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A Proletarian Classics?

Henry Stead*

THE BACKSTORY

The relationship between the study of Greek and Roman classics and European communism, particularly in the USSR and the Soviet bloc, has attracted increasing critical attention over the past decade. There have been several international conferences organized by scholars, including my coeditors David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska, which have resulted in the volumes *Classics and Communism* (2013) and *Classics and Class* (2016).[1] More recently, ancient theater and (mainly) Soviet communism in Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of an international conference, resulting in a third volume, *Classics and Communism in Theatre* (2019).[2] The subject is gaining momentum. A new network established by The Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, and collaborating with Oxford's Archive of the Performance of Greek

* University of St. Andrews, School of Classics, Swallowgate, Butts Wynd, St. Andrews KY16 9AL, UK; has22@st-andrews.ac.uk.

1 Karsai, Klaniczay, Movrin, and Olechowska, *Classics and Communism;* Movrin and Olechowska, *Classics and Class*. This publication came from the original meeting of the network, organized by György Karsai, Gábor Klaniczay, and Jerzy Axer. The project was funded by Thyssen Foundation and was conducted by Collegium Budapest and the University of Warsaw. It was initially called "Gnôthi Seauton! – Classics and Communism: The History of Studies on Antiquity in the Context of the Local Classical Tradition."

2 Movrin and Olechowska, *Classics and Communism in Theatre*. See also Olechowska, *Classical Antiquity on Communist Stage in Poland*. Exceptions included the Western panel, resulting in Hall, "American Communist Idealism in George Cram Cook's The Athenian Women (1918)," 1–22 and Stead, "British Communist Theatre and Aristophanes: The Case of Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood," 23–43. On the panel also were Justine McConnell, presenting on CLR James' *Toussaint Louverture* (1934), and Rosa Andujar, on Greek fidelity in Fidel's Cuba.

and Roman Drama and the University of St. Andrews' Centre for the Receptions of Antiquity is embarking on an exploration of "Classics and Cold War Theatre 1956–1989." In the British context, *A People's History of Classics* (2020) has shown glimpses of the creative influence of Soviet communism on several scholars, writers, and artists who worked with classical antiquity in Britain.[3] There have been plenty of discrete studies conducted over the years, many of which have been collated on the "Brave New Classics" website's research page.[4] But there is an extraordinary amount of work yet to be done on classics and communism as both a dominant and countercultural ideological force worldwide.

Whilst the discipline of Classics (especially the study of ancient Greek and Latin) suffered under the Soviet regimes, in other and sometimes surprising ways, "classics" – as cultural activity surrounding the ideas, images, texts, and other remains of ancient Greece and Rome – can be seen to have flourished both within and beyond the academy. For example, even within the Soviet bloc, classical translation and Marxist-Leninist ancient history and archaeology thrived in certain areas, as the closing segment of this issue illustrates with examples from Poland and Slovenia. The confluence of technological advances and increased leisure time in the twentieth century (not to mention the concentration of effort within the USSR on creating "proletarian culture") also meant that cultural participation burgeoned, and this included engagements with ancient Greek and Roman antiquity. The classics (broadly defined) were therefore accessible for the first time to mass audiences and mass readerships, where before they were largely limited, by education and means of access, to wealthy elites, who had nurtured them in the imperial European tradition of the *ancien régime*. The classics may not have entirely lost their former class connotations, even if the franchise was dramatically expanded.

The international workshop in which the following articles were initially presented as papers was held online in October 2021. Hosted by the School of Classics, University of St. Andrews, and sponsored by the Classical Reception Studies Network, it aimed to explore further the conflicted and complex relationship between classics and communism, using the prism of the ambiguous or polysemic concept of proletarianism. What, after all, is "a proletarian classics"? We

3 Hall and Stead, *A People's History*, esp. 476–495. See also Stead and Hall, "Between the Party and the Ivory Tower," 3–31.

4 Brave New Classics, www.bravenewclassics.info.

invited colleagues to discuss how classical antiquity was received by inhabitants of communist states. We asked how Soviet ideology and cultural policy could change the experience of "classics" both inside and beyond the Soviet Union and its satellites. Although in our call for papers we explicitly invited colleagues with a view on classics and communism outside of Europe, e.g., in Africa, Asia, Australasia, South and Central America, and the US, where we know there are interesting tales yet to be told, we did not manage on this occasion to attract papers. We did, however, receive a range of abstracts from people examining classical engagements in Belarus, Bulgaria, East Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

PROLETARIAN LITERATURE

In 1925 Leon Trotsky argued that there was "no such thing as proletarian culture and […] there never will be." His thinking was that before the revolution, the workers would remain too oppressed to create, and then after it, there would no longer be any proletarians because it would be a classless world. The concept did, however, catch on. In 1935 William Empson wrote:

> One might define proletarian art as the propaganda of a factory-working class which feels its interests opposed to the factory owners; this narrow sense is perhaps what is usually meant but not very interesting.[5]

He even agrees with Trotsky that "You couldn't have proletarian literature in this sense in a successful socialist state." But then he moves onto an altogether more expansive sense of the term, including "such folk-literature as is by the people, for the people, and about the people." Empson is non-committal on whether it has to be all three at once. For him, the concept of proletarian literature is at once "vague" and "somehow obvious."[6] He explains that even the Bolshevik Russians did not seem to have a single accepted definition.

Vague the term may be, but bland and unimaginative proletarian art need not be. In the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, Maxim Gorky described how socialist realism sought to have a real transformative effect on the world, but it aimed to do this by myth-making:

5 Empson, S*ome Versions of Pastoral*, 6.

6 Ibid., 17.

> Myth is invention. To invent means to extract from the sum of a given reality its cardinal idea and embody it in imagery – that is how we got realism. But if to the idea extracted from the given reality we add – completing the idea, by the logic of hypothesis – the desired, the possible, and thus supplement the image, we obtain that romanticism which is at the basis of myth and is highly beneficial in that it tends to provoke a revolutionary attitude to reality, an attitude that changes the world in a practical way.[7]

Immediately preceding this passage, Gorky shows the real-world power and application of myth in classical terms:

> This same folklore in our days has raised Vladimir Lenin to the level of a mythical hero of ancient times, equal to Prometheus.

Gorky's speech was delivered at a pivotal moment in Soviet cultural history, the adoption of "socialist realism" in the place of the more radical and sectarian concept of proletkult. This coincided with the anti-fascist "Popular Front" period (1934–1939), which precipitated a shift away from the more militant "*for* the worker, *by* the worker" model, toward more inclusive models, including, e.g., "*about* the worker" and simply "*in service to* the class struggle." Proletarian literature – in the sense of what an anti-fascist writer *should* produce according to the Communist International – became capacious enough to envelop the works of Western, middle- and (more rarely) upper-class "fellow travelers." Their attitude toward Soviet communism or the brand of communism espoused by their national Communist Party (not always the same) was sometimes less than enthusiastic. This said, the canon of Soviet-endorsed Western "progressive writers" might surprise most students of English and Modern Language Studies today. Some of the most celebrated and popular foreign authors, while published widely throughout the Soviet Union and its satellites, are scarcely read today (e.g., Jack Lindsay and James Aldridge).

DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

Our two-day workshop ended with a round table in which respondents Edith Hall (Durham University), Neville Morely (University of Exeter), and the Chinese Studies specialist Gregory Lee (University

7 Gorky, "Soviet Literature," 25.

of St. Andrews) reflected on the workshop papers and discussed broader matters. Given that there has been considerable scrutiny of the discipline in recent years in terms of its associations with imperialism, racism, misogyny, ableism, classism, it is unsurprising that talk turned toward the state of the discipline. Far from being a summary of that day's discussion, the following is a reflection inspired by our conversation. Given its formerly privileged status in modern society, the story of classics has long been told by people for whom the elitist narrative benefits. The study of ancient Greek and Roman classics – so the story goes – is uniquely valuable and rigorous: the literary classics have, after all, "stood the test of time," and the kind of education (largely linguistic) required to read them and the cultural activities that surround it are therefore considered to be delivered, conducted and consumed by an intellectual elite. This narrative has lost considerable currency over the past century, but it is stubborn. Since our disciplinary histories have long tended to focus on the receptions of an elite, both within and beyond the ivory tower of academia, the discipline and classical culture, especially literature, have strong associations of elitism.

However, this is just one side of the story. The extent and importance of the other side are still largely unknown. The projects of recovering both working-class engagements with classics, against the wider (and also true) narrative of exclusion, and the recovery of leftist classics, against the received narrative (also true) of its disciplinary and aesthetic conservatism are aligned. This was one of the aims of Edith Hall's and my *A People's History of Classics* (2020), which told the story of Classics "from below," but also included many radical classicists, who in various ways were engaged in the workers' struggle. Recovery is a necessary step toward exposing the underlying corruption of the existing narrative and challenging its hegemony. As Neville Morley warned, however, in the round table, it is also the case that the working-class and radical classicists we recover may have inadvertently contributed to the maintenance of the cultural hegemony enjoyed by the classics. I have considerable sympathy with this view, but I also feel a responsibility to counter the dominant narrative, skewed as it is by selection bias, rather than either cede the discipline and culture upon which it is founded to the reactionary right or consign it to the flames.

Those who lived in the Soviet Union and its satellites faced a similar dilemma in the wake of the October Revolution. Radical factions demanded the eradication of what they saw as the bourgeois or counterrevolutionary classical education, but pockets of resistance held, and the discipline was protected through the actions of seve-

ral brave figures. This is the conventional story, but it applies more comfortably to the fate of classical philology than a Classics more broadly conceived.

It is important to remember that the histories of both classical culture and communism in every region are different, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. When we study Western communist classics, we tend to find excitingly countercultural radicals, using Marxist ideas and pioneering Soviet aesthetics to challenge local convention.[8] They were very often also passionate advocates for civil rights and the kinds of freedom of expression that were denied their "Second World" counterparts. In the USSR and the nation states forming the Soviet bloc, for many, Marxism-Leninism was the oppressive convention against which the spirited rebels yearned to defy. That said, as we shall see, space is now emerging for more nuanced evaluations of the debt of Marxism to the discipline. Elżbieta Olechowska put it well when she said at the beginning of the workshop:

> To date, we have focused on persecution and difficulties. The time has come now to recognize that half a century of communism did not result only in a spectacular economic and ideological collapse of the practical application of communist principles, but also accelerated a much-needed transformation of methodology and focus, resulting in a better understanding of the ancient world.[9]

This step from a narrative of disciplinary decline via persecution toward a more balanced assessment of classical culture in the age of Marxism and Leninism opens up exciting new ground both in parts of the world where communism was a dominant and often oppressive ideology and where it was a countercultural and liberating force attractive to internationally minded and anti-capitalist artists and writers.

PEACE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE

That we can now access more fully proletarian classics is surely, in part, a result of the changing political climate. Between November 1989 and February 2022, we have enjoyed more or less free collaboration across Europe and high levels of access to formerly restricted archives. We have managed to tell our shared histories in ways that the

8 Bertolt Brecht, Isadora Duncan, Joan Littlewood, for example, were all considered parents of their art form.

9 Spoken in the opening session of the workshop, October 23, 2021.

polarizing Cold War environment precluded. The present invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces has reminded us once more how fragile and precious peace is. Quite apart from the tragic loss of life and terrible living conditions of the victims of the invasion, the war has also reconstructed all too familiar barriers which serve to separate us. The present situation reminds us how we must fight to keep avenues of cultural and intellectual exchange open, even when freedom of movement is restricted. The pandemic catalyzed and quickly normalized affordable and accessible international collaboration. Our online 2021 workshop was an example of this. We benefited hugely from participation from scholars across the world, including both Ukraine and Russia. These scholars now write from very different worlds to those in which they prepared their papers for the workshop, as do we all.

LEFT BEHIND

Another renewed urgency for the project has perhaps been provided by the high-profile appropriation of classical culture by bigots and fascists (including the so-called Alt-right) in the service of overtly harmful ideas (misogyny, racism, xenophobia, classism). Nevertheless, away from the extremes (and as briefly discussed above), the business-as-usual model of "Classics," complete with its associations with reactionary politics and elitism, continues quietly to shore up social division and intensify the privilege of the powerful and wealthy, in the UK and the US at least.[10] This background fuels several of the following explorations of classics and communism. When the discipline seems poisonous enough to elicit calls from within to be "burned down," we might profitably look to ways in which the same cultural entities (ancient Greece and Rome) have been dealt with and harnessed in other times and cultural contexts by "progressives" (both radical and less so). It is worth noting that these "progressive" appropriations may, at times, be just as harmful, repulsive, mind-numbing, or misinformed as their reactionary counterparts. The difference is that we have simply not focused on this side of our intellectual and cultural history while we have happily plumbed the depths of our rightist history. A rigorous "both/and" approach is required. The history of fascist Italy and Germany, for example, has been recently

10 For contemporary rightist and racist abuses of classical antiquity see, e.g. Dozier, PHAROS. See also Zuckerberg, *Not All Dead White Men,* for misogynist abuses of classics by the contemporary US right.

well addressed by scholars,[11] but explicitly anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, or "red" classics are comparatively underexplored.

One of the aims of the workshop was then to help recover the contribution of leftist thought (especially Marxism-Leninism) to our conception of the classical. The international, if not quite global, focus of our discussion, as well as the provocation and flexibility of the term "proletarian," has enabled us to access this "other side" of classics. We are very much at the beginning of this project, but the present issue of *Clotho* constitutes a significant step forward in our assembly of case studies illuminating twentieth-century non-elite and anti-capitalist classics.

THE ESSAYS

The articles that follow are unified by their rich interdisciplinarity and showcase a broad range of methods and approaches to the subject of "proletarian classics." Ancient historians rub shoulders with literary and reception scholars. The receptions engaged with here range across the intersecting fields of the history of scholarship, the history of the book, theater studies, comic book studies, political theory, cultural studies, and, of course, classical studies. The issue also presents two summarized and translated interviews with scholars whose careers were to different degrees and in different ways framed by the communist era in which they studied and their careers were, for the most part, conducted. The issue is illustrated by a photo essay depicting a visit to Greece by Slovenian students in 1958, which has been preserved and presented by one of the photographers herself, Ksenija Rozman.

The first essay introduces readers to the presentation of the classical world within a Workers' Encyclopedia, *Arbeidernes leksikon*, produced between 1931 and 1936 by intellectuals aligned to the Communist Party of Norway (NKP). Eivind Seland analyses the revolutionary classical education condensed into the entries of this encyclopedia, with a particular focus on historical narrative. Unlike contemporary reference works, this Marxist encyclopedia provided an ancient history based on the concept of class struggle. It presents proletarian heroes, such as the Gracchi and Spartacus, in largely positive terms, while ancient "class consciousness" is shown to have been suppressed by the delivery of

11 See, for example, Han Lamers and Bettina Reitz-Joosse, *Fascist Latin Texts,* available online; and for twentieth-century fascism and classics, see Roche and Demetriou, *Brill's Companion to the Classics, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.*

entertainments, economic sops, and a cross-class dependence on slave labor. Working-class solidarity is emphasized and promoted throughout. Every opportunity to prove the validity of Marxist analysis is taken. Seland shows how the emphases placed on social injustice, poverty, gender, ethnicity, slavery, and imperialism in the 1930s encyclopedia foreshadow scholarly preoccupations, which would only be taken up in earnest by Western historiography in the 1970s.

In the second article, Vittorio Saldutti focuses on the reception of Athenian democracy in the Soviet Union. His main subject is the German Professor of Ancient History and communist political leader Arthur Rosenberg (1889–1943), who was the first publicly to compare ancient Athenian democracy to contemporary German and Russian councils. In his hands and later those of the Dutch revolutionary Anton Pannekoek, Athenian democracy becomes a benchmark of true, uncorrupted democracy, as opposed to bourgeois democracy and later the "democracy" experienced in the Soviet system.

Our third article heralds a section of three essays on the reception of Spartacus. This cluster of independent studies on the communistic image of the Thracian slave leader across different times and places is helpful in that it effectively explodes the myth of Comintern monoculture, based on the idea that communist-controlled constituencies followed a dogmatic cultural policy formulated in Moscow. While the dogmatism and presence of centralist cultural policy are undeniable, their eventual manifestation was almost as kaleidoscopic and various as the people involved in its creation and the social contexts in which they created them. As we shall see, several strong common aesthetic, thematic and ideological features unify them, but there is also space for significant divergence and individuality concerning creative approach, medium, and even content. The representation of Spartacus in the public sphere is a vast subject, and the three essays here illustrate well the diversity of communistic receptions across time.

While actively engaged in military service in defense of Ukraine, Oleksii Rudenko heroically managed to complete his research on early Soviet performance receptions of Spartacus in Kyiv in the latter part of 2022. As his essay explains, Tiberius Gracchus, Marcus Junius Brutus, and Spartacus were the only ancient historical figures to be included in a list compiled by Lenin in 1918 of subjects of "monumental propaganda." In practice, Spartacus was the only figure of the three to be welcomed wholeheartedly into the Bolshevik parade of heroes. The Italian writer Raffaelo Giovagnoli's 1874 novel *Spartaco* was translated into Russian in 1881. It became a key source for Soviet receptions of

Spartacus. Rudenko traces the extent of the influence of this Italian mediation as he analyzes the theatrical receptions of Spartacus written by Vladimir Mazurkevich (1920) and Vladimir Volkenstein (1921). He also investigates the presentation of Spartacus in early Soviet mass performances. These were colossal audience participatory events, with vast casts and often performed out of doors and comprising pageant-like processions of revolutionary heroes. Such processions would frequently be peopled by Spartacus and his slave army. Rudenko tracks these early Soviet representations onto contemporary Soviet historiography and, where possible, government policy. Contemporary reviews of performances in a thriving genre of Soviet theatrical criticism are addressed to reveal a fast-changing and energetic engagement with what became, in this revolutionary moment, an extremely familiar and popular feature of Roman antiquity.

Miryana Dimitrova's essay on the reception of Spartacus by Bulgarian comic creators from 1979–1983 further explores the extraordinary popularity of the tale of Spartacus. She highlights the (perhaps surprising) diversity of the slave hero's representation within the Soviet bloc through an in-depth discussion of his unique Bulgarian reception, which includes an enthusiastic adoption of a conjecture by a German philologist in 1955, which transformed Spartacus' origin story. Instead of hailing from an indistinctly "nomadic" Thracian tribe, Spartacus becomes a member of the "Maidi" tribe and, therefore, from a region in southern Bulgaria. Dimitrova thus shows a Bulgarian nationalistic reception of the Soviet hero. Her analysis brings Spartacus' reception up to the post-Soviet present day, which enables her to demonstrate the ideological malleability of the slave leader, stemming – as she persuasively argues – directly from the lack of concrete evidence about Spartacus' life before Batiatus' gladiator camp.

We complete our Spartacist hat-trick by turning back in time and to *Ultima Thule* (specifically Caledonia), with an article by Scott Lyall, a Scottish literature specialist, who explores how Spartacus' slave army was envisaged by James Leslie Mitchell (*alias* Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 1901–1935), a radical Scottish leftist and working-class author. Mitchell's pen gave Scotland one of its most celebrated modern classics, the trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932–1934), the opening book of which, *Sunset Song* (1932), is the most well-known. It would be televised in 1971 and adapted into a film in 2015. In 1933, at the height of his creative powers, Mitchell wrote *Spartacus*, a novel based on the Third Servile War, 73–71 BC. As well as presenting the first in-depth analysis of this novel's relationship with its classical sources, Lyall's essay presents Mitchell's distinctive blend of utopian pessimism and

atavistic progressivism with admirable clarity and nuance. *Spartacus* radically focuses the narrative exclusively on the enslaved, leaving "the masters" (the Romans) all but uncharacterized. *They* become the faceless mass. Mitchell's creative process of self-professedly propagandistic myth-making from historical sources feeds into his broader reflection on what a revolutionary anti-capitalist writer in the 1930s should do. It is interesting to note that Mitchell seems to have come to a similar conclusion to his contemporary communist historical novelist, Jack Lindsay (1900–1990), who in 1937 advocated for a similarly propagandistic historical mode in an American communist monthly, *New Masses*.[12]

In a letter to the Scottish author Naomi Mitchison, now held in the National Library Scotland, Mitchell wrote:

> For years I've wanted to write the story of Spartacus and the Gladiator chaps. This year I did it. And all the while I wrote – and even while I corrected the proofs – I was scared that the next issue of [Jonathan] Cape's *Now and Then* would tell me that Naomi Mitchison had done the same. It seemed impossible she could keep off the subject for long – it was so essentially hers.[13]

Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) never did write a *Spartacus*, but – as the following essay by Barbara Goff shows – the Scottish writer and activist did on several occasions contemplate revolution in antiquity in her historical fiction. Mitchison's classical writings stretch the bounds of "proletarian classics" in exciting ways. She came from a prominent aristocratic Scottish family but worked tirelessly on the left of the parliamentary Labour Party UK, then committed to gradualist reform rather than revolution. As Goff demonstrates, Mitchison used antiquity as a site of experimentation with forms of political and social radicalism. While the novels discussed in the essay tended to sell well and – as evidenced by Mitchell's fan mail, cited above – enjoyed an enthusiastic following among readers on the left, Goff asserts that "in terms of long-term popular or critical success they have not been favored," but they do, she continues "fail in interesting ways."

12 For a discussion of Lindsay's historical fiction based on his *Brief Light* (1939) see Stead, "Class Struggle in Catullan Rome."

13 Letter from James Leslie Mitchell to Naomi Mitchison, dated "Tuesday" [August? 1933]. National Library Scotland: Papers of Naomi Mitchison and her family. Acc. 5885.3.

Failure is a concept infrequently discussed in Classical Reception Studies.[14] It is, however, something with which those of us who study the work of radical leftist writers, artists, and scholars on the western side of the Iron Curtain – i.e., in the uniquely polarizing context of the Cold War and its anti-communist aftermath – are all too familiar. History is often kinder to authors and artists than the days in which they lived. Mitchison is currently enjoying something of a renaissance, with the reprinting of her novels and the imminent release of Edinburgh University Press's *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*, the first scholarly volume on her as a writer.[15]

Goff's discussion of Mitchison's ancient revolutions exposes the author's fascination not only with female emancipation but also myth and ritual, influenced by the kinds of anthropology in vogue at the time performed by James George Frazer and those scholars associated with the "Cambridge Ritualists" label. Both cultural anthropology and "failure" feature prominently in Claudio Sansone's essay on Pier Paolo Pasolini, Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* and the "irrational." He traces the Italian writer and filmmaker's relationship with Aeschylus' tragedies, exploring Pasolini's attempt "to excavate patterns of ideological resistance" in them. It was not so much in critical accolades that Sansone deems Pasolini to have failed, but in his ultimate disappointment with his own notion that the irrational in Greek tragedy had revolutionary potential. Pasolini's attempt to turn the classical to political ends is shown to have been frustrated. The study ranges across different kinds of evidence: archival, play scripts, translator's notes, published essays, a posthumously published novel, and an unfinished study for a film. From this collage of sources, we witness the struggle of the Italian artist to make engaged versions of the classical. His classicism and radical politics appear held in an antithetical conflict from which no synthesis would ultimately be found. The Cambridge Ritualists, E. R. Dodds (esp. *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 1951), Antonio Gramsci, and the communist professor of Greek at Birmingham, George Thomson (esp. *Aeschylus and Athens*, 1941), are identified as key sources for Pasolini's shifting conception of the revolutionary irrational. Ultimately, Sansone offers the study of Pasolini's frustration as a cautionary tale, advising against reading revolutionary content into "elite products of

14 In 2019 Rosa Andujar and Daniel Orrells (Kings College, London) called for papers on negatively received theatrical receptions of antiquity for a Society for Classical Studies conference entitled "Problems in Performance: Failure and Classical Reception Studies."

15 Purdon, *Naomi Mitchison: A Writer in Time*.

past literary history," which might themselves be antithetical to such readings.

Also focused on the reception of Greek tragedy is Natasha Remoundou's article, which primarily takes on Sophocles' *Antigone* in the hands of the Irish poet, writer, and playwright Aidan Carl Mathews (b. 1956), staged at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin in 1984 – a busy year for *Antigone* in Irish theaters.[16] She opens, however, with a discussion of an earlier Irish reception of Antigone in the anonymous poem "The Prison Graves." The poem, which appears to date to March 1918, takes a recent production of *Antigone* at the Abbey Theatre as a contemporary hook on which to hang a politically motivated elegy to the executed Irish diplomatist turned anti-colonial rebel, Roger Casement (1864–1916), whose remains, first buried in Pentonville Prison, were reinterred in a Dublin cemetery as late as 1965. The anonymous poet uses the grief of Antigone to express their own at the death and lack of proper burial of Casement, but also (and quite strangely) uses a topical allusion to the recent interment of an executed murderer in the grounds of the prison to demonstrate the relevance of both the ancient play and the poem's subject. An elaborate publicity stunt? But Mathews' *The Antigone* (1984) is the main subject of Remoundou's posthuman lens. It may be conceived as a proletarian classic as it offers a radically class-conscious interpretation of the tragedy. Set in a dystopian, post-nuclear, militarized, surveillance state where atrocities and violence have become normalized. The Polynices character (Poly) has been spirited away and suffers a Stalinesque *damnatio memoriae*. Antigone's bleak struggle is never ending and apparently hopeless: tragedy and history repeat themselves indefinitely. The essay introduces readers to two underexplored and hard-to-access receptions of Sophocles' tragedy.

The final two essays move us away from tragedy and Western leftist receptions of classical antiquity and into the realm of the disciplinary history. On the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, we observe the impact of Marxism-Leninism on the activity of classicists in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the Polish People's Republic. David Movrin presents an exciting archival find in the recently rediscovered personal papers of the doyen of Slovenian classicists in the postwar period, Anton Sovre (1885–1963). Unlike several other Slovenian classicists, Sovre was not considered a threat by the com-

16 See, e.g., Macintosh, "Irish Antigone and burying the dead"; Torrance, "Post--Ceasefire Antigones and Northern Ireland." Full bibliography in Remoundou's article.

munist authorities. It was to him that the job of preparing a document on the future of classical philology for the Third Yugoslav Five-Year Plan fell. Movrin shows how Sovre attempted to use the document to counter the suspicions Party officials had about the discipline, which had a bourgeois reputation and was thus frequently scapegoated. Movrin's analysis of this fascinating document reveals not only what Sovre wrote but also uses his knowledge of the unique social context to read between its lines since Sovre was not untouched by the brutality of Tito's regime. Movrin also presents part of an interview he conducted in early 2022 with the scholar, Kajetan Gantar (1930–2022), who was named prominently in the 1959 document. Gantar revealed that the document was essentially a hasty collaboration between the two men. Movrin sets their plan for classical philology in its wider context of seemingly pointless bureaucracy and abortive planning cycles. The plans, however fanciful they may have been for the historical moment in which they were produced, were – Movrin explains – slowly and successfully put into practice over the succeeding generations.

Elżbieta Olechowska rounds off the essays, and she comes out swinging: "For Poles, Communism has become synonymous with Soviet domination at the end of World War II, an ideological smoke-screen hiding imperial aspirations inherited from czarist Russia." In addition to revealing and embodying a trend in the former Soviet bloc of deeply felt anti-communism, her article reminds us that there were few Marxists among Polish classicists following World War II. Those few, however, who survived the decimation of the War played an instrumental role in maintaining the discipline and providing an institutional space within which students and colleagues of all ideological inclinations could learn and then ply their trade. One such was Kazimierz Majewski (1903–1981). In spite of his communistic worldview, explains Olechowska, he was not only tolerated by the academic community but widely respected for his scholarship and the vital role he played in organizing and contributing to the intersecting fields of philology, ancient history, and archaeology, first in Wrocław and later in Warsaw.

That concludes the essays of this issue of *Clotho*, but not the issue itself. There are two interviews, summarized and translated by Olechowska, conducted by Adrian Szopa and Andrzej Gillmeister on April 22, 2016. The first is with the Polish historian and papyrologist Professor Ewa Wipszycka (b. 1933), whose work, especially in the history of the Christian Church in Egypt during late antiquity, has been widely lauded. The second is with Professor Benedetto Bravo (b. 1931), Ewa's husband, a historian of ancient Greece. Their interviews complement

Olechowska's article on Majewski well since Wipszycka and Bravo were in the same Warsaw University as Majewski in the early stages of their academic careers. Another interview, with Professor Ferenc Hörcher from Budapest, provides another and different window into the region during the decades that followed.

The essays collected here represent a continuation of the Classics and Communism project, but also the early stages of a new strand of the project seeking to uncover, or recover, the leftist tradition of engagements with classical antiquity both inside and outwith the academy. Many such engagements have been suppressed or obscured by Cold War attitudes. For the many and now well-documented limitations and shortcomings of Soviet classical studies, applying a Marxist lens had a dramatic impact on academia on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Studies conducted under, or influenced by the strictures of Marxism-Leninism were sometimes decades ahead of Western scholarship (e.g., imperialism, slavery). It would be a mistake to suggest that these approaches and analyses were not already developing in Western Europe and the States, but they were undoubtedly energized by the electricity of the revolutionary period and sustained by the (for a time) utopian symbol of the Soviet alternative.

Beyond the academy, class-conscious and politically motivated creative practitioners learned from public-facing studies written by scholars with communist sympathies. The broad-rimmed and perhaps slightly quizzical lens of "proletarian classics" will, we hope, continue to provoke, to generate new "ways in," and encourage new ground to be broken by students and scholars across the globe.

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