Feminism and Classics Revisited: A Panel in Commemoration of Barbara F. McManus

This panel, organized under the auspices of the Women's Classical Caucus, commemorates the twentieth anniversary of Barbara McManus' *Classics and Feminism: Gendering the Classics*, and the twenty-fourth of Nancy Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin's *Feminist Theory and the Classics*. McManus offered concrete data on the state of women in the profession and the state of the study of women and gender in antiquity, and showed the continuing, stark disparities in both areas. Rabinowitz & Richlin's volume offered challenges to scholarly orthodoxies political and personal, theoretical and interpretive. Recent activity in this vein—e.g., "Classics and the New Faces of Feminism," organized by Spentzou and Liveley—has retrospectively and prospectively explored feminism and the Classics, with particular interest in intersectionality, women's status in the profession, and expanding feminist inquiry further across the field.

This 90-minute panel asks how much has changed in our field and how much remains the same? How do and should feminist research and activism interact? What promising methodological developments characterize feminist classical scholarship in this century? Three papers exploring these questions precede a roundtable discussion on the enduring problems and possibilities.

Paper #1, "Twenty-five years of *Feminist Theory and the Classics*: Now what?," addresses developments in the field in recent decades and charts directions for the present and future. Scholars nowadays generally accept gender, sexuality, narrative theory, intertextuality, and intersectionality as inseparable from our reading of texts, and acknowledge that "sex," "gender" and "sexuality" are elusive, socially-constructed categories, are performative and evolving, and should be seen in a grid intersecting with other constructed categories like class and race. International collaborations among feminist classicists have continued to grow in participation and productivity. But what could we be doing more and better? The field needs more work on race; more intense discussion of what categories like "feminist theory," "sexuality," "queer theory" mean and do; more young scholars involved; more courses on these topics; and greater awareness of activism outside classrooms and research.

Paper #2, "Feminist activism in Australasian Classics: Progress and challenges," provides a recent history of gender activism in Australasian Classics. While the Women's Classical Caucus started in the U.S.A. in 1972, the Antipodean equivalent—Australasian Women in Ancient World Studies (AWAWS)—first met only in 2011. Until then, Australasian Classics lacked any formal body where women could organize or collaborate. Moreover, Australasia does not boast North American Classics' rich tradition of sustained, collaborative scholarly attention to gender in antiquity. But since 2011, AWAWS members have made many feminist interventions in the field with regard both to professional aspects of the discipline and to the content of teaching and research. The organization has at the same time grappled with external resistance, and as a new organization is still establishing its role, methods, and relationship to feminism(s) past and future. This paper highlights the resistance and challenges that AWAWS has faced among the wider Classics community, documents reasons for some of its successes and limitations, and points to ways we might move forward using an intersectional and collaborative model of feminism.

Paper #3, "Helen and Penelope: A new queer and intertextual feminist approach," offers a new reading of Helen's and Penelope's contrasting narrative roles and functions in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, a reading that is based in queer theory and Homeric intertextuality, builds on existing feminist approaches to Homer, and follows the spirit of McManus' "Transgendered Moments" reading of Vergil's *Aeneid*. This paper argues that Helen is a "queer" subject, based on her

adulterous violation of the gender and sexual norms that Homer establishes within his poetic world. In *Iliad*, Homer presents Helen's powerful and queer subjectivity in ambiguous ethical terms, since her actions generate universal suffering and/or death, but also heroic fame. *Odyssey* situates Penelope in extensive intertextual dialogue with the Helen of *Iliad*, constructing Penelope as an ethical antitype and corrective, in analogy to the intertextual heroic competition between Odysseus and Achilles. Penelope's fidelity helps generate a plot in which "good" triumphs over "bad," the hero achieves fame through survival, and suffering is ultimately alleviated. Through Penelope's compelling subjectivity, *Odyssey* endorses normative female behavior and condemns transgressive female sexuality. This new reading of Homer exemplifies the development discussed in papers 1-2 of feminist research in tandem with queer theory.