

Report of the Democratising Classics Panel at the University of St Andrews, 11-14 July 2018.

The Celtic Conference in Classics is an established academic conference which comprises multiple panels, each running for three days and exploring different aspects of the ancient world. Our panel focused on the theme of “Democratising Classics” and aimed to explore the “democratisation” of Classics in academia and the creative arts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It considered the impact of this process on Classics as a discipline, on classical receptions produced during this period, and on the interaction between art and academia. Some of the questions that the panel sought to explore include, for example: who was and is tasked with the translation of ancient works, with teaching others about classical antiquity, and with shaping the future of the subject? What has been the impact of “democratisation” on creative responses to the classical world, and how do these responses feed into academic debate and practice? Is this democratisation in action?

Our panel brought together 18 speakers from different parts of the UK, the USA, Germany and Denmark, in order to deliberate on and exchange views on the concept of “democratising Classics”. The full programme can be accessed via the official [conference website](#). The result was an exciting panel which worked as a small cohesive conference in its own right. Moreover, the last plenary lecture was delivered by one of our speakers, Peter Meineck, Professor of Classics in the Modern World at New York University, who spoke about his work staging performances of Greek tragedy with veterans. Thanks to the support of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies and the Classical Association, we were able to offer a number of bursaries for graduate and early-career speakers coming from further afield.

The panel also ran in conjunction with a remote project spearheaded by the academic collective [Minus Plato](#). In the weeks preceding and following the conference, speakers were asked to send contributions on different topics related to “democracy” and “Classics”, such as cultural participation, accessibility, and education. Minus Plato then produced a series of posts and collated them into an “exhibition” called “[Our Ancient Group Material](#)” (<http://minusplato.com/exhibitions/our-ancient-group-material>).

Although the panel was extremely diverse and interdisciplinary, there were some recurring themes, such as social equality, outreach and inclusion, mobilisation and participation, and, overall, how to make Classics more accessible. The papers ranged across different subjects, from contemporary poetry and art, education, philosophy, economics, film and drama. Many contributions underlined the necessity to assert that we do need the Classics and the humanities in our contemporary world and we need to challenge and uproot the ideologies of superiority and exclusion that have been

attached to the Classics for too long. After each paper, speakers and audience members engaged in thought-provoking discussions, in which both established scholars and junior researchers were equally engaged.

These are some of the positive reviews we received:

“Congratulations on the terrific job that you both did in conceiving, devising and realising the Democratising Classics panel, and in working so well as a team. You organised and ran the panel with exemplary professionalism, and imagination ... By the Friday, I thought the panel was working more like a tight research seminar than a conference panel as such. That's more testimony to your fine work.”

“My experience of the panel was extremely positive. The papers, whether from senior academics, early career academics, creative practitioners and/or Classicist postgraduates and postdocs, were all of a very high standard and addressed a wide range of important material and vital questions.”

“The conference was such a wonderful, positive experience & I would highly recommend it to anyone who can attend. Such an open, supportive environment – huge kudos to all the organizers! ... The senior scholars were so engaged with junior people in a way that doesn't always happen at conferences. Idk if part of this was because our panel was about Democratising Classics @DemocratisingCI (so it drew a particularly democratically-minded group), but it was a great experience.

@jennymessenger and @rossana_zetti organized a really great panel! (dare I say, the BEST panel?).”