound reflection; tyranny and the enslavement of others as well as freedom and enlightenment. This series aims to present works that capture the energy and tension across the widest possible range of these encounters.

Rather than regarding reception as an epiphenomenon of Classics, we see it as the discipline's engine. This has led us to the somewhat ambiguous first word of our title. On the one hand, our series will offer stories of 'the

Classics' after antiquity, that is, the remarkably variegated roles that ancient literature and artefacts have played in subsequent epochs. On the other hand, we hope to show that the history of 'Classics' as a discipline cannot be separated from these stories, even when they take us far beyond the classroom, library or museum. Classics is one mode of classical reception, and like other modes (indeed, often in concert with them), its questions and ends change with the times. In turn, 'After Antiquity' signals both chronology and a certain measure of aggression: our series offers books about people who not only *came after* antiquity but who also *went after* antiquity, sometimes with a vengeance. In the latter sense, they often found whatever they were looking for, and we shall follow the founding intuition of 'reception' studies as such, by foregrounding the role that later ages have played in the invention of the classical and in the reconstruction of the past. But we do also believe that Greek and Roman authors can, on occasion, write back to the present in ways that are disorienting and destabilizing. Sometimes, in other words, antiquity *comes after* us, and we hope to offer more than a few of those moments too.

Edmund Richardson's *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity* is a particularly fitting volume to begin the series. Richardson introduces the reader to an unlikely cast of characters: wunderkinds, homicides, generals, forgers and erudite liars in what amounts to an unclassical classical tradition. Contrary to received ideas about the ascendancy of Classics in nineteenth-century Britain, Richardson shows us that, throughout this period, perceptions of Classics were highly mutable and liable to shift from ascent to descent at the mercy of contingent causes such as the progress of the Crimean War or a man's fondness for drink. Victorian classicism turns out to be much more friable than one might first imagine. Richardson supplements and rewrites familiar narratives about the place of Classics in the Victorian establishment. While previous scholarship has been alert to criticism, dissent and doubt in Victorian classical debates, influential studies such as Richard Jenkyns' *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) and Frank Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981) have nonetheless affirmed classical antiquity as a usable past and a source of endless self-reflection for the Victorians. Richardson does not dispute that there was widespread belief in the power of the classical past in Victorian Britain, but taking his cue from the work of scholars such as Mary Beard, Simon Goldhill and Christopher Stray, he sets out to demonstrate that this belief was 'surely one of the period's most seductive, yet most insubstantial, visions' (p. 66).

Readers will find William Gladstone and George Grote in these pages, but in minor roles. Instead, in place of a confident classical tradition in which Victorian scholars were the heirs and interpreters of the Greeks and Romans, we are confronted with a world in which 'classical scholars were often depicted as barely fit to be allowed out in public' (p. 41). In Richardson's engrossing account, the ambivalence of Victorian classicism is epitomized by such figures as the Reverend John Selby Watson (1804–84), who despite his career as translator of Xenophon, biographer of Richard Porson, one-time deacon, and headmaster of Stockwell Grammar School, could not avoid the ridicule of an unseemly debate in *The Times* about the shortcomings of a Latin motto that he had penned in a suicide note, confessing to the murder of his wife. Richardson gives us a captivating account of this bizarre episode, which reveals the underside of the Victorians' apparent affinity for Classics.

Instead of the focus on canon and corpus which is so familiar from studies of the classical tradition, Richardson gives us the metaphor of classical antiquity as corpse – a deceased past which was resurrected by the living with unpredictable results. The master tropes here are fragility, uncertainty, instability and misdirection. For every confident claim to a usable past, Richardson finds a classical failure and the miscarriage of hope. Responding to Christopher Stray's scholarship on the sociology of Classics and classical education in the long nineteenth century, Richardson examines the aspirations of those who embraced classical antiquity, in the expectation that it would bring social advancement, wealth, or both. The lives of his protagonists show how frequently these hopes were frustrated. In addition, paying due attention to the institutional power of the Church in Victorian Britain, Richardson analyses the phenomenon of the so-called 'Greek Play Bishops' who were said to have secured ecclesiastical office on the strength of their classical scholarship. In contrast, this book argues that social mobility through Classics eluded the vast majority of those who set store by their investment in classical antiquity.

We have chosen *Classical Victorians* to launch this new series devoted to classical receptions because it offers a stunning reappraisal of the Victorians' relationship with Classics, restoring many forgotten lives to the record. Richardson's analysis and narration of the careers of Theodore Buckley, Robert Brough, Duncan McPherson, the Reverend Selby Watson, Constantine Simonides and Samuel Butler will enthrall readers. We also regard this book as a timely intervention in the broader field of classical receptions. In his insistence on the uncertainty of Victorian classical receptions, which oscillate between hope and disillusionment, success and

failure, Richardson's work speaks to the need to undertake horizontal studies of classical reception in different periods, in order to understand the variations within different reception contexts and the contingency involved in what is represented and what is ignored or consciously suppressed.

In his attention to figures on the edges of the story, whose classical learning ultimately counted for little, Richardson also contributes valuable insights into debates about the institutionalization of Classics and questions of authority and entitlement. If the prodigious classical knowledge of Theodore Buckley was not sufficient to make a career out of Classics for him, and if Thomas Hardy's Jude failed to convert his self-taught classical education into admission to Oxford, what was Classics good for? *Classical Victorians* has much to say about the tangled web of Classics and class that is written into the very nomenclature of the discipline. Works in this series will consider the role that institutional centres have played in the reconstruction of classical antiquity from the early medieval period to the present day, and the role that they continue to play in shaping the way in which different communities understand and interpret the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. At the same time, the emphasis on plural receptions highlights counter-narratives that run parallel to dominant, received traditions. The result, exemplified by Richardson's book, is a thicker account of the uses to which classical antiquity has been put.

The unstable mobility promised by the Classics in Victorian Britain offers interesting material for comparison with other periods and contexts for classical reception. Recent research into African-American classical receptions shows that lives and livelihoods were transformed through the pursuit of Classics and careers were made, not least the life and career of William Sanders Scarborough (1852–1926) so well chronicled in *The autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough: an American Journey from Slavery to Scholorship*, edited by Michele Valerie Ronnick (2005). Richardson's book invites us to pay attention to the struggle and the uncertainty in the stories of men like Scarborough, for whom Classics was certainly not an all-empowering body of knowledge and whose trust in the power of classical antiquity was frequently disappointed. There are no simple narratives here, but instead a series of complicated negotiations with the past influenced by the forces of the present. Similarly, reading *Classical Victorians*, readers may well ask whether there were not both individuals and groups in Victorian Britain whose attempts to construct a usable classical past were more successful, in their own terms, than the labours of Richardson's protagonists. For instance, Isobel Hurst's *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics:*

the Feminine of Homer (2006) suggests that studying Classics was genuinely enabling for many Victorian women. But at the same time, Richardson's study makes us wonder how many women found their hope in Classics misplaced and dropped out of the story. *Classical Victorians* offers an inspiring and far-reaching model for how to approach classical reception studies in all their complexity, and gives us excellent proof, if proof were needed, of how important the Victorians continue to be for framing our understanding of our multivalent relationship with the classical past in the twenty-first century. Alongside narratives of glory and certainty, the Victorians have bequeathed us a catalogue of examples of the fragility of the classical past and the ironies and surprises engendered by its pursuit.

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