

## Putting the Class into Classical Reception:

The hero of Thomas Hardy's tragic novel *Jude the Obscure*, a poor stonemason living in a Victorian village, is desperate to study Latin and Greek at university. He propels himself into the torment that results from harbouring such unrealistic aspirations at the moment when he gazes, from the top of a ladder leaning against a rural barn, on the spires of the university of Christminster (a fictional substitute for Oxford). The spires, vanes and domes 'gleamed like the topaz' in the distance [Hardy (1974 [1895]), 41]. The lustrous topaz shares its golden colour with the stone used to build Oxbridge colleges, but is one of the hardest minerals in nature. Jude's fragile psyche and health inevitably collapse when he discovers just how unbreakable are the social barriers that exclude him from elite culture and perpetuate his class position, however lovely the buildings that concretely represent them seem, shimmering on the horizon.

Hardy was writing from personal experience. As the son of a stonemason himself, and apprenticed to an architect's firm, he had been denied a public school and university education; like Jude Fawley, he had struggled to learn enough Greek to read the *Iliad* as a teenager [Seymour-Smith (1994), 39-40]. Unlike Jude, Hardy rose through the social ranks to become a prosperous member of the literary establishment. But he never resolved his internal conflict between admiration for Greek and Latin authors and resentment of the supercilious attitude adopted by some members of the upper classes who had been formally trained in them. A similar conflict today remains unresolved within the study of Classics and its reception; many scholars suffer from a Hardy-esque discomfort with the history of the discipline itself. Education in the ancient Latin and Greek languages has always been an exclusive practice, used to define membership in an elite, despite variations in the social and demographic arenas where the boundaries of exclusion have been drawn; the best documented case remains that fictively experienced by Jude -- Classics in 19th-century England [Stray (1998); Larson (1999-2000)]. Yet the

study of Greek and Roman antiquity has undergone an upheaval since the Second World War, and more particularly since the 1960s. As a result it is now arguably less elitist than at any time in its history. Another result has been an upsurge of interest (historically connected with the Civil Rights movement) in the institution of ancient slavery, and a grudging new respect for Marxist and allied theories, primarily as applied by Geoffrey de Ste Croix (1981) and (to a lesser extent) George Thomson (1973 [1941]), both of whom tackled class hierarchies head-on in relation to ancient history.

The first issue that needs to be addressed by anybody who wants to think about the relationship between social class and classical reception is this: **(1)** *why do the terms class and Classics sound so similar?* Both terms, in fact, originated in the ancient Mediterranean world. When the Romans heard their Latin noun *classis*, it contained a resonance that we do not hear when we say *class*: deriving from the same root as the verb *clamare* ('call out'), a *classis* consisted of a group of people 'called out' or 'summoned' together. It could be the men in a meeting, or in an army, or the ships in a fleet. The word has always been associated with Servius Tullius, the sixth of the legendary kings of early Rome, who was thought to have held the first census in order to find out, for the purposes of military planning, what assets his people possessed. It is this procedure that explains the ancient association of the term *class* with an audible call to arms. Yet in the middle of the 18th century the term was adopted in order to distinguish different strata within English society. The working poor of England began to be called members of 'the lower classes' rather than just 'the poor' or members of 'the lower orders'. The term *the poor* was too imprecise, and the notion of hierarchical 'orders' too inflexible and too infused with medieval and feudal notions of birth-rank to accommodate the new, unprecedented levels of social mobility. The term *class*, which (like its ancient prototype) implied a status with an economic basis rather than an inherited rank, was a result of the incipient erosion, during the industrial revolution, of the transparent and relatively stable hierarchical rank order which had earlier governed the English social structure. The French and German languages soon imitated the English one, replacing the terms

*état* and *Stand* with *classe* and *Klasse*; by the 1815 the now-familiar terms ‘middle’ and ‘working classes’ had become accepted parlance.

The plural Classics, meanwhile, had been used in English by 1711 to designate the corpus of Greek and Latin literature. But it is to the legendary first census that there must also be traced the origins of the terms *Classics*. In Servius’ scheme, the men in the top of his six classes -- the men with the most money and property -- were called the *classici*. The Top Men were ‘Classics’, and this is why, by the time of the late second-century AD Roman miscellanist Aulus Gellius, by metaphorical extension the Top Authors could be called ‘Classic Authors’, *scriptores classici*, to distinguish them from inferior or metaphorically ‘proletarian’ authors, *scriptores proletarii* (*Noctes Attici* 19.8.15). Every tradition of writing, art and music -- English Literature, Dutch painting, Jazz -- now claims to have its own ‘Classics’. But the most venerated Classics amongst all others have usually been the authors of Greece and Rome -- the *primi inter pares* or ‘first amongst equals’ when compared with all the cultural *Classici* produced in world history. The addition of the definite article *the* to the term *Classics* enacts a final sub-division by which the *most* elite texts of all can be identified by the few refined individuals supposedly able to appreciate them. The unit at Harvard University which studies these Greek and Roman cultural ‘Hyper-Classics’ still styles itself *The Department of the Classics*. The involvement, historically, of the study of Greece and Rome with the maintenance of socio-economic hierarchies is thus so obvious in the very title *Classics* that over the last two decades some scholars have considered abandoning it altogether, and replacing it with a label such as ‘Study of the ancient Mediterranean’ or ‘Study of Greek and Roman antiquity’. But there is another possible response to the controversial and loaded nomenclature that the subject has inherited than simply to discard it. A better strategy, perhaps, is to use the problematic title to think with, in order to develop a sensitivity to the class issues raised by the study of ‘Classical texts’.

The second and most important question that applying the concept ‘class’ to classical reception raises is this: **(2)** *to what class did the people under scrutiny, who*

*were doing the 'receiving' of Greece and Rome, themselves in fact belong?* This question can be asked as much in relation to the fictional Jude Fawley (especially since he exists within a self-consciously 'realist' novel) as to the real-life author Thomas Hardy. But it is often a difficult question to answer. One reason is that no two analysts can ever agree on what exact sub-divisions within socio-economic classes pertained within any particular period of history: since the industrial revolution especially, there has been so much social confusion and mobility that precise sub-categories of class (for example, 'upper proletariat', 'under-class', 'service sector' or 'lower middle/white collar') can become difficult to apply consistently. Paul Fussell's 1983 'classic' of class analysis, *Class, A Guide Through the American Status System*, proposes a nine-tier stratification of contemporary American society, ranging from the super-rich (who have amassed such large fortunes that their descendants need never work) through to no fewer than five discrete categories of low-class persons: in descending order, these are skilled blue-collar workers, workers in factories and the service industry, manual laborers, the destitute unemployed and homeless, and the 'out-of-sight' members of the population incarcerated in prisons and institutions. Similar detailed sub-divisions can be identified in most historical societies. Another problem is the argument between Marxists, who stress the economic basis of class, and theorists influenced by the sociologist Max Weber, who stress the importance of *status* in terms of prestige derived from education and rank in determining true 'life chances'. Furthermore, working-class identity as it is commonly understood is often based on neither economic position nor prestige, but on more subjective criteria such as clothing, dialect, accent, place of origin, and recreational activities. This complexity has provided unwarranted ammunition to those who wish to deny altogether the blindingly obvious truth that in most of the societies manifested in world history, and certainly over the last five centuries, wealth and power have *always* been concentrated in the hands of a disproportionately small percentage of the population, who have lived off the labour of others; moreover, access to education and the means by which information, culture and therefore ideology are disseminated have

*always* been virtually coterminous with the possession of economic power. Any research into intellectual life in such societies, including research into classical reception, will therefore be distorted if what this chapter henceforward for the most part simply calls the 'lower' classes, who formed the majority of the population, are erased from the picture.

Yet hardly anybody has been interested in lower-class access to Classics. This becomes clear in comparison with the history of women's access, which has at last begun to be written [see e.g. Thomas (1994), 19-67; Beard (2000)]; a few important steps are being taken in investigating the study of Classics by colonised peoples in India [Vasunia (2007)], and by African Americans [Ronnick (2005a) and (2005b)]. But scant attention has been paid to the implication of Classics in social exclusion that is class-based, or to the types of access to the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome which the lower classes have managed to gain. When such access has been achieved, it has always been in spite of educational deprivation. But another obstacle has often been the prejudice held by some members of the lower classes against cultural property understandably perceived as emblematic of their exploiters: as the miner in Tony Harrison's feature film *Prometheus* says to his small son, who has been given Greek tragedy to read as homework [Harrison (1998), 9]: 'God knows why they feed yer all that crap'.

One reason for the neglect of class-conscious research is that many critics, especially in the USA, deny that class is a legitimate category of analysis. They feel that both class-conscious art and class-oriented criticism are reductive and partisan (see Konstan (1994), 47). Other critics reject the category of class because they fear it might narrow down the field of study and its potentialities. But the argument from the dangers of restriction can be used the other way: class-blindness has resulted in damaging controls exerted on the parameters of the discipline, and unnecessary limits on the ways in which Greek and Roman culture and their influence can be approached. Classical reception can be defined more interestingly if a wider social spectrum and more diverse media and genres are included in the picture. The third question that class-conscious researchers into classical reception need to ask is surely this: **(3)** *how much Latin and*

*Greek education had the ‘receivers’ experienced, and how did they feel about it?* Blanket refusal to think about social class in the context of Classics was an attitude inherited from people like the Earl of Chesterfield, who in 1748 wrote to his son, ‘Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for everybody...the word *illiterate*, in its common acceptance, means a man who is ignorant of these two languages’ [Stanhope (1932), vol. iii, 1155]. In a series of breathtaking acts of rhetorical exclusion, Classical knowledge is here limited to linguistic knowledge, education to males, and literacy to reading competence in Greek and Latin.

Lord Chesterfield’s distinctions explain why, until recently, so few Classical scholars have ever evinced much enthusiasm in response to the history of modern-language translation, at least beyond the treatment of canonical ancient poets by equally canonical post-Renaissance authors (e.g. Pope’s translations of Homer). The length of time for which the Classical languages constituted the near-exclusive property of an educated **elite** is itself remarkable. In his autobiographical poem *Autumn Journal*, Louis MacNeice (a Church of Ireland bishop’s son, educated at public school) ironically pondered the relationship between the ancient languages and social privilege nearly two hundred years after Lord Chesterfield [Macneice (1979 [1938]), 125]:

Which things being so, as we said when we studied  
The classics, I ought to be glad  
That I studied the classics at Marlborough and Merton,  
Not everyone here having had  
The privilege of learning a language  
That is incontrovertibly dead,  
And of carting a toy-box of hall-marked marmoreal phrases  
Around in his head.

Most prestige was attached to the ability not just to read Latin and Greek fluently, but to the composition in these tongues of both poetry and prose (usually translated from British historians, essayists or parliamentarians). The Suffolk poet Robert Bloomfield, a former cobbler, was so astonished when he heard his popular classic *The Farmer's Boy* translated into Latin that he wrote another poem, darkly to warn his protagonist against despising his humble origins [Bloomfield (1827), vol. ii]:

Hey, Giles! in what new garb art dress'd?  
For Lads like you methinks a bold one;  
I'm glad to see thee so caress'd;  
But, hark ye!---don't despise your old one.  
Thou'rt not the first by many a Boy  
Who've found abroad good friends to own'em;  
Then, in such Coats have shown their joy,  
E'en their own Fathers have not known 'em.

Tony Harrison, another poet born into a working-class family, studied Classics after winning a place at Leeds Grammar School. His poem *Classics Society (Leeds Grammar School 1552-1952)* expresses the class tensions crystallised in the pedagogical exercise of Latin Prose Composition [Harrison (1984), 120]:

We boys can take old Hansards and translate  
the British Empire into SPQR  
but nothing demotic or up-do-date,  
and *not* the English that I speak at home.

Yet during the centuries when elite 'education' continued to mean primarily education in Latin and Greek, far more people than ever acquired knowledge of these tongues were reading the Greeks and Romans in their own languages [see Hall (2007a)]. In his path-breaking study of the intellectual movements that prepared the way for the 17th-century

English revolution, Christopher Hill stressed that the first English translators of the Classics were a homogeneous group of non-University protestants and Puritans, and that one of their main goals, as ardent patriots, was to make ancient learning available to all Englishmen who could read. They 'regarded the creation of an enlightened lay public opinion as a bulwark of true religion and national independence' [Hill (1965), 28; see also Conley (1927)]. More recently, Jonathan Rose, in his brilliant historical account of the reading habits of the British working class (2001), has drawn attention to the excitement that many individual autodidacts experienced when they began to read certain of the Greek and Latin Classics (often Homer) in translation -- the thrill of life-changing imaginative discovery. A real-life equivalent of Hardy's obscure Jude, an autodidactic stonemason called Hugh Miller (born in 1802), recalled the pleasure he had found as a boy in reading Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: 'I saw, even at this immature period, that no other writer could cast a javelin with half the force of Homer. The missiles went whizzing athwart his pages' [Miller (1843), 28-9]. The fourth question that the class-conscious study of class reception entails is therefore this: **(4)** *through what kinds of books did the individual(s) discover and get access to the ancient world, and what kinds of modern-language translation would they have been likely to be able to use?*

Fortunately, research into the *history* of the role played by modern-language translations in the study of the ancient world has been facilitated by the more systematic study of reading culture which has developed amongst social historians over the last three decades. The contribution of such influential organisations as (in Britain) the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge has begun to be appreciated [Webb (1971), 66-7; Vincent (1989), 85, 110-11, 192]. So has the wide range of books read by 19th-century African American literary societies, which included Homer, Sappho, Pindar, Demosthenes, and Virgil as well as Dante and Shakespeare [McHenry (2002), 56, 172-3]. The impact of canonical works dependent on (rather than translated from) ancient authors is understood above all in France, where many people's reading knowledge of the Classics was for centuries derived mainly from François Fénelon's *Odyssey*-inspired

novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699) and the 17th-century plays of Corneille and Racine, who dramatised the myths of Medea, Phaedra, and Iphigenia; works by all three authors featured amongst the thirty most cited titles in a French Ministry of Education questionnaire on rural reading filled in by prefects in 1866 [Lyons (2001), 164-5]. Other scholars have noted the role played by *illustrated* texts in interesting illiterate people in the Classics [Richter (1987), 20-2]. An early 18<sup>th</sup>-century French farm-boy from Lorraine, by name of Valentin Jamerey-Duval, was illiterate until he came across an illustrated edition of *Aesop's Fables*. So drawn was he to the visual images that he asked some of his fellow-shepherds to explain the stories, and subsequently to teach him to read the book. As a result he developed an insatiable appetite for reading, and became a librarian to the Duke of Lorraine [Lyons (2001), 49]. *Aesop* first rolled in English off William Caxton's printing press as early as 1484, and like Homer, Ovid, and the ancient narratives telling the stories of Heracles and of the Argonauts, he has been a staple of illustrated children's books which have achieved deep social penetration, and the role played by these influential versions of classical authors in cultural history has yet to be the subject of serious scholarly attention.

More attention has focussed on books designed to offer instructive 'digests' of ancient Classics, such as the excerpts from Aristotle, Polybius and Cicero included in *The Political Experience of the Ancient: in its Bearing upon Modern Times*, published by the educationalist Seymour Tremenheere in 1852 [Webb (1971), 97]. The cultural importance at all levels of society of *Aesop's Fables*, historically one of the most widely read texts after the bible, has been begun to be acknowledged [Vincent (1989), 89]. In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ulster, the bags of books touted round even the humblest of cottages by 'chapmen', or itinerant booksellers, certainly included *Aesop's Fables* but also — more surprisingly — a version of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. Other reading enjoyed by the 'common man' in Northern Ireland included a version of Musaeus' poem *Hero and Leander*, a history of Troy descended from the *Recuyell of the histories of Troye* printed by Caxton,

and (for reasons of theology as much as a desire for Classical learning) Josephus' *History of the Jewish War* [Adams (1987), 50, 58-9, 85, 103, 183, 185].

The recent advent of freely available online modern-language translations of Greek and Roman ancient authors, through the work of initiatives such as Project Gutenberg, is undoubtedly set to improve non-specialist access to antiquity. This is the case even if the third-millennial phenomenon of the 'Digital Divide' separating those who have and do not have easy access to the Internet is already creating a new type of social division that is different from that of socio-economic class, even if it usually overlaps with it. Once an author has been translated into a modern language, moreover, it may be that he initially begins to achieve widespread circulation not directly through a modern-language translation, but through some other popular medium. The fifth question that class-conscious research into classical reception could usefully would therefore be this: **(5) to which cultural media containing information about the Greeks and Romans would the people under investigation be most likely to have experienced systematic exposure?** These days the ancient Greeks and Romans are most likely to be encountered in the media of popular culture -- novels, movies, television dramas and documentaries, cartoons, computer games, and comics [see e.g. Bridges (2007)]. Between the 16th and the 19th centuries, far more people consumed texts, histories and myths from the ancient world in the live theatre and opera house than through the medium of the printed word. It was from Shakespeare's history plays that Renaissance groundlings learned their Roman history. It was through Italian opera and subsequently ballet that the myths immortalised in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* reached their widest 18th-century audiences. It was in the form of Ernest Legouvé's *Médée* that large numbers of mid-19th-century people without a word of Latin or Greek felt the theatrical impact of the death of Medea's children, whether in French, or in Italian, or English-language versions and imitations. One version, by John Heraud, in 1859 reached tens of thousands of lower-class spectators, seated in East London's enormous Standard Theatre. Even more learned their classical myths, and some spectacular episodes from ancient history (e.g. the Fall of

Pompeii), in the form of the Victorian burlesque theatre -- light-hearted musical adaptations of glamorous legends and classical drama [Hall and Macintosh (2005), 350-88, 401-27].

Working-class access to classical myth and history included the entertainments offered by travelling showmen. The famous Billy Purvis took his booth theatre around the circuit of northern racetracks, in which he displayed phantasmagorias illustrating scenes such as Neptune in his car, attended by Amphitrite and Tritons; Purvis's troupe of actors also performed paraphrases of plays on classical themes, including *The Death of Alexander the Great*, a revision of Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* of 1677. The most famous of all early circus performers, Andrew Ducrow, specialized in 'hippodramatic' enactments of Hercules' labours, of Alexander the Great taming Bucephalus, of the rape of the Sabine women, and Roman gladiators in combat. Most of these were performed at Astley's Theatre in London, the clientele of which was heterogeneous, including both working-class and middle-class elements. Public houses in Victorian London sometimes hired entertainers who took up acrobatic poses based on classical statuary, such as 'Hercules wrestling with the Nemean Lion'. Similar forms of entertainment were sold by Victorian pornographers. From the 1840s onwards well-developed female models in skin-tight 'fleshings' could be seen in the popular *poses plastiques*, in which they imitated naked classical statues for the delectation of audiences which contemporary critics regarded as including the 'worst sort' of person. *Tableaux vivants* such as 'Diana Preparing for the Chase', at Liverpool's proletarian Parthenon Rooms in 1850, legitimised sexual voyeurism by the use of classical mythology [Hall and Macintosh (2005), 388-90].

Yet it is not enough to identify the class *position* of people reacting to the ancient Greek and Roman world in subsequent epochs: class *agenda* is even more important. When the educationalist Seymour Tremenheere compiled excerpts from ancient political theorists in order to enlighten the masses (see above), his intention was actually to *discourage* socialist agitation, and he therefore omitted Plato and his thought-provoking communistic Republic altogether. An arguably even more important question to ask is

the sixth one to be suggested here: **(6)** *how has the reception of individual ancient texts and authors been affected by the class agenda of the new, post-antique readership or spectatorship?* There have always been plenty of working-class reactionaries, and many radicals and revolutionaries from higher up the social scale. Some ancient authors have been associated in certain periods with certain types of political view, espoused across the class spectrum, and research identifying this type of pattern remains largely undone. Here it is interesting to compare the different experiences undergone in England, and what in 1707 became Britain, by the Greek tragedians and Aristophanes respectively. Both genres of theatre were produced in and by the fifth-century Athenian democracy, and their contents were inextricably bound up with its ideals. But, until the twentieth century, only tragedy was used to support liberal causes and democratic reforms. Greek tragedy was associated with the ‘Glorious Revolution’, Whig ideology and, by the 1830s, with the extension of the franchise. Adaptations of Greek tragedy for performance on the professional stage of England, supportive of such political tendencies, can be identified from John Dennis’s *Iphigenia* in 1700 to Thomas Talfourd’s *Ion* in 1836 [Hall and Macintosh (2005)]. Aristophanes, on the other hand, was from before the Civil War identified with the Stuart monarchy and the dramatists who gathered round Charles I’s French wife Henrietta Maria. After the Restoration in 1660, and more particularly after the French revolution, the writers attracted to Aristophanes were all different varieties of conservative, ranging from moralist Oxford academics in Holy Orders to wealthy patricians and counter-revolutionary agitators [Hall (2007b)]. The most disreputable example of Aristophanic imitation is the novel *Simiocracy* (1884) by the Conservative MP Arthur Brookfield. It tells how the Liberal Party enfranchises orang-utans, and imports millions from Africa in order to retain power.

It is certain that researching the political agendas of the individuals who have responded to different ancient authors and artefacts has the potential to yield results that are not only intrinsically fascinating, but can illuminate the reputations and scholarly views that have attached themselves to these ancient authors. Indeed, since scholarship

has usually provided the first line of interpretation of any particular author, in the form of editions and commentaries, it is *especially* important to pose the seventh question here suggested: **(7) how did the scholars responsible for the primary work on any particular ancient text personally see the world, and the place of classical literature within it?** For many of these scholars, class analysis would have been anathema. The effect of the *absence* of class-consciousness in the analysis of ancient literature during much of the twentieth century has been lucidly documented in Peter Rose (1992), 1-42. An exceptionally interesting example from slightly earlier is Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve, a brilliant classical scholar who in 1880 founded the prestigious *American Journal of Philology*, and is usually regarded as the founder of serious academic study of the classics in North America. His impact on the study of Pindar has been immeasurable: there is not a late 19th or 20th-century commentary or scholarly article on the epinician genre which is not still informed by Gildersleeve's dazzling commentary on the Olympian and Pythian odes (1885). Yet Gildersleeve's comments on Pindar are inseparable from his political outlook: he was intensely loyal to a nostalgic vision of the Old South, a vision forged before and during his service in the Confederate cavalry during the American Civil War, an experience which marked him indelibly [Hopkins (1986); DuBois (2003), 13-18]. He had at some level identified the society he defended with the aristocratic, traditional, elegant world conjured in Pindaric epinicia. That idealized picture had erased all the pain entailed by its underlying modes of production (peasant farming and slavery).

It is equally impossible to separate the politics espoused by the Philadelphia journalist I.F. Stone (a lifelong campaigner for African Americans and the poor, and opponent of American economic imperialism) from his study *The Trial of Socrates* (1989), in which he iconoclastically argued that Socrates deserved to be condemned because his actions had indeed been damaging to the Athenian democracy. Yet some of the most fascinating pages in that book concern not Socrates but Thersites, the low-class soldier who complains to the generals in the *Iliad* about the treatment of the ordinary troops. Stone points out how scholars from the Byzantine commentator Eustathius to the

twentieth century have conspired with Homer in class snobbery and criticism of the first spokesman for low-class rights in the western literary tradition. The German reference work *Der Kleine Pauly*, which is still much used, goes so far as to describe Thersites as a *Meuterer, Laesterer und Prahlhans* – ‘mutineer, slanderer, and braggart’. For British scholars, authors, translators and artists, a quick look at the online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* can often provide speedy illumination not only of the class origins but of the political trajectory underlying any particular individual’s publications. Simply to look up the name of the brilliant and influential translator of Aristophanes, John Hookham Frere, for example, is to reveal a bitter, disappointed **plutocrat**, the son of gentry, educated at Eton, fulminating from self-imposed exile in Malta against the democratic reforms he felt were eroding all the privileges previously enjoyed by his class. This has incalculable implications for his identification with Aristophanes, and his presentation, through translation, of the leaders of the Athenian *dēmos* [Hall (2007b)].

The case of Aristophanes underlines the importance of putting a further, eighth question in class-conscious classical reception: **(8)** *which ancient texts and passages within them have proved most susceptible to subsequent class-conscious readings?* The paramount example here is the *Odyssey*. One of the many reasons why this epic has proved so popular is that its cast of characters is not confined to an almost exclusively elite, aristocrat group: besides the several significant slave characters (Eumaeus, Eurycleia, Melantho), the poem includes a beggar, a mill woman, merchants and pirates, and a great deal of backbreaking labour [see Rose (1992), 92-140; Thalmann (1998)]. This overall effect is heightened by the setting on rugged Ithaca, where it is hard to secure a living from the land. But the most important factor in the focus of so many subsequent readings of the poem on class issues is the strategy by which Odysseus himself is disguised as the poorest type of free individual. For nearly ten books a king's perspective is fused with that of an indigent, ragged vagrant.

Yet the earliest responses to the *Odyssey* during the Renaissance did not emphasise its portrayal of class relationships. Odysseus was a prince in the high

aristocratic tradition, a role certainly maintained in Giambattista della Porta's tragicomedy *Penelope* (1591), William Gager's Latin drama *Ulysses Redux* (1592), and Giacomo Badoaro's libretto for Monteverdi's opera *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* (1640). Perhaps the earliest translocation of the *Odyssey* to a lower-class household occurred in the cheeky medium of ballad opera. *Penelope*, by John Mottley and Thomas Cooke (1728), sets the story of the *Odyssey* in a London tavern, the Royal Oak Ale-House; the publican is Penelope, wife of Ulysses, a sergeant in the grenadiers who has been absent fighting for nineteen years. There have subsequently been several other *Odyssey* plays and novels set in needy or proletarian communities [see Hall (forthcoming)]. But the most widely disseminated responses to the *Odyssey* that relocate its action to low-class contexts have been in fairly recent cinema. *Sommersby* (1993, directed by Jon Amiel) concerns a confederate soldier who turns up at a homestead in the American south after the civil war, claiming to be its pig-farming householder Jack Sommersby, husband of Laurel and father of her son. Poverty, agricultural problems, and the wandering population of newly liberated slaves provide the background to a story that fuses the second half of the *Odyssey* with the true story of a returning soldier dramatised in the movie *La Retour du Martin Guerre* (1982). Created by the same men who went on to collaborate on the screenplay for *Sommersby*, Daniel Vigne and Jean-Claude Carrière, this had also been subtly influenced by the *Odyssey* and was a powerful evocation of the physical reality of life in pre-industrial 16th-century France. In Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993), the Odysseus-figure Johnny is a Mancunian working-class drifter, and class conflict explodes in his disastrous confrontation with the 'suitor', represented by his girlfriend's rapacious upper-class landlord.

There have also been several films released over the last decade that explicitly use the *Odyssey* but translocate it to the working culture of the southern states of the USA. Victor Nunez's *Ulee's Gold* (1997) features a poor beekeeper in the Panhandle marshes of Florida, a former Vietnam combatant, who defends his home and womenfolk against lowlife criminals. The Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) identifies as its

Odysseus-like hero one Ulysses Everett McGill, a loser and escaped convict from the ‘white trash’ of the deep south, in 1930s Mississippi, at the height of the great Depression. The story of unremitting agricultural labour told in Anthony Minghella’s *Cold Mountain* (2003, based on a novel by Charles Frazier), almost sidelines its returning carpenter-soldier hero in favour of the relationship between the middle-class ‘Penelope’ Ada Monroe and the lowest-class person in the area (Ruby Thewes). Finally, Wim Wenders’ *Don’t Come Knocking* (2005) features Howard Spence, a sixty-year-old alcoholic movie actor, who on returning to his hometown in Elko, Nevada, rediscovers an old love interest and offspring; the travelogue consists of desperate escapades in a crummy casino, a drying-out cell in the local police station, and other demotic locations.

The *Odyssey* serves well to introduce the last question to be considered in this brief overview of methodologies for the investigation of class tensions within classical reception: **(9) the relationship between class and canon**. As society and its attitudes to social class have changed, so the periods of ancient history and the authors on the curriculum have been transformed. The *Iliad*, with its focus higher up the social scale than the *Odyssey*, was for centuries the more read and admired of the two poems, but in the early 1900s, the period of proletarian revolutions, it was relegated -- so far permanently -- to second place. Of course, the original emergence of the classical canon was a product of the ancient world’s own judgements on what was deemed worthy of repeated reading, copying and transmission around its cultural centres, and these judgements usually had a class element within them. The elevated genres of epic and tragedy, with their aristocratic heroes, survived far better than mime, pantomime, satyr drama, and the Greek burlesque novel, with their irreverent attitudes, quotidian settings, obscenity, and perceived demotic appeal [see Hall (1995)]. This point is brought out with incomparable clarity in Tony Harrison’s play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, where the near-total loss and disparagement of the ancient genre of satyr drama is connected both with ancient aesthetic snobbery and twentieth-century class conflict.

Yet even within the corpus of transmitted texts, the ‘canon’ looks different from discrete vantage points in subsequent global history. The historians and biographers of Rome (Livy, Plutarch, Suetonius), who reverberated so loudly in the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, began to be rivalled by an interest in Greek history during the Enlightenment; democratic Athens only emerged as a model for mainstream admiration in the late 18th century, at the moment when her tragedies were essentially rediscovered in mainstream discourse. Radicals and autodidacts everywhere have always been attracted to ancient authors who had once been slaves, such as Aesop and Epictetus. In the former Soviet Union, the study of ‘decadent’ and ‘bourgeois’ individualist poets such as the Roman elegists was often discouraged, while Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, Oppian’s *Haliutica*, and other texts focussed on agriculture and food provision were examined in detail. Soviet tastes can be demonstrated by a quick look through the useful English-language summaries of the articles included in the journal *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* [*Messenger of Ancient History*, founded in 1937; see also Takho-Godi (1970)].

This exercise would also reveal the significance of certain figures to a society as institutionally class-conscious as the Soviet Union, as they have also been to more anti-establishment working-class movements and their supporters. Spartacus, the Roman gladiator who led a slave revolt, is the best known in the west through Stanley Kubrick’s film adaptation of the committed communist Howard Fast’s 1951 novel. But the story had been used in the cause of reform from at least as early as the 1760 French tragedy *Spartacus* by Bernard-Joseph Saurin, who drew his noble image of the rebel slave from Plutarch’s *Life of Crassus*. The other ancient patron of working-class movements has, since a similar date, been the Titan philanthropist Prometheus, who rebelled against Zeus’s autocratic rule to give humankind fire, making possible all technological advances. His arrest and epoch-long confinement have always seemed symbolic of the industrial working classes’ oppression and exploitation. Indeed, the man who coined the term *communism* to describe his egalitarian, feminist and utopian political aims was a nineteenth-century Christian socialist called John Goodwyn Barmby, who published a

monthly magazine entitled *The Promethean: or Communist Apostle*. There is no topic in classical reception that would not benefit from the application of the nine-step enquiry into its class ramifications outlined in this chapter. But thinking about the vivid cultural presence across time of Spartacus' conflict with Crassus [see e.g. Wyke (1997), ch. 3; Urbainczyk (2004), 106-40], and Prometheus' revolt against Zeus' autocracy [Harrison (1998), vii-xxix; Hardwick (2000), 127-39; Hall (2004)], would certainly prove a rousing way to begin putting the class into classical reception.