



Ranger, H. (2012) 'Conference report: Institute of Classical Studies Colloquium, "Gender in the University Classics Curriculum", University of London'.

Rosetta **11**: 103-106.

http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue_11/ranger2.pdf

Conference report: Institute of Classical Studies Colloquium, 'Gender in the University Classics Curriculum', University of London, 9th March 2011.

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'Gender in the University Classics Curriculum' was a half-day colloquium organised by Dr Sue Blundell of the Open University and Dr Susan Deacy of the University of Roehampton to explore where and how gender is being taught in Classics at university level: what exactly is meant by 'gender', and is gender a relevant issue for classicists? This was the first such colloquium and arose from research conducted by Dr Blundell for The Higher Education Academy in 2006, and which was published as a report in 2008. The report detailed the institutions at which gender is taught and recorded whether this was as a specific module (for example, 'Masculinity and Citizenship', Nottingham University), or whether embedded within a course such as 'Living in the Ancient World' at Durham University. Dr Blundell also detailed the student demographic of classicists within those institutions to examine to whom gender is being taught (although currently overall in the UK there are more female students reading Classics than male). The colloquium was centred on eight guest speakers representing a range of institutions and subjects, including the University of Birmingham's Dr Mary Harlow, and an informal discussion-led atmosphere was encouraged. The delegates consisted of a mixture of undergraduates, postgraduates and academics whose interests lie in various aspects of gender in the ancient world.

The first speaker was Dr Susan Deacy (Greek History and Literature, University of Roehampton), who teaches two modules on gender in the ancient world entitled 'Sex and Gender' and 'Gender in Art'. Although Dr Deacy felt that gender is a relevant issue and so prevalent in everyday life that it needs to be explored and expanded, she wondered whether courses with the words 'sex', 'gender' or 'women' in the module title would deter some students. Professor Edward Harris (Ancient History, Durham University)

agreed and felt that the reason his course 'Living in the Ancient World' was the most popular first year undergraduate module was because 'gender' or 'women' did not explicitly appear in the module title. However, he regretted that there was not a dedicated course exploring this issue, particularly as gender was often taken to mean 'women', and issues of masculinity were not fully scrutinised. Professor Harris also noted that the main problem when attempting to talk about women in the ancient world is the lack of sources. Helen Foley and Froma Zeitlin pioneered research into gender in Classics in the 1980s by examining literary sources,¹ and Sarah Pomeroy's famous *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (1975) came from her work as a papyrologist. Shona Lewis has led research into images of women in vase painting and Helen King (present at the colloquium) has examined the representation of women in medical writing, but the range of sources we use still needs to be expanded. Professor Harris suggested the direction of future research into gender could lie in examining epigraphy dealing with women in their private and religious lives; religious dedications (who are these women making dedications to and for what?); subscriptions and public donations of money by women; physical archaeology; and the role of women in the economy through their household activities such as weaving (for being a housewife in antiquity was a very different role to our modern notion of a non-income generating housewife).

As a postgraduate looking at constructions of gender in the ancient world and those literary individuals who do not fit so easily into received cultural notions of 'male' and 'female', I was especially struck by the words of Emmanuel Buenaventura, a former student of the University of Roehampton. Emmanuel spoke of how his education in Classics has influenced his current work through a charitable organisation with substance abusers and trafficked women, and spoke of how he often recalls the classical stories of homelessness, troubled gender issues and lifestyle choices in his work, returning again and again to the tale of Hippolytus. However, he worried that

¹ See, for example Foley, H. 1981. 'The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama', in H. P. Foley, *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, and Zeitlin, F. 1985. 'Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama', *Representations* 11, 63-94.

as Classicists we glamorise the past, and warned us that we must be careful not to forget about the potentially tragic narratives of those individuals who have been exiled or killed for their lifestyle or sexual choices, the narratives that he works with every day.

Dr Vanda Zajko (Senior Lecturer in Classics, University of Bristol) then asked the room, 'Why haven't we talked about feminism yet?'. Dr Zajko argued that the greatest achievement of feminism in Classics is the recognition that there is no such thing as a neutral standpoint and that one can never read a text 'objectively'; we now read canonical texts differently and are aware of oppositional readings and plurality of meanings in texts, as well as recognising our own privileges of sex, race, age and class that we bring to a text. Feminism has opened up new methods of analysis and we now see gender narrative as a meta-narrative that can help us comment on other voices within a text. Dr Mary Harlow (Senior Lecturer in Roman History, University of Birmingham) agreed that feminism has helped classicists to recognise their own 'standpoint' and to critically examine social constructions in society, and both Dr Harlow and Professor Lorna Hardwick (Classical Studies and Classical Receptions, Open University) noted that feminism has moved Classics away from simply the political and military spheres to include more topics of interest than 'Great Men and Great Deeds' alone. The mention of feminism spurred quite a heated discussion amongst the delegates that unfortunately had to be left unresolved!

The delegates were then treated by Professor Lin Foxhall (Greek Archaeology and History, University of Leicester) to a preview of her forthcoming book *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*,² before concluding the afternoon with an open discussion and drinks reception in Stewart House.

We would like to thank the organisers for such a thought-provoking and interactive afternoon, and hope that this is the first of many gender colloquia.

ⁱⁱ Foxhall, L. *Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*, forthcoming in the Key Themes Series, Cambridge University Press.

Rosetta 11. http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue_11/ranger2.pdf

Dr Sue Blundell's report 'Gender in the University Classics Curriculum' can be downloaded at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/hca/classics/resources/practical_advice/NonLanguageTeaching/GenderandtheClassicsCurriculum