



Conversations with Practitioners: How Technology Can Facilitate Collaboration

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Abstract

Creative responses to the Classics are one of the most powerful engines that fuels the field of Classical Reception. In the new millennium, technology has not only helped facilitate a closer dialogue between practitioners working in a variety of artistic mediums and reception scholars, but has also widened the dissemination possibilities via open-access websites hosted by universities. This paper testifies to this well-established but still growing phenomenon. It is based on the work I carried out at The Open University, UK, as an interviewer for *Classics Confidential* (2013–2016) and *Practitioners Voices in Classical Reception Studies* (2014–2018), and as project leader of the *Classical World New Zealand* project (2017–present) at Massey University. I reflect on how this work has shaped my understanding of the reception process itself and enabled me to contribute to the dissemination of information about exciting new case studies in the long reception history of the Graeco-Roman Classics.

Conversing with practitioners is both illuminating and confronting, in the sense that it demands that scholars engage with the creative process of artists, while reflecting critically on their work. The very topic of this paper, my contributions to websites promoting the work of creative practitioners of Classical Reception, necessitates a self-reflective approach and involves an interrogation of my own practice that is far from standard in traditional academic output. I hope that these personal observations prove helpful and testify to the importance of a practitioner-led approach to Classical Reception, inspired by the methodology championed by my postdoctoral mentor, Professor Lorna Hardwick.¹ This work is rooted in the principle that practice should

¹ L. Hardwick, 'The Theatrical Review as a Primary Source for the Modern Reception of Greek Drama – A Preliminary Evaluation', <https://university.open.ac.uk/arts/research/greek-plays/publications/essays/hardwick-using-reviews> (accessed 05/02/2025). For an example of an interview she conducted, see L. Hardwick, 'Greek Tragedy and the Modern Director: Theatre Director Helen Eastman in Conversation

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guide theory rather than the other way around. Forcing practice into the straight jacket of academic theory, especially when dealing with new and innovative works of art that are modelled on classical sources, can lead to an ill-fitting set of conclusions. Taking my cue from practitioners has always served me well, allowing me to see aspects of the ancient sources that were previously hidden or obscured, and exciting new interpretations from people from outside the narrow confines of academia that allow us to interrogate the ever-evolving state of our relationship with Antiquity.² Crucially, such an approach also problematises the hierarchical view that scholars are in a position of Olympian authority, passing judgement on artists' activities, rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue.³

In the title of this paper, I deliberately use the term 'practitioners' as an entry point into an examination of my relationship, over the course of my career, with a variety of practitioners of reception and the innovative new versions of the Graeco-Roman Classics that they have created.⁴ I also wish to acknowledge the role that these conversations and collaborations have played not only in my own work, but also in the work of many other Classical Reception scholars, especially in the field of Performance Reception.⁵ This paper examines three indicative examples from my own work, at different stages of my career, that testify to the importance of this type of dialogue and collaborative ways of working. It should also be noted that I have adopted a wide definition of the term 'practitioner' that includes artists who work in a variety of media and genres, including but not limited to actors, theatre directors, filmmakers, painters, designers, musicians, writers but also students and even some scholars. Their audiences are also an essential part of the conversation that adds more layers and is part of new interpretations thus keeping the Classics not merely 'alive' but flourishing.⁶

Footnote 1 (continued)

with Lorna Hardwick', in *Dialogues with the Past: Classical Reception Theory and Practice*, ed. A Bakogianni, London, 2013, pp. 27–37.

² L. Hardwick, *Reception Studies*, Oxford, 2003, p. 4.

³ On the importance but also the challenges of a meaningful dialogue with Antiquity, see B. Holmes, 'Liquid Antiquity', in *Liquid Antiquity*, ed. B. Holmes, Geneva, 2017, pp. 18–59 (55).

⁴ The ancient Mediterranean world was populated by many peoples with their own cultures and histories. For a groundbreaking study of the need to engage with the complexity of this region, see M. Umachandran and M. Ward (eds.), *Critical Ancient World Studies: The Case for Forgetting Classics*, London, 2024. Working in the field of Classical Reception requires us to openly acknowledge our research agenda and to recognise our own set of limitations. In my career, my focus has been primarily on ancient Greece and its reception, especially in modern Greece.

⁵ To name but three illustrative examples of Performance Reception scholars who based their research on interviews they conducted with practitioners, see O. Olasope, 'Lament as Women's Speech in Femi Osofisan's Adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women: Women of Owu*', *Textus*, 7, 2017, 105–17; M. Treu, 'Incense on the Grass: A Strongly Perfumed Libation Bearers (1999)', in *The Smells and Senses of Antiquity in the Modern Imagination: The Fragrant and the Foul*, ed. A. Grand-Clément and C. Ribeyrol, London, 2022, 224–42; and G. Van Steen, 'The Audacity of Truth: The *Antigone* of Aris Alexandrou, a Play of Island Detention from the Greek Civil War', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 54 (1), 2011, pp. 115–36.

⁶ On the key role spectators play in the reception process, see L. Hardwick, 'The Problem of the Spectators: Ancient and Modern', in *Dialogues with the Past: Classical Reception Theory and Practice*, ed. A Bakogianni, London, 2013, pp. 11–26 (16).

An Experience-led Theoretical and Methodological Model

My academic practice and theoretical and methodological approach were shaped by an early formative experience of meeting and informally interviewing the Greek Cypriot theatre and film director Michael Cacoyannis (1922–2011).⁷ After a screening of his Euripidean trilogy (*Electra*, 1962; *The Trojan Women*, 1971; and *Iphigenia*, 1977) at the Barbican Theatre in London (12–13 May 2001), he kindly agreed to talk to me, even though I was then a mere PhD student working on my thesis on *Electra*'s reception.⁸ The majority of my other case studies of the long reception history of this fascinating tragic heroine were created by artists in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chance to talk to a living practitioner and to ask them questions about their reception of a classical source made a lasting impression and quite literally changed the course of my academic career. This seminal encounter instilled in me what soon became a guiding principle, namely that the option to converse with a living practitioner is an opportunity that should always be vigorously pursued.

Just as importantly, this formative experience also taught me that we can read against the grain of a practitioner's self-fashioning narrative, a stance I have increasingly adopted in the case of Cacoyannis' Euripidean trilogy. Interviewing a practitioner does not mean automatically accepting their point of view, but it can deepen our engagement with their work and gain us a better understanding of how they wish it to be understood and received. For example, Cacoyannis generally preferred to focus on the universal resonances of Greek Tragedy, rather than the contemporary and local ones.⁹ It should be noted that this view that Greek Tragedy/Classical Literature has a universal and timeless appeal was and continues to resonate and is a powerful motivating force for directors adapting the ancient plays for stage and

⁷ It should be noted that film is a collaborative medium, but it should also be acknowledged that this trilogy was a passion project for its director, who directed, wrote the scripts, secured funding and carefully chose all his main collaborators. The groundbreaking work of Marianne McDonald in analysing Cacoyannis' Euripidean trilogy should also be credited: her *Euripides in Cinema: The Heart Made Visible* (Philadelphia, 1983) was a trailblazing monograph in the field of the reception of classical tragedy on screen. She was among the first Classical Reception scholars to interview Cacoyannis, and Irene Papas (over the phone): M. McDonald and M. M. Winkler, 'Michael Cacoyannis and Irene Papas on Greek Tragedy', in *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, ed. M. M. Winkler, New York, 2001, pp. 72–89 (this is an abridged version of a longer interview, originally published in an earlier iteration of Winkler's volume, titled *Classics and Cinema*, London, 1991).

⁸ This encounter with the film and its director resulted in a whole chapter (ch. 5) devoted to an analysis of *Electra* (1962): A. Bakogianni, 'Electra on the Silver Screen: Michael Cacoyannis' Cinematic Reception of Euripides' Tragedy', in *Electra: Ancient and Modern: Aspects of the Tragic Heroine's Reception*, London, 2012, pp. 153–94.

⁹ In a 1979 interview with Gianni Phlessa for the Greek newspaper *To Vima* (Sunday edition), Cacoyannis described Greek tragedy as 'eternal' (author's translation from the Greek): M. Cacoyannis, Δηλαδή... (Namely...), Athens, 2018, p. 89. In the same interview the director claimed that his only truly 'political' film was his documentary *Attila 74* (1975) about the Turkish invasion of his home island of Cyprus (95).

screen.¹⁰ And while scholarship has sought to nuance this view, many practitioners continue to stress the universality of Greek Drama, and its ‘timeless’ quality.¹¹

Cacoyannis’ cinematic trilogy is embedded in and informed by events in the 1960s and 70s, which are in turn rooted in the conflicts and crises of the first half of the twentieth century. His moving anti-war spectacles (especially in his *The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia*) cannot be divorced from the conflicts that Cacoyannis lived through (the London Blitz in World War Two, the Vietnam War and the invasion of his home island of Cyprus in 1974), as well as the political and economic crises of modern Greece, most notably in the years leading up to and during the Greek dictatorship (1967–1974).¹² Cacoyannis might have preferred to distance himself from such ‘local’ and ‘personal’ connections to the ancient material but there is no denying that they shaped how he ‘received’ and cinematically interpreted Euripides’ source plays. One of the tenets of Classical Reception is that our own positionality, our backgrounds and agendas impact how we understand and respond to our ancient sources but also the world more generally.¹³

Practitioners, scholars and audiences are all engaged in an intense and meaningful relationship with the Classics that can be described as a type of dedicated fandom. As other papers in this special issue have demonstrated this can be a very fruitful approach to examining our relationship with the Graeco-Roman Classics.¹⁴ Acknowledging our obsession with Antiquity can be wonderfully freeing and open new avenues of thought and research. One of the advantages of working with practitioners is that they are upfront and open about their passion for the ancient world but also about the creative freedom with which they adapt it to produce their own new works of art.

On the theoretical level, the ‘affective turn’ in Adaptation Studies is a particularly useful model with which to discuss classical stories, characters, and vignettes that cross media and are reconfigured in new and exciting ways. For the present discussion John Hodgkins’ *The Drift: Affect, Adaptation, and New Perspectives on Fidelity* (2013) proved particularly germane. Hodgkins expands on Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the ‘drift’ to argue that

¹⁰ On the ‘timeless appeal’ of Euripides’ tragedies and Cacoyannis’ trilogy as ‘evidence’ supporting this view, see McDonald, ‘Michael Cacoyannis’ (n. 7 above), p. 72. On the dangers of applying this label to the Classics, see Holmes ‘Liquid Antiquity’ (n. 3 above), p. 24.

¹¹ S. Goldhill, 2007, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today*, Chicago/London, 2007, p. 128. To name but one illustrative example, an advertisement for a 2023 production of *Medea* at Soho Place, London, referred to the tragedy as a ‘timeless play’ <https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/show/27552-medea>. See also: <https://sohoplace.org/shows/medea> which advanced the same view without specifically using the term (both accessed 05/02/2025).

¹² A. Bakogianni, ‘The Anti-War Spectacle: Denouncing War in Michael Cacoyannis’ Euripidean Trilogy’, in *War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict*, ed. A. Bakogianni and V. M. Hope, London, 2015, pp. 291–311. For the wider context, see G. Van Steen, *Stage of Emergency: Theatre and Public Performance Under the Greek Military Dictatorship of 1967–1974*, Oxford, 2014.

¹³ Hardwick, ‘Reception Studies’ (n. 2 above), pp. 7–8.

¹⁴ On the intersection between Classics and fandom culture, see Cristina Salcedo González, Liz Gloyne and Henry Jenkins’ papers in this special issue.

[...] it is less important to classify a text [...] and cast judgement on it, that it is to recognize the particular affects a text is fostering and how these affective energies are being transmitted from one work to the next, how they are drifting from one medium to another provoking transformations and becomings in the process.¹⁵

Classical Reception theory reminds us that another essential element in the mix in this nexus is the audience receiving these receptions of the Classics and adding their own layers of interactivity and fandom. However, the practitioners might have chosen to interpret and recast their classical models, the audience adds yet more readings, as do scholars, thus broadening the horizons of meaning and the interpretive possibilities. This helps to keep the Classics truly alive rather than simply re-animating them.

How Websites can Facilitate our Dialogue with Practitioners

With this caveat in mind, we return to the importance of talking with practitioners and of trying to record and preserve these conversations with the help of technology. Websites are in the second decade of the new millennium a common and rather basic technology, but they remain influential in disseminating information. Some of the earliest efforts of digitising classical information are by today's standards relatively low-tech and involve the creation of websites hosting online databases.¹⁶ Two well-known and impactful examples from the UK are The Open University's *Classical Receptions in Drama and Poetry in English from c. 1970–2005* and the *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama*, The University of Oxford.¹⁷ I did some work for the former, but the latter has over time become the more active of the two. This brings me to an important practical question that needs to be acknowledged: databases and other websites require maintenance and that necessitates adequate levels of staffing and resources.¹⁸ Without them a website, however initially successful, 'ages' in technological terms and over time becomes less user friendly and thus less effective.¹⁹

A groundbreaking publication in the field is the online journal *Practitioners' Voices in Classical Reception Studies (PVCRS)* founded by Lorna Hardwick at the Open University and continued by Jessica Hughes. I was fortunate enough to be able

¹⁵ J. Hodgkins, *The Drift: Affect, Adaptation, and New Perspectives on Fidelity*, New York/London 2013, p. 11.

¹⁶ For a brief history of early groundbreaking Digital Classics projects, see H. Stead 'Classical Reception Online', *Nunt. Antiquus*, 17 (2), 2021, pp. 17–28 (19–21).

¹⁷ <https://university.open.ac.uk/arts/research/greek-plays/> and <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk> (both accessed 04/02/2025). See also Stead 'Classical Reception Online' (n. 16 above), p. 21.

¹⁸ The Open University's website continues to be a useful depository of the tremendous work the research project of the same name accomplished. See also Sara Palermo and Luis Unceta Gómez's paper about a Spanish example of an important database in this special issue.

¹⁹ The problem of adequate resourcing for digital material is discussed further below.

to contribute three interviews to this project between 2014 and 2018. As stated on the opening page of the website:

Its aim is to provide a forum in which creative practitioners (theatre directors, actors, poets, translators, artists, architects, composers, choreographers and others) can discuss the relationship between their work and the classical texts, themes and contexts on which they draw.²⁰

I was also the academic consultant for one of these three projects whose practitioners I interviewed for *PVCRS*, the BBC World Service radio programme *Telling Tales: The Odyssey* (original broadcast date: 4 April 2018).²¹ This radio programme recast the Homeric hero Odysseus as a refugee turning him into a potent symbol for our times. After the broadcast of this award-winning programme, I was fortunate to interview its producer Penny Boreham (in person in Oxford),²² and her close collaborators Prodromos Tsinikoris (narrator/*rhapsodos*, in person in Athens), and Giles Lewin (music, over email). This collaboration demonstrates the opportunities such close working relationships can give rise to.

The Odyssey was the third instalment of the *Telling Tales* programme, and it juxtaposed the stories of refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos, caught up in the ongoing asylum seeker crisis, with the Homeric epic. Most of the refugees whose voices are heard were not familiar with this ancient Greek story, but the programme highlighted the importance of sharing stories among people from different cultures and what these exchanges can tell us about what unites rather than what divides us.²³ Boreham and her collaborators thus used an ancient story as a vehicle to deliver a very contemporary message to their modern audience. The ‘European’ refugee crisis was and remains an ongoing issue for many thousands of people. Scholarly and creative interpretations of the *Odyssey*, the ancient story of a long and perilous home-ward-bound journey, now tend to focus on the precarious nature of any *nostos*,²⁴ and to explore the impact of Odysseus’ absence on his family, and community, as well as on those he encounters during his travels and while fighting at Troy. These aspects of the ancient story lend themselves particularly well to new retellings that can be used to activate modern resonances, but more importantly they offer real people the opportunity to tell their own stories.

Another project to which I contributed between 2013 and 2016 was *Classics Confidential*, founded by my Open University colleagues, Elton Barker and Jessica

²⁰ <https://university.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/> (accessed 04/02/2025). See also Stead, ‘Classical Reception Online’ (n. 16 above), p. 25.

²¹ <https://university.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2018/boreham> (accessed 16/02/2025).

²² It won a Silver Medal at the ‘New York Festivals International Radio programme awards for the World’s Best Radio’: <http://pennyboreham.com/about-2/> (accessed 15/02/2025).

²³ On how stories can cross cultural barriers, see C. Della Coletta, *When Stories Travel: Cross-Cultural Encounters between Fiction and Film*, Baltimore, MD, 2012.

²⁴ M. Oikonomou, ‘Manteia, Mediality, Migration’, in *Classics and Media Theory*, ed. P. Michelakis, Oxford, 2020, pp. 291–312 (309).

Hughes, but ran independently.²⁵ This well-received video and later podcast series showcased the work of both scholars and practitioners.²⁶ This opportunity to interview colleagues and artists has led to more encounters and working partnerships in the years since. Practitioners and colleagues have asked me to work on projects based on the interviews I conducted for *Classics Confidential*. These video interviews became my ‘calling cards’, they showcase my approach to researching and teaching in the field of Classical Reception.

When I moved to Massey University in New Zealand, I drew inspiration from these two projects and, with my former Open University colleagues’ blessing, I combined the two formats to create the *Classical World New Zealand* project (henceforth CWNZ) which combines text and video to showcase interviews with practitioners. This time, in contrast to my practice for *Classics Confidential*, the focus is entirely on the practitioner(s) themselves, while I asked my questions from behind the camera, so they could be edited out. The practitioner(s) could thus communicate directly with the viewer, who could focus entirely on their words. Like *Classics Confidential*, CWNZ video interviews are also available on YouTube which enhances their dissemination potential.

My motivation for starting this project was to become familiar with the state of classical reception in the new country I migrated to, also known in Māori as Aotearoa. As stated on the project’s website, ‘*Classical World New Zealand* demonstrates the modern world’s ongoing dialogue with ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt and highlights New Zealand’s contribution to this conversation’. What I learned from the practitioners I interviewed over the course of this ongoing project (interrupted during the pandemic) is that hybridity is the name of the game in New Zealand receptions of the Classics. This key term is defined by Sanders as ‘a blend, fusion or compound of influences’.²⁷

The majority of New Zealand practitioners are far less concerned with ‘fidelity’ to their classical models and more about ensuring that they ‘speak’ to / connect with their audiences. We are generally dealing with a) creative adaptations, b) personal responses and c) practical approaches to adapting the classics for a local New Zealand context.²⁸ To offer just one characteristic example of this type of unfettered reception, one of my first interviewees in 2017 was Kelly Harris, the director of the

²⁵ <https://classicsconfidential.co.uk> (accessed 04/02/2025). I was fortunate enough to be interviewed by Dr Jessica Hughes herself about my work on Electra: <https://classicsconfidential.co.uk/2013/03/13/electra-ancient-and-modern-with-anastasia-bakogianni/> (accessed 14/02/2025).

²⁶ Some of the videos have had close to 3,000 views.

²⁷ J. Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, London/New York, 2006, p. 161. On the concept of the hybrid and classical mythology, see L. Unceta Gómez and H. González Vaquerizo (eds.), *En los márgenes del mito. Hibridaciones de la mitología clásica en la cultura de masas contemporánea*, Madrid, 2022.

²⁸ For a longer discussion of the reception of Greek Tragedy in New Zealand based on findings from CWNZ, see A. Bakogianni, ‘Antigone in Aotearoa: Performing Sophocles’ Tragedy in New Zealand’, in *Re-embodying and Rethinking Greek and Roman Drama in Modern Times*, ed. A. Sarkissian, H. Marshall and E. Poláčková, Leiden, 2025, pp.120–50 (120–3).

Skin Theatre company,²⁹ who explained in detail the decision-making process by which this semi-professional theatre company adapted Euripides' *Medea*. Worried that staging the ancient tragedy in the context of small-town New Zealand would not attract an audience they decided to recast it and modernise the story so that instead of performing *Medea* the story revolved around eight women getting together to read and discuss the ancient tragedy. Under the title *The Book Club* (2016), this new play asked these eight women to take it in turn to voice Medea, inspired by the themes of family embedded in the ancient play, but expressed in terms of contemporary concerns and anxieties about the position of women in New Zealand society and the problems encountered by migrants trying to settle in Aotearoa (see Fig. 1). The reasons why the creative team adapted the play so freely is that their primary concern was for the ancient story of Medea to connect with New Zealand audiences. They thus sought to localise rather than foreignize the ancient drama.

Technology is greatly facilitating my current collaboration with the American artist Jim Cogswell about his artwork *Vinyl Euripides* which he personally installed in 2022 at the Michael Cacoyannis Foundation (henceforth MCF) in Athens.³⁰ In his press release about the project, the artist described the work as 'A trilogy of vinyl narratives on three floors of glass based on Michael Cacoyannis' cinematic adaptation of three tragedies by Euripides'. This exciting and rich visual and performative network synthesises three distinctive components: Euripides' Greek tragedies (*Electra*, *The Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*), Michael Cacoyannis' cinematic trilogy and Jim Cogswell's art installation, four years in the making.

I offer two indicative examples of how my conversations with the artist have already enhanced my understanding of his creative process, featuring two of my favourite tragic heroines. In Michael Cacoyannis' film, his *Electra* (Irene Papas) faces the viewer in this memorable scene backed by the chorus of country women, all dressed in black as a sign of mourning. Cacoyannis' *Electra* has more agency and gives expression to her anger and desire for matricide, although at the end of the film she comes to regret the part she played in killing her mother and punishes herself by going into self-exile. Jim Cogswell takes this a step further by bringing *Electra's* rage to the fore. He drew her entirely in red, the colour of blood and anger. In marked contrast to the chorus of women drawn in white, the red *Electra's* wild, spiky hair visually captures the essence of her transgressive nature. A woman's anger and outspokenness then as now unsettle our society and mark her out as 'other'.³¹ The

²⁹ <https://www.massey.ac.nz/about/colleges-schools-and-institutes/college-of-humanities-and-social-sciences/research-in-the-college-of-humanities-and-social-sciences/humanities-media-and-creative-communication-research/classical-world-new-zealand/kelly-harris-interview/> (accessed 21/02/2025).

³⁰ For the announcement of the installation, see: <https://mcf.gr/en/jim-cogswell-vinyl-euripides/>. The MCF was founded by Cacoyannis himself in 2003. The foundation's headquarters opened their doors in 2008. The MCF's mission statement outlines their aims, and how they are building on Cacoyannis' vision: 'The objective of the Foundation is the study, support, and promotion of the arts of the theatre and cinema, across all eras, as well as the recording and safekeeping of works created': <https://mcf.gr/en/management/>. For more information on their activities, see: <https://mcf.gr/en/events-2/> (all three websites were last accessed 30/06/2025).

³¹ For an in-depth discussion of the problem of feminine vengeance using *Electra* as a case study, see A. Bakogianni '¿*Quo Vadis*, *Electra*? El problema de la venganza femenina en la tragedia griega y en la

shape of her hair was suggested to Cogswell by a cactus in his home. This type of anecdotal story illuminates the artist's creative process and showcases how connections and intuitive leaps are made (Figs. 2, 3).

In the final scene of Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia*, Irene Papas as Clytemnestra gazes balefully at the departing Greek fleet with hate-filled eyes. Mikis Theodorakis' soundtrack underscores the mortal danger that awaits Agamemnon upon his return (Clytemnestra even warns him but he chooses to ignore her). The ending of Cacoyannis' Euripidean trilogy foreshadows the opening of his earlier *Electra*. In the nearly silent prologue added to Euripides' source text, the audience bear witness to the murder of the king upon his return from Troy (which also sets the scene for an audience unfamiliar with the classical story). At the end of *Iphigenia*, Clytemnestra watches the Greek fleet depart for Troy, while plotting her revenge for her daughter's sacrifice thus completing the circle and taking us back to Agamemnon's murder. Only this time we are on the side of Clytemnestra because we understand her motives and empathise with her suffering. Papas' moving performance, as both the daughter in the earlier film and the mother in the final movie (as well as Helen in *The Trojan Women*), draws attention to their familial connections, while highlighting their contrasting fates.

In Jim Cogswell's rendition of Clytemnestra in vinyl, she becomes a figure in a red mask, with red hands, holding a red dagger gazing at the departing Greek ships in blue. Above but also behind Clytemnestra hangs the ominous red net connecting her to the twisted clouds in the sky. The viewer can easily conjure up the fierce wind pushing the triremes towards Troy, so powerfully represented in the conclusion of Cacoyannis' trilogy (see Fig. 4 and 5). The use of red to suggest Clytemnestra's rage echoes her daughter, Electra's similar depiction. In this scene, Cogswell's Clytemnestra assumes the role of avenger after the devastating loss of her beloved daughter, Iphigenia. Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice their daughter on the altar of his ambition breaks their marriage and tears apart their family.³² The artist added helicopters flying over the Greek ships as a means of visually linking the ancient war with the more recent Vietnam War, thus reiterating the current position of the Trojan War as an archetypal war that can help us make sense of recent and ongoing conflicts.

Footnote 31 (continued)

cultura popular contemporánea', in *Clasicismo e identidades contemporáneas. Recepciones clásicas en la cultura de masas*, ed. L. Unceta Gómez and C. Salcedo González, Madrid, 2024, pp. 33–50.

³² For an in-depth discussion of this theme in the film, see A. Bakogianni, 'Annihilating Clytemnestra: The Severing of the Mother-Daughter Bond in Michael Cacoyannis' *Iphigenia* (1977)', in *Ancient Greek Women in Film*, ed. K. P. Nikoloutsos, Oxford, 2013, 207–33.



Fig. 1 The challenges of modern motherhood, *The Book Club* (2016). © Skin Theatre Company

Throughout history, the Graeco-Roman Classics have proven both a force for good and ill but their success is undeniable.³³ Classical scholars are not and should not act as gatekeepers but as engaged and active members of a community that keeps abreast of public debates and is involved in these wider discourses as James I. Porter, and Johanna Hannik have argued.³⁴ Now more than ever Classical Reception scholars need to question why we work in this field and how best to demonstrate

³³ As the *Pharos* online project acknowledges it is the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, in particular, that have long been held up as models for imitation by conservative forces. This is why one of the project's goals during our ongoing culture wars is to act as a modern-day lighthouse that allows 'students to recognize and challenge the persistence of white supremacist narratives around Greco-Roman antiquity', as stated on *Pharos*' home page: <https://pharos.vassarspaces.net> (accessed 28/06/2025). Another aspect of this dark side of the reception history of the Graeco-Roman Classics is that other important ancient Mediterranean cultures like, for example, Egypt and Persia are exoticized and othered. The roots of this interpretation can unfortunately be found in many of our ancient source texts themselves. For example, in Herodotus' *History*, we encounter not only his fascination and exploration of other cultures but also his biases against them. Specifically, although not exclusively, against the Persians, who become the main antagonist in his narrative of tyranny (the Persian Empire) versus freedom (the small alliance of Greek city-states that opposed Xerxes' forces). While academics now seek to offer their students a more complex picture of this ancient conflict, right-wing interpretations fixate on this simplistic reading. For an illustrative example of such nuanced work, see E. Bridges, *Imagining Xerxes: Ancient Perspectives on a Persian King*, London, 2014.

³⁴ J. I. Porter, 'Reception Studies: Future Prospects', in *A Companion to Classical Reception*, ed. L. Hardwick and C. Stray, Malden, MA/Oxford, 2008, pp. 469–81 (479) and J. Hannik, 'It's Time to Embrace Critical Classical Reception', 2017: <https://eidolon.pub/its-time-to-embrace-critical-classical-reception-d3491a40ecc3> (accessed 02/02/2025).



Fig. 2 Electra and the chorus, *Electra* (1962). © Michael Cacoyannis Foundation

the positive impact that Classics has the potential to make, especially in light of the big societal challenges we are facing.³⁵ One way of doing that involves engaging in dialogue with artists, performers, filmmakers, novelists, and other creatives who are practising reception, in the active sense of doing reception. They are at the forefront of helping to keep the classical world alive and meaningful for new audiences, new generations, new media, new works of art. Technology and dedicated websites play an important mediating role in showcasing the historical and contemporary impact of Classics,³⁶ and the work of creatives as shall be demonstrated in the next section.

³⁵ For a discussion of some of these challenges, see A. Bakogianni and L. Unceta Gómez, 'Introduction: Classical Reception in the Early 2020s, Critical Times and Where to Next?', in *Classical Reception: New Challenges in a Changing World*, ed. A. Bakogianni and L. Unceta Gómez, Berlin/Boston, 2024, pp. 1–18.

³⁶ An example of a website that tackles the damning public perception that Classics is an elitist subject, and the historical reasons for this view, is <https://www.classicsandclass.info> (accessed 14/05/2025).



Fig. 3 Jim Cogswell's *Electra and the chorus panel* from *Vinyl Euripides* (2022). © The artist

Technology and Practitioner Resources

The fast pace of technological advancements from the beginning of the new millennium to the present greatly facilitates our work in this area. Using my own experience as an example, I regretfully note that preserving that spontaneous conversation I had with Michael Cacoyannis in the form of an audio or video recording, let alone uploading them on a public-facing website, was not available to me as an option in 2001 (instead I took handwritten notes). Fortunately, with greater institutional support, I gained access to such technology later in my career, while working at The Open University, UK, and currently at Massey University, New Zealand, which crucially includes permission to display material on these institutions' websites. Free websites like, for example, WordPress do not support extensive audio-visual material and linked social media accounts. Additionally, institutional IT support is an invaluable asset that greatly facilitates the process and ensures that a Digital Humanities' project is properly maintained and updated. It also fosters the project's potential to reach a wider audience and have a more meaningful and long-term impact.

In terms of recording interviews with practitioners, hand-held cameras with good microphones have become ever more versatile, portable and affordable in the intervening years, thus enabling us to preserve and share such interviews, alongside the more traditional long-form text format for such conversations, greatly facilitated by our ability to publish this material on institutionally supported websites. As distance-learning providers, The Open University and Massey University have a vested



Fig. 4 Clytemnestra's hate-filled eyes, *Iphigenia* (1977). © Michael Cacoyannis Foundation

interest in supporting such work,³⁷ but other institutions, volunteer organisations and individuals host a variety of websites devoted to the ancient world, while podcasting has become a popular medium.³⁸

Accessibility and digital long-term preservation are major concerns, not only for the websites discussed in this paper, but for Digital Humanities more generally.³⁹ As institutional support waxes and wanes, long-term survival is not guaranteed and requires flexibility and adaptability and for the torch to be passed on to

³⁷ Many universities now provide media training for their staff or subsidise attendance on relevant courses. Distance learning institutions whose staff must create audio-visual resources as part of their teaching duties tend to offer such opportunities. I hereby gratefully acknowledge the media training I received from both The Open University and Massey University, New Zealand.

³⁸ *Classics Confidential* switched to audio interviews in 2017. For examples of popular podcasts about the ancient world, see: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-best-ancient-history-podcasts-119411> (accessed 12/02/2025). For a list of some of the field of Classical Reception's major projects, see: <https://classicalreception.org/links/> (accessed 14/02/2025). For developments in blogging practice by classicists, see Liz Gloyn's paper in this special issue.

³⁹ For a discussion of the benefits and challenges of working in Digital Classics and Digital Humanities more generally, see M. Terras, 'The Digital Classicist: Disciplinary Focus and Interdisciplinarity', in *Digital Research in the Study of Classical Antiquity*, ed. S. Mahony and G. Bodard, London, 2010, pp. 171–89.



Fig. 5 Jim Cogswell's Clytemnestra from *Vinyl Euripides* (2022). © The artist

a new generation.⁴⁰ A successful example is the *Classical Reception Studies Network (CRSN)*, originally founded in 2004, but still going strong in a new format, two decades later.⁴¹ After the original Arts and Humanities Research Council grant that helped set up the network ran out, The Open University continued to support the network for a time and to host its website, until it passed on the torch to other institutions and individuals. This is both natural and desirable, for such networks, projects and websites to survive and thrive, long term, they must evolve and the personnel looking after them must be rotated.⁴²

When teaching the ancient world on screen and other reception topics that draw on resources created by practitioners, copyright complications can arise and are particularly relevant for open-access resources, where permission must be sought and obtained. For example, Michael Cacoyannis' Euripidean trilogy was not widely available after the films' initial releases in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, his *Electra* and *Iphigenia* could not be viewed outside film festivals like the one I attended at the Barbican. It took another few years before the director was able

⁴⁰ The stimulating online magazine *Eidolon* stopped publishing in 2020: <https://eidolon.pub> (accessed 20/02/2025).

⁴¹ <https://classicalreception.org> (accessed 14/02/2025).

⁴² I was privileged to oversee the *CRSN* website between 2010 and 2013. Maintaining a website and keeping it updated, even with the support of the university's IT staff, necessitates a big investment of time and effort.

to resolve the copyright issues that were preventing the films from becoming available on DVD. Negotiations dragged on for many years with MGM studios,⁴³ who still hold the global rights for both movies. Finally, they released a Region 1 DVD of *Electra* for the North American market in 2002.⁴⁴ In 2006, a Collectors' Deluxe DVD boxset of Cacoyannis' Euripidean trilogy became available for Region 2, marketed and sold by a Greek company called Audio Visual Enterprises. The latter is no longer available for purchase, but as of the time of writing Region 1, as well as a Region free DVD and Blue Ray of *Electra* from a Spanish source were available for sale on Amazon and other reputable online sellers.

Many people around the world, however, now encounter the trilogy not on DVD or on Greek national television (ERT), where it is occasionally broadcast,⁴⁵ but on YouTube. The copyright implications are complex and murky, and this is an online space that is hard to police. Under the educational umbrella, certain types of uses of YouTube clips are permitted, but it is useful to have good advice on these issues and ideally some clear institutional guidelines and support.⁴⁶ Thanks to the generosity of the MCF I was able to make *The Trojan Women* available on a dedicated site to Open University students who chose the elective on Classical Reception, part of the Post Graduate Foundation Module in Classical Studies (A863, 2014–2024). The opportunity to watch and engage with the whole movie, as well as working closely with key scenes is an invaluable teaching tool.⁴⁷ It is rare that a university can offer the public open access to movies, plays, novels, poems, musical compositions and more; in other words, an artist's entire oeuvre. Many universities do offer some level of access to such creative outputs, but only for their students and staff (as in the example, above). One of the key advantages of the online interview format is that it enables us to share clips, snippets, extracts, and other examples of the creative output of artists thus both promoting their work but also the impact of Classics more generally.

As these examples demonstrate, long-term access to the resources practitioners make available to scholars and the wider public involve complicated arrangements and negotiations with both individuals and institutions. To reiterate a key point, the

⁴³ Then known as United Artists/MGM, now Amazon MGM Studios (<https://www.mgm.com>, accessed 19/02/2025). MGM released the first World Films Region 1 DVD of the film.

⁴⁴ <https://thesignatureshop.co.uk/pages/dvd-region-codes-explained> (accessed 11/02/2025). Since information about DVD Regions is normally found on the websites of multinational technology companies, I have chosen to refer to the succinct explanation provided by smaller concern by a childhood favourite, the British actor and television presenter Warwick Davis.

⁴⁵ In Greece and Cyprus, Cacoyannis' Euripidean Trilogy is now distributed by Feelgood Entertainment, S. A. They have given the films to the state-owned, public television and radio broadcaster ERT for broadcast. For more information, see <https://filmcommission.gr/production-company/feelgood-entertainment-s-a/> and <https://company.ert.gr> (both accessed 12/02/2025).

⁴⁶ <https://bytescare.com/blog/how-to-use-movie-clips-on-youtube-without-copyright> (accessed 12/02/2025).

⁴⁷ For further details about our pedagogical design and approach, see: A. Bakogianni, and P. James, 'Classical Drama at a Distance: Teaching Performance Reception in an Online Environment', in *Classical Reception for All? Theory and Practice in Today's Classroom*, *Classical World* 112.1, ed. A. Bakogianni, 2018, pp. 707–25.

project leader and/or interviewer must obtain the artists' consent for all material made available on a website. Such a website is another form of engagement with the public, as well as having the potential to engender further conversations with interested scholars. Finally, it is important to remember that after the initial outlay of assets needed to set up a website devoted to interviews with practitioners, such a resource requires regular updating of not just the content, but also of the long-term support of web designers and senior management. None of these prerequisites are guaranteed, so running such a website requires a long-term commitment and the willingness to continue to advocate for the importance of such resources.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on efforts to promote the work of practitioners, who actively receive the culture of the ancient world and create new and exciting works of art. This is but one area of Digital Classics, but an important one that will grow further in the future. In Classical Reception, we acknowledge how our own background, education, agendas and biases shape our engagement with the cultures of the ancient world. In my own practice as a researcher, I gravitate towards this field because my main interests lie in performance and visual culture, widely defined. My education and formative experiences have pushed me in this direction. Opportunities for dialogue outside of academia lead to the broadening of one's horizons in fruitful ways. They can also help expand not only one's research avenues but more importantly to showcase creative responses to the Classics in a variety of media (in this paper alone, my case studies included film, theatre, radio and contemporary art).

The type of interview, digitised and uploaded on a dedicated website, that is the subject of this paper involves not just a scholar talking with a practitioner(s), but active engagement with the new version of the classical past created by the subject. This necessitates an open and sympathetic outlook but does not entail the adoption of a practitioner's point of view. A balance must be maintained between the two, the distancing and immersion also required by my favourite ancient genre, Greek Tragedy. Above all, we must acknowledge that 'there are a plurality of strategies for putting aspects of antiquity in relationship to one another, with other cultural forms, and with the contemporary world'.⁴⁸ We might like some more than others, but it is important to remain open to new interpretations, versions and works of art. The open-access preservation of such interviews allows the conversation to be shared with other interested academics, students and the public.

In conclusion, technology has facilitated classicists' ongoing efforts to promote both new and established approaches to learning about, studying and researching the ancient world. To do so, we have had to overcome a series of challenges such as accessibility and resourcing. Or to put it more simply such projects necessitate access to technology, equipment and the time and resources needed to create online content like websites, with audio and video-edited content. Video-editing

⁴⁸ Holmes, 'Liquid Antiquity' (n. 3 above), p. 58.

is necessary to produce the professional level results that most universities now demand, but it is an expensive service, especially if it is outsourced. To ensure these websites' long-term survival, we need to continue to invest in maintaining, updating and growing them. Undoubtedly, this represents a substantial investment for both individuals and institutions, but I hope this paper also testifies to the benefits such endeavours confer on not only our own field of Classical Reception, but also in terms of outreach and impact. Now more than ever, we need to demonstrate the benefits of Classics and the Humanities more generally. We are engaged in a struggle against anti-intellectual movements around the globe that denigrate the value of the Humanities. A particularly distressing development is the proliferation of alt-right appropriations of the Classics on the Internet.⁴⁹ One effective way in which we can counter such forces is by using websites, supported by social media campaigns, to showcase the demonstrable benefits of studying these subjects and of engaging with the past in a variety of meaningful, creative and impactful ways.

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⁴⁹ As discussed above (n. 33), the *Pharos* project is a useful resource for understanding and combating such appropriations. On alt-right interpretations of the Graeco-Roman Classics, see also Oskar Aguado-Cantabrana and Carlos Sanchez Perez's papers in this special issue.