

Abstract and Bio:

Luis Unceta Gómez - *Classical models for contemporary toxic masculinities*

Taking advantage of its consideration as the cradle of civilization, over the last years, we are assisting to a gender-oriented appropriation of Roman antiquity to legitimize the stereotypical toxic masculinity as the genuine form of manhood. Considered to be a reaction of post-feminist masculinity and a defensive response to the achievements of women's liberation and autonomy, these justifications of male violence and domination are often mixed with far-right claims, which ground on nostalgia and sentimentality for the past. These representations have quickly spread on digital (the "manosphere"; see Zuckerberg 2018 and Aguado Cantabrana forth.), and real homosocial environments (such as gyms), and are fostered by influential individuals (Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, among others), and by the complex gender dynamics in film and television depictions of Roman Antiquity. In this paper, I will explore some examples illustrating the portrayal and reasoning behind these appropriations, which usually take the form of the Stoic philosopher and the gladiator (or a combination of both).

Luis Unceta Gómez is senior lecturer in Latin Philology at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain. He specializes in Latin pragmatics and linguistic politeness, and also in classical reception in contemporary mass culture, especially comics, films, speculative fiction, and representations of sexuality therein, topics on which he has published widely. Currently, he is the principal investigator of the research project "Marginalia Classica: Recepción Clásica y cultura de masas contemporánea. La construcción de identidades y alteridades" (<http://marginaliaclassica.es>). Among his latest publications, he has recently co-edited, with Anastasia Bakogianni, the volume *Classical Reception: New Challenges in a Changing World* (De Gruyter, 2024), and, together with Juliette Harrisson and Martin Lindner, the collection *Playful Classics. Classical Reception as a Creative Process* (Bloomsbury, 2025).

Fabien Bièvre-Perrin – Tiphaine Besnard - *Modern masculinity and the t(h)reat of ancient women*

The Amazons appear on the screen many times, in peplums and more occasionally in films or series not set in Antiquity. In this communication, we will look at how the image of the Amazons has been conditioned by a male gaze before being subverted by a female or even feminist gaze, and what this says about masculinity. Constructed as a negative of male values and attitudes and at the same time as an echo of them, like in ancient Greece, the Amazons of 20th and 21st century screens offer an ambiguous and contradictory reflection of its creators, who sexualise and make seductive the actresses of a world seen as flawed and unnatural, a dynamic from which the female gaze struggles to distance itself. In a similar way, we aim to analyse the representations of another Ancient and famous woman: Medea, from 19th century paintings to nowday's visual art. The starting point of our discussion will be a painting by the little-known Belgian artist Joseph Stallaert (1825-1903). Medea's infanticide offers new visions of rage and fury.

Fabien Bièvre-Perrin is a teacher-researcher at the University of Lorraine. He is a member of the SAMA team and a research associate at the Centre Jean Bérard (Naples). Part of his work are devoted to the reception of Antiquity in contemporary popular culture. An archaeologist and art historian, his work also focuses on the monuments and funerary landscapes of Magna Graecia, as well as on Italiote iconography. He runs the Antiquipop

project (<https://antiquipop.hypotheses.org/>) and is co-editor of the *Frontière:s* journal (<https://journals.openedition.org/frontieres/>) .

Tiphaine A. Besnard is art historian and adjunct researcher at the University of Toulouse – Jean Jaurès. She is a member of the PLH-ERASME team. Her research focuses on the reception of Antiquity in contemporary art, especially from the 19th Century to nowadays. She also curates exhibitions.

Katharina Wesselmann - ‘Tonight we’ll dine in hell!’ Toxic Thermopylae and its Herodotean origins

Herodotus’s typically complicated narrative of the Battle of Thermopylae does not have the makings of a manosphere fairytale – and yet it has been stylised into a masculinist (and nationalist) idea, a tale of outnumbered warriors, heroically defending Europe against a faceless threat of oriental masses, “an army of slaves vast beyond imagining, ready to devour tiny Greece”. It is therefore not surprising that the right-wing ‘Identitäre Bewegung’ uses the Spartan lambda as its symbol. But how do we get from Herodotus’s earliest representation of the battle to the simplified version we find in a movie such as Zach Snyder’s ‘300’? How does a complex historical situation become an emblem of heroic masculinity? Political reception, films, graphic novels, and, not least, Ciceronian rhetoric all manage to stylise the historical event into a factually reductive cocktail of tropes, collecting masculinist stereotypes with each retelling.

Since 2023, **Katharina Wesselmann** has been Professor of Classics at Potsdam University. She studied Greek, Latin and art history in Tübingen, Cologne and Basel. While working as a highschool teacher of Latin and Greek in Basel, Switzerland, she completed her doctorate with a thesis on mythical patterns in the work of Herodotus (2010), followed by her habilitation with a commentary on Homer's Iliad 7 (2018). In 2019, she took a position as professor for Didactics of Ancient languages at Kiel University. Katharina Wesselmann's research focuses on depictions of otherness in ancient texts, decolonisation of the Classics, ancient epic and historiography, didactics and gender studies

Shushma Malik - 2024: Roman Men Return to the Games (*Gladiator II* and *Those About to Die*)

2024 saw the Roman games return to both the big and small screens with *Gladiator II* (dir. Ridley Scott) and *Those About to Die* (Peacock/Amazon Prime, dir. Roland Emmerich). Despite both deploying many long-established tropes from Roman representations on screen, reviewers saw something quite different in how each production dealt with masculinity for the third decade of the 21st century. Emphasising the ‘modern masculinity’ of *Gladiator II*’s Lucius, Zoe Williams (*Guardian*) wrote that ‘the two films, both directed by Ridley Scott, give us two different versions of masculinity – not just in terms of the actors’ vibes, but how they deal with women, geopolitics and battle.’ Alternatively, the TV show was seen as a throwback to masculinities of the past: Alison Herman (*Variety*) describes *Those About to Die* as ‘a himbo of a show: dumb, musclebound and appealing because of these qualities, not in spite of them’, while Jack Seale (*Guardian*) thinks the show’s ‘setup could be lifted from a 1980s Sylvester Stallone or Jean-Claude Van Damme movie’.

In this paper, I will consider how masculinity is variously used to produce reactions in the audience that create attraction, revulsion, a sense of nostalgia, and a sense of novelty. To do this, masculinity will be considered as part of the intersectional profile of the key characters, including Paul Mescal's Lucius, Moe Hashim's Kwame, Iwan Rheon's Tenax, Dimitri Leonidas' Scorpis, and Jojo Macari's Domitian.

Shushma Malik is Assistant Professor of Classics and the University of Cambridge and Onassis Classics Fellow at Newnham College. Her research interests include Roman emperors in political culture, Roman historiography, and classical receptions. She has worked extensively on the emperor Nero's portrayal in Christian history as the Antichrist, and has also published on portrayals of Roman emperors in the works and letters of Oscar Wilde.

Alastair Blanshard - *Hercules and the Modern Man*

This paper examines the continuing fascination with the figure of Heracles as a paradigm for masculinity. It traces this interest across a variety of genres including film, television shows, comics, and computer games as well as the way that he is refracted within practices such as bodybuilding. The Hercules that emerges across these genres is importantly partial. He represents only a sliver of the rich range of representations available from antiquity. In studying Heracles, the silences and disavowals are just as important, sometimes more so. One of the silences that is worth considering is the absence of material that explores the strong connection between Heracles and domestic violence and sexual assault. The silence on this topic is almost total within the popular reception of Heracles and points to one of the major anxieties about masculinity, namely the way in which it tends all too easily and quickly to toxicity. This is the grubby secret that haunts the celebratory rhetoric that surrounds this hero. We see a similar pattern of repression and disavowal around the homoeroticism of Heracles. His overdetermined heterosexuality in modern representations stands in contrast to a strong vein of queerness that runs through the ancient figure. This paper looks at the way in which modern queer actors have attempted to exploit this vein for political purposes.

Alastair Blanshard is the Paul Eliadis Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Queensland. He is the author of a number of books on the Greek World and its impact on the modern. His book, *Hercules: A heroic life* has been translated into four languages. His most recent works include an edited collection on Oscar Wilde and his interest in Greco-Roman antiquity as well as collection on gender for the Bloomsbury *Cultural History of Gender*.

Florian Freitag - *The Legacy of Beefcake: Post-Physique and Neo-Physique*

The year 2017 saw the relaunch of America's first and most famous beefcake magazine, *Physique Pictorial*, after a hiatus of 27 years. Now published by the non-profit Bob Mizer Foundation out of the "gay capital of the world" (San Francisco) rather than by the Los Angeles-based photographer and physique pioneer Bob Mizer, the "new" *Physique Pictorial* is no longer conceptualized as a commercial beefcake publication, but rather as an indie magazine *about* beefcake, a venue to create awareness of the genre and its history, and thus also to reclaim beefcake's space among the gay institutions of pre-Stonewall America. As a veritable homage to beefcake, the "new" *Physique Pictorial* mixes photographs and texts

reprinted from the original with articles about Mizer in particular and beefcake photography in general as well as portfolios by contemporary beefcake photographers.

As pictorial reinterpretations of earlier beefcake photography, these portfolios also take up and play with the various forms of references to antiquity that pervaded Mizer's and his colleagues' pictures, thus throwing a new light on the role of antiquity in beefcake. Long interpreted as an "alibi" to fool censors, the "new" *Physique Pictorial* showcases, both in its reprints and in its new material, in one magazine the plurality of approaches to antiquity that originally had been spread over a multitude of titles – from the rather serious summoning of ancient Greece for the purpose of creating a transhistorical continuity of homosexual desires in *Grecian Guild Pictorial* to the playful and sometimes campy remediations of contemporary sword-and-sandal epics in the "original" *Physique Pictorial*. The magazine thus invites its readers to (re)discover the diversity of beefcake photography, including the diversity of beefcake's antiquities.

Florian Freitag received his PhD in North American literatures from the U of Constance (Germany) in 2011 and has been a professor of American Studies at the U of Duisburg-Essen (Germany) since 2019. Freitag is the author of *The Farm Novel in North America: Genre and Nation in the United States, English Canada, and French Canada, 1845-1945* (Camden House 2013) and *Popular New Orleans: The Crescent City in Periodicals, Theme Parks, and Opera, 1875-2015* (Routledge 2021). His other work has appeared in *Canadian Literature*, *American Literary Naturalism*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Periodical Studies Today: Multidisciplinary Analyses*, and the *Handbuch Zeitschriftenforschung*.

Filippo Carlà-Uhink - *Symposium: Greek Bodies, Greek National Heritage, Pornography and the Construction of Masculinities*

Sex – Sea – Sun – Symposium. These four words appear in this sequence five times on screen in the trailer of the short Greek art-porn film *Symposium* (Homo Made Films, 2017). The title evokes of course the Platonic dialogue that has played a great role in the discourses about (especially male) homosexuality since the late 19th century, and the entire short movie is in some way a re-elaboration of the famous Platonic work, aiming at discussing, within the frame of the pornographic movie, crucial questions for the LGBTQIA+ community such as fem- and transphobia and queer activism. The film is deeply embedded in Greek discourses about ancient heritage and modernity in the moment of the Greek government debt-crisis – and consistent with further activist engagement for example by one of the film's actors, Giannis Maskidis. This paper will discuss this short film in the context of the reception of ancient Greece within male homosexual (sub-)culture, highlighting, beyond the explicit aims of the movie production, the body images and sexual scripts visualized and performed in it.

Filippo Carlà-Uhink is professor for Ancient History at the University of Potsdam. The reception of Greek and Roman antiquity in modern popular cultures is one of his main research areas: his previous work deals with the presence of antiquity in movies, comics, theatre, novels, and themed spaces. He is the author of *Representations of Classical Greece in Theme Parks* (London et al., 2020) and the editor of many collections on modern receptions of the ancient Mediterranean world. He is currently working on a project on ancient Greek bodies and their reception in the modern Global North, with a special focus on their visualization and idealization in male homosexual (sub)cultures.

Anna Chiara Corradino - *The Mythic Gaze: Re-signifying Adonis and Narcissus in 20th-Century Queer Art*

This paper examines the evolution and divergence of the mythological figures Narcissus and Adonis in twentieth-century homosexual visual culture, particularly within European cinema and American physique magazines. Building on Alessandro Grilli's observation that these two figures, historically interchangeable in their representation of ideal beauty, have diverged in modern culture—with Narcissus embodying "sickly" beauty linked to pathology and Adonis representing perfect beauty "made for love"—this study challenges and complicates this binary understanding. The paper traces the reception of these myths through Fassbinder's cinema, particularly *Querelle de Brest* (1982), and analyzes how classical Greco-Roman imagery provided visual frameworks for representing opposed masculinities, since both figures have been reclaimed and re-signified within gay visual culture, creating new meanings that transcend traditional ephebic versus muscular categorizations. Central to this investigation is the concept of consciousness and self-awareness as the new polarizing factor in contemporary representations. Unlike heteronormative culture, which demands that an "Adonis" remain unaware of his beauty to avoid accusations of vanity or effeminacy, homosexual visual culture embraces and celebrates this self-awareness. The paper will demonstrate how physique magazines, film, and contemporary art have transformed these mythological 'archetypes', creating a queer subjectivity that subverts mainstream representational frameworks.

Anna Chiara Corradino is a research fellow at Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa, and adjunct fellow in Hermeneutics and Rhetoric at the University of Pisa. Previously a DAAD Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Potsdam, she holds PhDs in Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (Bologna/L'Aquila) and Kulturwissenschaft (Humboldt Berlin), plus a double degree in Philology and History of Antiquity and Italian Studies (Pisa). Her research focuses on the history of ideas, classical reception, and cultural and gender studies. She has published on female necrophilia, ancient adaptation, and mythological reception. Her doctoral research has been published by Bloomsbury – IMAGINES (2025).