



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
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Exploring Ancient Literature

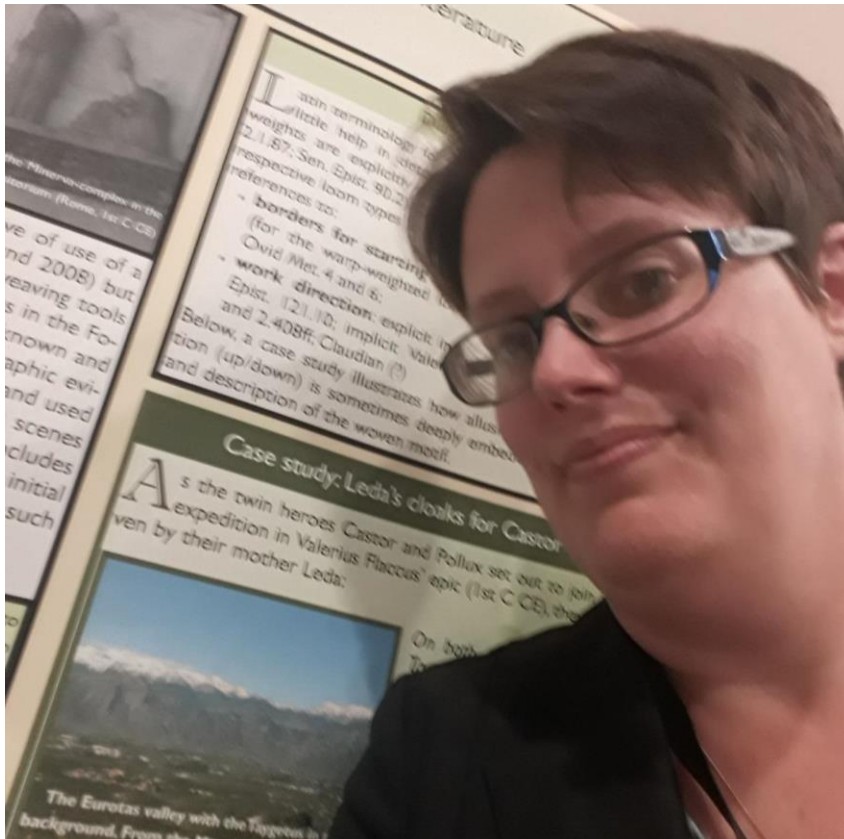
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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Hello!



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Exploring Ancient Literature

- Two units focussing on Greek and Roman literature (8 and 11)
- They tie in with the concept of identity creation explored in other parts of the module...
- ...but also give you hands on experience of working with literary texts – and tools to do so
- Two questions, tweaked to ancient material:
 - What did these texts make their contemporary audience feel/think/act?
 - How did these texts accomplish that? *How do they do it?*

Exploring Ancient Literature

- Two questions, tweaked to ancient material:
 - What did these texts make their contemporary audience feel/think/act?
 - How did these texts accomplish that? *How do they do it?*
- Two texts, illustrating two different ways to work with text:
 - Homer *Iliad* 6.312-529
 - Sappho *Fragment* 16
- What, *if anything*, do we need to know/do before we start reading and asking our two questions?

Ways of reading

ILIAD 6

Why 'Homer'?

- Ancient sources refer to the poet of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as 'Homer'
- We know that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were transmitted orally for a significant period of time prior to being written down—13thC BC / 8thC BC
- Texts we study today was largely shaped in Athens in the 6th to 4th C BCE, pulling together a range of different versions, and further edited in Alexandria in the Hellenistic period
- Texts as we have them reflect both Bronze Age and Archaic/Classical Greek society => challenging to use as sources for either!

Male and Female

- The Greek world was divided clearly in male and female sphere of responsibility/influence/power
 - Cf. discussion of female attendance at the Great Dionysia theatre festivals
- Literature and drama were ways to explore and affirm these norms, just as they are today



Athenian amphora by the Amasis painter, mid-6th C BCE. Now in [New York](#)

Euripides' *The Trojan Women*

What words of yours can release
Pity to match your pain?
And I – never again
Shall I sway to the shuttle's song,
Weaving wool spun from a home-bred fleece!
Instead, one last look at the faces of my dead sons,
Then go to meet yet worse –
Forced, maybe, to the bed of some lustful Greek! –
Listen, gods, to my curse
On the night that hides such wrong!
By day, servile and meek,
Carrying water from the well –
Perhaps, holy Peirene! This is my first prayer [...]
(Eur. *Tro.* 199-205)



Life in Opposites



- Kneepads used for picking wool clean – an everyday object just like the spindle whorls
- Motifs:
- Scenes from the women's quarters, which we can view both in terms of recognition and in terms of assertion of society's norms: this is what your life should be
- A number of these also depict mythological motifs, fitting in with the fact that mythology and religion were key parts of the woman's life – and parts that let her both take and try out a role outside of the home



A Gender Sensitive Reading: *Iliad* 6

- Lines 1-236 focus on Diomedes in battle
- 237 onw.: Hector's return to the homes of Troy; he meets
 - Wives of other soldiers eager for news
 - His mother Hecuba, who wants to look after him and bring him wine; Hector asks her to see to the sacrificial robes of Athena, together with her ladies in waiting
 - Helen and Paris (removed by Aphrodite from the fight with Menelaus and for whom Hector is looking)
'He found the man in his chamber busy with his splendid armour, the corselet and the shield, and turning in his hands the curved bow, while Helen of Argos was sitting among her attendant women directing the magnificent work done by her handmaidens.' (Hom. Il. 6.321-324)

Hector out of Place; Unmanly Paris

- In *Iliad* 6, we move from the male sphere of the battlefield to the household dominion of the Trojan women:
 - Hecuba offering refreshments
 - Helen working wool with her maids in waiting, supervising servants
 - It is clear that Hector does not belong properly there:
- Hecuba: ‘Why then, child, have you come here and left behind the bold battle?’
- Hector: declines wine, ‘for fear you stagger my strength and make me forget my courage’
- [...] the house of Alexandros, a splendid place [...] a sleeping room and a hall and a courtyard [...] entered Hector, in his hand holding an eleven-cubit long spear
- Hector scolds Paris: ‘you have scolded me rightly [...] it was not so much in coldness [...] that I sat in my room, but I wished to give myself over to sorrow.

Hector Out of Place

- Paris: 'But just now with soft words my wife was winning me over and urging me into the fight [...]'
 - Giving over to feelings, and to a wife?
- Helen, of Paris: 'I wish I had been the wife of a better man than this is [...]'
 - The dubiousness of Paris' manliness flagged up for the audience
- Hector: 'Do not, Helen, make me sit with you, though you love me. [...] Already my heart is hastening me to defend the Trojans ['send Paris after me, please'] for I am going first to my own house, so I can visit my own people, my beloved wife and my son, who is little [...]'
 - Secure connection, but also clear division of gender spheres

So speaking Hector of the shining helm departed and in speed made his way to his own well-established dwelling, but failed to find in the house Andromache of the white arms; for she, with the child, and followed by one fair-robed attendant, had taken her place on the tower in lamentation and tearful. When he saw no sign of his perfect wife within the house, Hector stopped in his way on the threshold and spoke among the handmaidens: 'Come then, tell me truthfully as you may, handmaidens: where has Andromache of the white arms gone? Is she with any of the sisters of her lord or the wives of his brothers? Or has she gone to the house of Athena, where all other lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess?' Then in turn the hard-working housekeeper gave him an answer: 'Hector, since you have urged me to tell you the truth, she is not with any of the sisters of her lord or the wives of her brothers, nor has she gone to the house of Athena, where all the other lovely-haired women of Troy propitiate the grim goddess, but she has gone to the great bastion of Ilion, because she heard that the Trojans were losing, and great grew the strength of the Achaians. Therefore she has gone in speed to the wall, like a woman gone mad, and a nurse attending carries the baby.'

A Temporary reversal: Andromache

- First, note how different Hector's house is described 'well-established dwelling' – no frills – as compared to Paris' 'splendid palace'
- Secondly, note that the home is where Hector expects to find Andromache: 'failed to find', and that the 'perfect wife' should normally be 'within the house', 'Andromache of the white arms' – no tan, normally inside, that she keeps a '*hard-working* housekeeper'
- Thirdly, if she's out, Andromache would normally be at the house of another wife, or in the temple
- When she deviates from this, she is described as 'a woman gone mad'

Hector and Andromache

[...] and Hector hastened from his home [...]. So as he had come to the gates on his way through the great city, the Skaian gates, whereby he would issue into the plain, there at last his own generous wife came running to meet him, Andromache. [...] She came to him there, and beside her went an attendant carrying the boy [...] a little child only, a baby. [...] Hector smiled in silence as he looked on his son, but she, Andromache, stood close beside him, letting her tears fall. [...] Hector, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother, you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband. Please take pity on me, stay here on the rampart, that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow, but draw your people up by the fig tree, there where the city is openest to attack, and where the wall may be mounted.

Hector and Andromache



Hector and Andromache

- Hector's silence
 - On the one hand, a subtle expression of emotion
 - On the other, implying that in this sphere, still within the city, the man's role is less prominent
- Andromache's family
 - She describes her world wholly in terms of her family
 - Cf. Sappho *Fr.* 44 with a lavish description of the wedding of Hector and Andromache
 - 'do not leave [...] your wife a widow – implies that to a husband, a wife is important first and foremost in that capacity
 - Hector picks up on this later, foretelling how Andromache will be described as 'the wife of Hector, who was ever the bravest fighter of the Trojans, breakers of horses, in the days when they fought about Ilion.'

Andromache out of Place?

- Offering suggestions on how to plan the battle: 'draw your people up by the fig tree' etc
- Overstepping the boundary? Is Andromache turning into a 'bad' wife?
- The build-up: her behaviour in this scene is clearly highlighted as being out of the ordinary, and caused by extreme circumstances

Andromache In (Her Own) Place

So speaking he set his child again in the arms of his beloved wife, who took him back again to her fragrant bosom smiling in her tears. [...]

Hector comforts her: 'Go therefore back to our house, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens ply their work also; but the men must see to the fighting, all men who are the people of Ilion, but I beyond others.' So glorious Hector spoke and again took up the helmet with its crest of horse hair, while his beloved wife went homeward, turning to look back on the way, letting the live tears fall.

Iliad 22: Hector and Andromache

But Hector's wife had not yet heard the news. No one in fact had even gone to tell her that her husband had remained outside the gates. She was at work, in a corner of her lofty house, on a purple web of double width, which she was decorating with a floral pattern. In her innocence, she had just called to the ladies-in-waiting in her house to put a big cauldron on the fire so that Hector could have a hot bath when he came home from the battle – never dreaming that far away from all baths he lay dead at the hands of Achilles and bright-eyed Athene. But now the keening and moaning at the battlements reached her ears. [...] 'Alas, Hector; alas for me!' she cried. 'So you and I were born under the same unhappy star, you here in Priam's house and I in Thebe under wooded Placus in the house of Eetion [...]'

Follow-up reading

Arthur, M. B. (1981). The divided world of Iliad VI. *Women's Studies*, 8, 21–46.

Kozak, L. (2016). *Experiencing Hektor : Character in the Iliad*. Bloomsbury Academic.
[Chapter title: Mission (Andromache) Il. 6.369-502]

Exploring Ancient Literature

PRACTICAL TIPS

Overview texts to help

- Cartledge, P. 2011 *Ancient Greece: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford.
- Allen, W. 2014 *Classical Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford.
 - Or, a bit more extensive: [Croally, N. & Hyde, R. 2011 *Classical Literature*, London.](#)
- These short surveys will help identify the overall timeline of development
- Use them to relate sources, periods or problems in specific modules to ancient literature generally: do check!

So how do you find Classical texts?

- Online: there are several reliable sites hosting translations of Greek and Latin sources
 - Perseus at Tufts: [Greek and Roman material](#)
- Online via UWTSD: [Loeb Classical Library](#)
- The site [theoi.com](#) combines text and encyclopaedia articles – but use with caution!

Brill's New Pauly

- For introductions to almost any subject related to the ancient world, the most reliable reference work is the online *Brill's New Pauly*
- This is an academic encyclopaedia of the ancient world – it covers far more than mythology
- Access via [UWTSD online library databases](#) and logging on to the database called Brill Reference Works, and selecting *New Pauly Online* to search the English version only

Ways of Reading

VOICE AND COMPOSITION

The context of the archaic period

- (Further) development of the *polis* over the 8th to 6th century BC
 - Growth of urban centres
 - Conflicts between *poleis*
 - => identity of different *poleis*
- Gradual changes of rule affecting many (but not all!) *poleis*:
 - From aristocratic dominance to tyranny to...
- Changing self-definition means changing cultural expression



Changing cultural climate

- Literature in this period becomes a way of dealing with changes in identity
 - Whether it approves or disapproves of the changes...
 - Authors you will read in this section will be scattered across this spectrum
- Different types of poetry create, support, and sustain different types of cultural identities
 - Aristocratic
 - Tyrannical
 - Democratic
- Who writes poetry changes over the period: the two focus authors of this lecture stand at the beginning of the development



A vast range of poetry

- Lyric poetry (also called 'melic' from 'melos' = 'song')
 - Monodic lyric – a solo voice accompanied by the lyre [e.g. Sappho, cf. the vase painting above]
 - Choral lyric – for many singers, with lyre (and flute), sometimes dance, on a very wide range of topics and for a very wide range of occasions
- Elegiac poetry – defined by its verse, performed alongside the flute [e.g. Tyrtaeus]
- Iambic poetry – defined by its content: mocking, rude and graphic [e.g. Semonides, Solon]

Unifying factors

- Similarities in form
 - Brevity compared to epic poetry
 - Performance, again compared to epic poetry
- Similarities in content
 - Generally in the here and now, again compared to epic poetry dealing with the historical past
 - Applies both to the Pindaric victory odes and to (some of) Sappho's love poems – but cf. Stesichorus for mythological topics
 - A stronger suggestion of representing a personal perspective: many archaic poems feature a first-person narrator ('I-voice')
 - Consider this as a potential consequence of societies no longer relying on oral story- or poetry-telling to glue communities together

Using a first-person voice

- Be cautious! A poet saying 'I' and 'me' may very well be referring to their own experience, but may also be faking a first-person voice – cf. modern song lyrics or film voice-overs!
- The first-person voice may be chosen for artistic rather than personal reasons
- The paucity of evidence makes it more difficult to judge in relation to ancient literature...
- ...and has led, historically, to an emphasis on biographical interpretations

"The snow in the mountains was melting and Bunny had been dead for several weeks before we came to understand the gravity of our situation. He'd been dead for ten days before they found him, you know. [...] I suppose at one time in my life I might have had any number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell."

D. Tarrt The Secret History, 1992

Sappho

(end of 7th C BC, Lesbos/Mytilene)

Some say an army of horsemen,
some of footsoldiers, some of
ships, is the fairest thing on the
black earth, but I say it is what
one loves.

It's very easy to make this clear to
everyone, for Helen, by far
surpassing mortals in beauty, left
the best of all husbands

and sailed to Troy, mindful of
neither her child nor her dear
parents, but with one glimpse she
was seduced by

Aphrodite. For easily bent...and
nimble...[missing text]...has
reminded me now of Anactoria
who is not here;

I would much prefer to see the
lovely way she walks and the
radiant glance of her face than the
war-chariots of the Lydians or
their footsoldiers in arms.

From state to individual?

Some say an army of horse-men,
some of foot soldiers, some of ships,
is the fairest thing on the black earth,
but I say it is what one loves.

[...]

I would much prefer to see the
lovely way she walks and the radiant
glance of her face than the war-
chariots of the Lydians or their foot
soldiers in arms.

- This poem can be used as evidence for the move from general to personal in lyric poetry
- A meeting with the woman she loves would be more valuable than military power
- But: military power is mentioned and held as an important measuring stock or the comparison doesn't work
- => Reflection of society even if the persona rejects it
- Sappho part of aristocratic society

Relating to mythology (and epic)

It's very easy to make this clear to everyone, for Helen, by far surpassing mortals in beauty, left the best of all husbands

and sailed to Troy, mindful of neither her child nor her dear parents, but with one glimpse she was seduced by

Aphrodite. For easily bent...and nimbly...[missing text]...has reminded me now of Anactoria who is not here;

- Focus on Helen as an individual
- Initially: Helen's feelings
 - The people she leaves behind
 - Menelaus the safe bet
 - Cf. later Eur. *Med.* 230-240
 - Expansion of epic tradition: her child and her parents – leaving them potentially harrowing
- Later: The pressure of love (Aphrodite)

Personal epic

It's very easy to make this clear to everyone, for Helen, by far surpassing mortals in beauty, left the best of all husbands

and sailed to Troy, mindful of neither her child nor her dear parents, but with one glimpse she was seduced by

Aphrodite. For easily bent...and nimbly...[missing text]...has reminded me now of Anactoria who is not here;

- Sappho draws on Homer to tell a seemingly personal story
 - For both, it is important to remember that the core material is taken for granted
- The Iliadic Helen colours the reader's understanding of Anactoria's character here
 - ...and therefore also of Sappho's own (if we assume Sappho = I)
- The comparison of Anactoria to the supposedly most beautiful woman in the world is of course also no coincidence...

And went sailing off to Troy
With no thought [at all] for her child
Or her beloved parents, but led away
...

...for...

...lightly...

[she] has reminded me now of
Anactoria

Who is not here

I wish, most of all, that I could gaze
upon

Her graceful walk and the brightness
of her face

This I desire more than the gleam of
Lydian chariots

And heavily armed foot soldiers

- The mention of Anactoria gains its full significance only at the end of the clause
 - 'who is not here' does not have an active verb in the Greek
 - Either this heightens the absence of Anactoria: she is so far from being an agent or character in the poem that her actions aren't represented in a conjugated form
 - Or the character Anactoria remains under the control of the narrator (cf. Greene 1994: 44)
- The final stanza is the first to put the narrator's (subjective) experience unequivocally front and centre

Composition: How is it done?

Some say an army of horse-men,
some of foot soldiers, some of
ships, is the fairest thing on the
black earth, but I say it is what one
loves.

[...]

I would much prefer to see the
lovely way she walks and the
radiant glance of her face
than the war-chariots of the
Lydians or their foot soldiers in
arms.

- The poem opens with a comparison to military power...
- ...and closes with a comparison with military power
 - Ring composition
- Effects?
 - Implicit suggestion that the power of love is like the overwhelming power of an army: doesn't have to make sense
 - General statement grows from a seemingly personal poem
 - Acknowledgement that military power *does* matter; acknowledgement of the power of normative society