‘A Mirror does not develop…’. The History of Classical Scholarship as Reception

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E.M. Forster, reflecting on the art and technology of the novel, claimed that ‘a mirror does not develop because a historical pageant passes in front of it. It only develops when it gets a fresh coat of quicksilver – in other words, when it acquires new sensitiveness’.[1] What may be true of the novel may also be true of a scholarly discipline, and the book to which my own reflections here serve as an introduction, is a call for a new sensitiveness: one not without appreciation of the historical pageant, but one that equally cares about the fresh workings of the quicksilver.

The Scottish novelist and writer Ali Smith, herself often engaged with figures and tropes from antiquity, elaborates on Forster’s pronouncement in her hard-to-classify text *Artful* (2012), four chapters of a first-person narrative that were also four lectures Smith gave at Oxford University as the Weidenfeld Visiting Professor in European Comparative Literature. Smith’s text does not simply slot into the category of lectures on art, literature, or poetics. Instead, this is a text that confronts and thinks with being in the the disorienting and reorienting position of speaking in the role of the scholar in front of an audience of scholars. She does so by harnessing that sense of difference for her first-person narrative, which speaks from the point of view of someone whose beloved partner returns from the dead to worry about a series of unfinished lectures with the same titles as Smith’s chapters. Her partial, opaque, often funny, communications force the narrator to confront, in turn, the patchiness of language, of knowing an other, and of knowing again anything thought familiar, in approaching those unfinished, alien scripts herself.

[1] Forster (2005 [1927]: 36).

Smith's text deliberately breaks with the conventions of academic discourse, but is, at the same time, deeply philological: in its reflections on language, its enacted forms of interpretation, reading and re-reading, and correction, in its evasions (the 'artful' of the title is also Charles Dickens's Artful Dodger) and exposures of the interpreter, in its relish of wordplay and etymology, its rattling of words, its forcing the reader to remain in and to remain aware of a state of not-knowing, of knowing incompletely. In her last lecture, 'On Offer and On Reflection', comes Smith's elaboration of Forster's comment:

All reflection involves both Narcissus and Hermes. EM Forster, in Aspects of the Novel, reminds his readers that 'a mirror does not develop because a historical pageant passes in front of it. It only develops when it gets a fresh coat of quicksilver – in other words, when it acquires new sensitiveness.' Quicksilver is another word for Mercury, is another word for a planet that looks like a grey boulder in space, is another word for an element which is both fluid and solid, can change its shape yet still hold its form, is another word for Hermes, Greek god of art, artfulness, thievery, changeability, swiftness of thought and of communication, language, the alphabet, speechmaking, emails, texts, tweets; god of bartering, trade, liaison, roads and crossroads, travellers, the stock exchange, wages, dreams; […] God of quick-wittedness, god of the musical potential of the shells of dead things, god of getting a tune out of goat-guts, but above all god of perfect timing, god of canny slippage, god of changing the subject.[2]

Compare this Hermes, who lends his name to the art and science of hermeneutics, of interpretation, with another Oxford lecture, that, almost exactly a hundred years earlier, also invokes the dead and that is likely to be more immediately familiar to Classicists. In 1908, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff spoke, in English, to a scholarly audience in Oxford, pronouncing what might be his most recognizable statement in the Anglophone world, that '[t]he tradition is dead; our task is to revivify life that has passed away. We know that ghosts cannot speak until they have drunk blood; and the spirits which we invoke

[2] Smith (2012: 185-86). Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, from which the quotation comes, was itself also rooted in a series of lectures, the Clark Lectures in English literature, delivered at Cambridge University in 1927, an invitation that filled Forster with some apprehension, speaking in a scholarly frame as a writer. His 'Introductory', from which the quote comes, also includes reflections on the scholar.

demand the blood of our hearts. We give it to them gladly; but if they then abide our question, something from us has entered into them; something alien, that must be cast out in the name of truth!'.[3] Wilamowitz's *Herzblut* emphasises the heart's desire for proximity and the reactive need to pull back in the name of science, expressing a nostalgic, self-denying energy in the name of discipline, in the most literal sense of the word.

That Wilamowitz himself is the author of a (still readily available, and translated) history of classical scholarship, and that 'blood for the ghosts' gave the title to a collection of essays on the history of classical scholarship by Hugh Lloyd-Jones that is also still widely referenced, illuminates one end of the spectrum of how the history of classical scholarship has been approached: from within the discipline, as a history of the self, a history of familiarity, anecdotal, yet teleological, and nostalgic in the way Seth Lerer has described the self-historicizing, self-disciplining, and self-sustaining narratives of scholarly identity as 'a form of nostalgia that lies at the heart of the rhetoric of philology'.[4]

If this is an approach to understanding the past and those who try to understand the past that is in stark contrast to the lateral, mutable, contingent, unexpected guiding trickster spirit of Smith's Oxford lectures, then Christopher Stray's work on British Classics gathered in this volume, which often circles around Oxford no less than around its sibling institution Cambridge, can look, Janus-faced, in more than one direction: it acknowledges, looking back at recognised scholarly and narrative templates, the power of the individual, of the evocation of scholarly

[3] Wilamowitz (1908: 25). The lectures were, incidentally, translated for him by Gilbert Murray. On the lectures, Fowler (2009); on their correspondence Calder (2002); in terms of referencing Wilamowitz in the field of Reception Studies and the history of Classics, 'blood for the ghosts' might now be the equivalent of what Steven Nimis has termed the 'Wilamowitz footnote' in classical scholarship; Nimis (1984).

[4] Lerer (2002: 10); likewise, '[t]he construction of academic disciplines may not be keyed to an objective subject of study but to a subjective narrative of disciplinary maintenance. Rhetoric and philology become the paradigms for such self-reflective inquiry. Recounting the history of the field effectively justifies the field; anecdotalizing the experience of its experts is the means by which one makes oneself an expert', Lerer (2002: 9).

environments, of the familiar characters, but never looks back to those narrative genealogies without critical examination; at the same time, and in an entirely un-nostalgic and encouragingly un-sentimental way, it tells those stories not as self-sufficient exemplars, but instead suggests and describes something closer to 'sites of learning', or 'sites of knowledge' (to borrow Christian Jacob's term 'lieux de savoir'),[5] which are overlapping, open, connective, provisional, highlighting the accidental, the unstable, the surprising, and often the overlooked, whether people, objects, or technologies, each with their own agency and, often elliptical and erratic, trajectory.

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The history of classical scholarship, then, has, and has had, multiple identities: on the one hand, as an established part of the study of the ancient Greek and Roman world, though often as a secondary part, as, in effect, a naming of the parts of traditions and genealogies. But, on the other hand, it has also, especially alongside new research interests in the reception of antiquity, been claiming its place as a more fully reflective and theorized field that is and ought to be integral to classical studies themselves. As a field of inquiry, it is multifaceted and multidisciplinary. It taps into larger concerns of the history of scholarship and science, and of disciplinarity in the modern research university; it encourages the meta-critical reflection of specific, historically conditioned practices, epistemologies, and ways of knowing; and it addresses, even if indirectly, the question of what forms of knowledge of antiquity lie outside the confines of the discipline and how those ways of knowing have been articulated.

In a 2009 review essay on recent work in the history of classical scholarship, I suggested that some of the nodal points around which projects were emerging

[5] *Lieux de savoir* is a research network and book series directed by the French cultural historian and classicist Christian Jacob, with a strongly comparatist mission: Jacob (2007), Jacob (2011). The term alludes to the project on *lieux de mémoire*, 'memory sites', connected with a group of researchers around Pierre Nora in the 1980s, a term that itself plays on the Roman rhetorical notion of mnemotechnics, topoi, and memory maps; Nora (1984-1992).

were disciplinarity, philology, and the figure of the scholar.[6] These were not isolated categories, and the work of the last decade has, if anything, continued to probe the porous membranes around those terms, as many scholars of scholarship have, in effect, continued to turn a philological eye on the philologists.[7] Such philological gazes have maybe been most evident in work that arises out of interaction with a turn to 'practices' in the History of Science, examining the tools, habits, and epistemological expectations of classicists in a way that is temporally and geographically expansive, and increasingly deliberately comparative.[8] This willingness to probe and extend the capacity of terms is maybe most evident in the term 'philology' itself, whose recent treatments can range from the historical and comparative technologies of textual knowledge, collection, and criticism to the philosophy and epistemologies of making meaning of text; and from philology as a way of living to philology as a means of living, spanning the ethical as much as the institutional and professional, the social as much as the epistemological.[9] Biography, likewise, is

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[6] Güthenke (2009); see also Güthenke (2015) for an annotated bibliography.
[7] 'A double historicization is required, that of the philologist—and we philologists historicize ourselves as rarely as physicians heal themselves—no less than that of the text'; Pollock (2009: 958).
[8] For a good account, see Daston and Most (2015). For an account of the rise of *Altertumswissenschaft* in Germany that, among other things, explicitly and profitably looks to impulses from the history of science such as the history of specific disputes, see Harloe (2013). The opening of the history of classical scholarship to the history of the humanities tout court, or its welcome integration into it, is also reflected in such ventures as the recent journal *History of the Humanities* (University of Chicago Press).
[9] On tools and practices, for example, Most (1997), (1998), (1999), (2002). For Stray's work on practices, tools, and people, selectively and to give a sense of the range, Butterfield and Stray (2009); Hallett and Stray (2009); Stray (2010); Stray and Whitaker (2015); Kraus and Stray (2015). For histories of philology in a comparative and global frame: Elman, Chang, and Pollock (2014); Grafton and Most (2016); also the research project www.zukunftsphilologie.de, a project housed at the Freie Universität, Berlin under the auspices of the Forum Transregionale Studien, and its new, associated journal and book series *Philological Encounters* (Brill). For the philosophy and theory of philology: Hamacher (2015); Schwindt (2009); Gurd (2010), Wegmann (2014). On philology as a 'way of life': a graduate seminar recently team-taught at the University of Chicago by Boris Maslov and Rocco Rubini, to be repeated at the University of Oslo in 2018; on 'ethical reading', addressing the interactions between Theology and Classics, Najman (2017). On detailed and large-scale

playing a newly invigorated role in this: no longer a positivist, teleological narrative, the biographical is opened in different directions:[10] the detailed intellectual biography that emphasizes self-fashioning and larger intellectual trends, yet is equally and critically attuned to the content of the scholars' work;[11] the emphasis on networks, collaborations, and harder to register forms of academic labour;[12] or new forms of experimentation with narrative altogether.[13]

Christopher Stray's essays collected in this volume resonate with many of those recent tendencies. Although they profess not to be explicitly oriented towards theory or not to be aiming for theorizing, a good number of them gesture in that direction as inseparable from their analytical thrust. Stray puts his emphasis, and his affinities, with fine-grained, in-depth, archive-based case studies, rich in evidence and data. At the same time, such case studies are legible not only in the familiar frames of the field's self-historicizing; in their responsiveness to the more elusive dynamic of what they describe, including that of the archive, they prove equally rich in and rich as connectors and sensors that allow for the materials to articulate new, open-ended theoretical and methodological questions and to enact a new mobility within Classics at large.[14]

In his introduction, Stray suggests a definition of Classics 'as the product of a form of social action ('classicizing') in which powerful past meanings are deployed in the present for a variety of purposes, conscious or otherwise. Very

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trajectories about the rise of modern philological institutions: Clark (2006); Turner (2015). For a recent survey, Hui (2016).

[10] See Marchand (2010) on Baertschi and King (2009) for reflection on biography as a tool.

[11] For example, Rebenich (2002); Grafton and Weinberg (2011); Haugen (2013).

[12] For networks and forms of collaboration not just as a historical feature but one encouraging new methodological and theoretical reflection, see, for example, Avlami and Alvar (2010); Bonnet, Krings and Valentini (2010); Stockhorst, Lepper and Hoppe (2016); Hilbold, Simon and Späth (2017).

[13] A good example is the 'Archive of Encounters' that continues the research project on Classics and class undertaken by Edith Hall and Henry Stead at King's College London: www.classicsandclass.info; Goldhill (2017) on family biography as a narrative challenge arising from a philological dynamic.

[14] For a reflection on Classics and the 'open field', and a call for such mobility, see Güthenke and Holmes (2018).

often this purpose has been to hold to a set of exemplary models which enable resistance to change and relativity. Classics has often provided those models, its nearest rivals in European history being religion and nationalism'. If stability was one purpose, in practice Stray's essays offer overlapping spheres in which the contingency of stability, compromise, and provisionality weigh heavily. If anything, the 'exemplarity' of classical models appears to be much less about stability than about a spectrum of flexibility and inflexibility, of roadblocks and sideways manoeuvers, of attempts at creating stability, and of the avowals and disavowals those attempts bring. Stray's historical frame for the nineteenth and twentieth century is one where priorities were themselves shifting and kept doing so: curricular reform and institutional changes interacted with the Royal Commissions of 1850, 1872, and 1922 – though, again, rather than making this a determining contextual frame, Stray is clear that those changes were the result of negotiation, workable compromise, constellations, and sometimes sheer accident.[15] These are essays about connectedness and its limitations, too: about in-groups and out-groups, exclusion and inclusion, schools (literally and figuratively), communities, pedagogy, and the anxieties, dynamic, and confusions that come with them.

Stray emphasizes his attention to 'micro-environments'; but this is not the work of someone who would not look up from crafting a little model university on his desk: instead, the deeper the archival exploration, the clearer also the reckoning with the kaleidoscopic contingencies and negotiations inherent in the material record. Likewise, in focusing on Classics in Britain, the essays might suggest a self-contained lens, and one that often anchors itself on the dominance of few institutions. But there is a calculated, repeated emphasis on connectivity and messiness both at the edges and right in the centres of those institutions that Stray singles out: British Classics tends beyond Britain, it reacts, in explicit and disavowed ways to scholarly and cultural events outside Britain; and much as a micro-ecology of in-groups in universities, colleges, and schools reveals larger explicatory force, at the end of the day Stray's characters show again and again,

[15] For the instabilities, risks, and dangers of aspiring to classical models in the same period, see, for example and in a different key, Richardson (2013).

intentionally or not, that Classics is not and cannot be done in isolation, splendid or not.[16] There are no water-tight dividing lines, be they individual, institutional, disciplinary, or national. British Classics is, in its texture, about Classics in Germany, in America, in France and Holland, and about the messiness and force of mutual perception and self-perception, making it more than ever a timely book.[17]

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If, in the last twenty years or so, there has been a pendulum swing from genealogical histories of classical scholarship written by classicists, for classicists, towards critical histories of scholarly practices, institutions, and individuals written (mostly) by cultural historians and historians of scholarship and of science, then Stray's work fits that paradigm. As he explains in his own introduction, when he began work towards Classics in Britain, in the late 1970s, he came from a background in History and Sociology, and his interests were not in the first instance focused on the creation of meaning and understanding of textual content in the classical scholars, teachers and pupils he discussed. At the same time, and not least due to the significant collaborative energy that has seen him team up with classicists for a large number of edited volumes on practices, objects, and individuals, his work points ahead to an important shift in how text and context relate.

When Christopher Stray began to work on the history of classical scholarship in Britain, from an initially sociological point of view, in the late 1970s, and even when his *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England,*

[16] See, explicitly, Hallett and Stray (2009).
[17] New and important work is being done on émigré scholars (for example, Crawford, Ulmschneider and Elsner (2017)). But comparatively little is said about the longer back-history of exchange. To take the example of Anglo-German scholarly histories, the role of Winckelmann has rightly been emphasized, as in Evangelista (2009), or Orrells (2011). Ellis (2014) makes a case for a two-directional trans-national approach. Stray's great many instances of pointing up the connectors gestures towards the need for a much more detailed and extensive study of Anglo-German classical relations, including its complex history of mutual perception.

1830-1960 was published as a monograph in 1998, there was very little like it that approached the history of classical knowledge in a comprehensive, institutional, cultural-historical way, and also distinguished it from prosopographically-focused histories of Classics written from 'within', such as those of Edward Sandys, Rudolf Pfeiffer, or Wilamowitz;[18] or the very fine-grained longue-durée historical and intellectual portraits of scholars, works, and scholarly themes offered by Arnaldo Momigliano.[19] (Stray outlines in his own introduction the genesis of the work, in relation to especially the related, yet different work on England by, for example, Richard Jenkyns and Frank Turner).[20] In the late 1990s, the book stood in dialogue with new cultural-historical work such as that of Linda Dowling on the Hellenism of Victorian Oxford, or with Suzanne Marchand's seminal study of German institutional Hellenism and Archaeology, as well as a growing body of work, especially in Germany and Italy at the time, on Classics and nationalism.[21]

If, on the one hand, Stray's work had affinities with a growing body of work by historians, rather than classicists, it also interacted strongly with the growing field of Reception Studies that, in the British context, arose from within Classics. That line of inquiry, particularly indebted to questions of the aesthetics of reception, included scholarly receptions, but tended towards reception events in the arts, literature, and wider culture. Twenty years on, both the field of the history of scholarship and of Reception Studies has expanded and changed.[22] Categories are transforming, not only in terms of the thin line between Reception Studies, the history of Classics, and Classics itself, a porousness that has arguably changed all three, but especially in the increasingly less productive or

[18] Sandys (1903-1908); Pfeiffer (1976); Wilamowitz (1982) [1921].
[19] Momigliano (1994).
[20] Jenkyns (1980); Turner (1981).
[21] Dowling (1994); Marchand (1996). On Classics and nationalist ideology, Losemann (1977), Canfora (1980); Wegeler (1996); Näf (2001); Christ (2006). More recently, Stephens and Vasunia (2010), or Klaniczay, Werner and Gecser (2011) have broken away from the emphasis on nationalism as nationalist ideology.
[22] For an account of the important place of *Redeeming the Text*, and a reflection on and encouragement of the critical developments of the field since, see the 2013 special issue of the *Classical Receptions Journal*.

provocative binaries of historicism versus aesthetics, or the ostensibly self-evident imagination of text enveloped by but separate from context.[23]

While the language of 'context' remains important, it raises the question whether context is distinguishable from text.[24] No classicist will be surprised that texts have histories, for example, and that, therefore, textual form is interdependent with context. But there is also a deeper situatedness of any act of scholarly interpretation and knowledge, one which (still) tends to get side-lined in the name of scientific objectivity – a reprise of Wilamowitz' gesture to keep the dead, called up, at bay. Again, work in the History of Science has made clear how much 'objectivity' itself is an active, changing, labour-intensive historical phenomenon, without making this a battle-cry for relativism.[25] Many studies, whether by classicists or historians, have left in place a distinction between historical circumstance and the ancient materials studied; as a result, it would appear that classicists can decide, on and off, to take an optional interest in the 'background' of their institutions, or figures of identification. But this is increasingly no longer the case. In this sense, Stray's findings, portraits, exempla, 'micro-environments' also feed into a new awareness that Classics as a discipline with its textual and scholarly practices, with its incorporations of value, and with the situated, embodied nature of its agents is in fact inseparable from questions of reception.[26] For a small example, we might take Stray's chapter on Jebb's Sophocles: here, Stray gives a thick description that includes Jebb's cultural investment in a particular kind of Sophocles; the format of the multi-volume edition and translation; the constellations, continuities and discontinuities that went into making 'Jebb's Sophocles'. Does this leave Sophocles' Greek intact, and out of the picture? Maybe – but when one reads Stray's account together with,

[23] See, for example, the programmatic pieces by Goldhill and Martindale in Hall and Harrop (2010), for a definition and exemplification of the historicism vs aesthetics parameters, but also the ultimate limit(ation)s of the terms. Leonhard (2006) and (2011), or the introduction to Butler (2016) suggest some useful correctives.
[24] This is a question generally alive in literary and cultural studies; see, for example, Felski (2011), expanded in Felski (2016).
[25] Daston and Galison (2007).
[26] For some recent formulations of this, Butler (2016); Formisano and Kraus (2018); Postclassicisms Collective (forthcoming).

say, Goldhill's *The Language of Sophocles* it becomes clear how tricky it is to disentangle an underlying text from hermeneutic, specifically late nineteenth-century, Christian expectations about Sophoclean style, arrangement, and notions of the tragic, and how tricky it is to treat such 'contextual', reception-oriented knowledge as optional, or forming an external, removable layer.[27]

A recurring theme across Stray's explorations is that of negotiated and interdependent rivalry: between individuals, between institutions, between nations, and between Classics and other disciplines. The sense of contested territory that Stray's classicists experienced was shared outside Britain in the changing world of the research university. The German classicist W.S. Teuffel, in a lecture of 1858 on recent developments in the study of classical antiquity, speaks of a hypothetical comparison of Classics now and then that would leave many a philologist justifiably feeling like 'an older sister in a large family', who has 'to watch attention move away from her and towards the younger siblings many of whom she was once rocking', an older sister 'who is still amiable, and now even more experienced, well-read, and educated (*gebildet*) compared to a decade ago'.[28] Teuffel here thinks in particular of the rise of other, modern philologies who owe their techniques to classical philology. In our current moment, the relationship between Classics, Reception, and the History of Scholarship is no less part of a sibling dynamic, though we might want to think of family resemblances rather than questions of primogeniture and unidirectional nurture (though the implication of sibling affects may prove a useful heuristic). If scholarship is always a form of reception, then any history of scholarship is entangled with that reception – and is itself situated in a similar way. This is not to make a point or issue a warning about infinite regress, about getting stuck in a relativist loop or *mise-en-abîme* where every position is hopelessly subjective; instead it is an encouragement to show care and responsibility vis-à-vis the

[27] Goldhill (2012); on notions of the tragic inflecting and building structures of classical knowledge, see, e.g., Billings (2015) and Leonhard (2015).
[28] Teuffel (1871: 460). For the use of gendered imagery of a personified science and a gendered object of inquiry, too, compelling work has been done for nineteenth century historiography (for example, Smith (1998); Schnicke (2015)), including on ancient historians such as Mommsen (Müller (2010)). Nothing comparable is currently available for Classics as such.

changeability of the field, thinking about potential rather than vertigo, articulating it as a fresh sensitivity (not least in Forster's sense), rather than a pronouncement of instability and crisis.

Ali Smith closes her reflection on Forster, interpretation, Narcissus and Hermes the changeable as follows:

Because of this messenger going ahead of us, whose quickness is a reminder that alive and very fast both sometimes mean the same thing, we are able not just to know but to see where we are and where we're living. With this mercurial god, division comes to mean response. His presence allows transparency, protection, a seeing through something *and* an act of seeing something through.[29]

Does reflection on Classics and its history offer any form of protection? Probably no more or less than Wilamowitz's revenants drawn near by blood then kept at bay by protesting science. Christopher Stray's essays, the people, acts, and things they circumscribe, indicate movement between stability and slippage, between promise and compromise, between familiar narratives and pointers to newly configured, mercurial pathways. They challenge any certainties which doors are opening and which are closing. They do see through something, and they see something through.

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[29] Smith 2012: 186.

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