

# CANISW

Newsletter

April 2026

In this issue we are delighted to share several upcoming events, along with a selection of notes and reflections on performances of Classical works, Classical languages and the ancient world. In section three below, we ask you to share your thoughts on reading Caesar: please do!

## 1. FORTHCOMING LECTURES

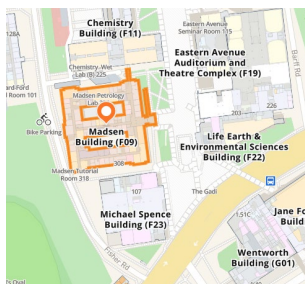
### i. Professor Stefan Pfeiffer

The special lecture with Professor Stefan Pfeiffer (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) will be 'Asterix and Cleopatra: Translating Antiquity into the Modern World from Comic to Film.'

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April 5.30pm VGCC (Madsen Building University of Sydney)

**Vere Gordon Childe Centre**

Click the map to take you to the full campus map:



A Zoom link will be made available for external live participation.

**About this lecture:** What if a comic could rewrite history? *Asterix and Cleopatra* (1963) does just that—blending myth, satire, and sharp political commentary in a story set in Ptolemaic Egypt. Far from mere entertainment, this classic parodies Hollywood spectacle while offering a biting reflection on colonialism, power, and French identity. The comic presents Egypt as a land of decadence, slavery, and architectural

incompetence and Cleopatra's 'genius' depends entirely on the Gauls. Yet this caricature wasn't invented by Goscinny and Uderzo; it echoes Roman propaganda (Horace's 'whore of the Nile') and 19th-century Orientalism. Meanwhile, the indomitable Gauls stand in for modern France: clever, egalitarian, and fiercely resistant to foreign rule. With humour and hidden depth, *Asterix and Cleopatra* reveals how history is constructed—and deconstructed. The paper will try to uncover the comic's political subtexts, from colonial nostalgia to 20<sup>th</sup> cent. misogyny, and why a story about ancient Egypt still shapes how we see the past.

<https://classics.org.au/events/calendar/public-lecture>

The Asterix comics are enduring although they have copped some criticism for their depiction of Numidians, amongst others. But see this from Publishers Weekly, on the relaunch of Asterix back in 2020, [Publishers Weekly](#).

If you wanted to reacquaint yourself with Asterix and Cleopatra ahead of the lecture, watch the old animation on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xe5hR4dXXsA/>.

And if you're feeling really keen, perhaps read Asterix in Latin or even in ancient Greek.

More here: <https://asterixthegaul.com/2025/09/asterix-in-ancient-greek-and-latin/>

Although note, there is no Latin/ancient Greek version of *Asterix and Cleopatra*.

## ii. **Dr. Alexandra Pinkham (USyd)**

Don't miss this forthcoming talk on Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe in *Metamorphoses*. This lecture will be delivered by Dr. Alexandra Pinkham (USyd) as part of Lesbian Visibility Day.

From the promo:

*A day without lesbians is like a day without sunshine...* so as the days become more cloudy and Lesbian Visibility Day approaches, please join us as we turn the Library into the Lesbrary. The Library, Pride Network, and Diversity & Inclusion present Pride Culture Club: Sapphic Salo(o)n.

Together we'll explore the rich world of sapphic culture: not only literature and poetry (what is 78% of lesbian culture), but also other aspects of queer experience and storytelling. We'll be joined by queer scholars sharing original research, and you'll have the chance to read your favourite sapphic poem or original work of wlv yearning.

This event is not just for lesbians but everyone who loves, supports, uplifts, or is simply curious about sapphic voices. Come along, bring a piece that speaks to you, or just

enjoy being read to while we celebrate why sapphic literature continues to be such a powerful, joyful part of our community.

[REGISTER HERE TO ATTEND](#)

Event Details: You must be over eighteen to attend.

When: 4pm – 5:30pm, Thursday 30th April

Where: Seminar Room (218), Level 2, Fisher Library, Camperdown Campus

- Dr Alexandra Pinkham (she/her), Sessional Academic, Classics & Ancient History, School of Humanities
- Dr Gavin Lee (he/him), Senior Lecturer, Historical Musicology, Sydney Conservatorium of Music
- Olivia Sutherland (they/them), Research Assistant, Sydney Social Sciences and Humanities Advanced Research Centre
- Open mic!
- Mingle over light refreshments and wine to enjoy courtesy of Diversity and Inclusion

About Pride Culture Club

[Pride Culture Club](#) is a space for the University of Sydney's LGBTQIA+ community to share our passion for queer culture in all its forms, including history, art, music, film, and literature. [Join the mailing list](#) to get involved and stay informed about upcoming events. Contact [librarypride.support@sydney.edu.au](mailto:librarypride.support@sydney.edu.au) for more information.

## 2. OTHER FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### i. **Antigone in Sydney**

*Antigone* will be performed at the University of Sydney on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of May. Produced by Gaius Gracchus, the USyd society for students of classics, James Collins directs the performance. There will be three performances and all three have sold out already. If you don't yet have a ticket and are keen to go, there may be some stand-by tickets available on the night.

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/museum/whats-on/talks-and-events/antigone-gaius-gracchus.html>

**ii. *An Iliad*.**

This retelling stars David Wenham in performance with the Sydney Theatre Company and runs 20 Apr - 21 Jun 2026 at the Wharf 1 Theatre.

Tickets can be purchased here: <https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/whats-on/2026/productions/an-iliad>. Background information on the playwrights, [Lisa Peterson](#) and [Denis O'Hare](#) and the production are available: <https://www.courttheatre.org/about/blog/in-conversation-playwrights-lisa-peterson-and-denis-ohare/>

**iii. Upcoming ABC interview.**

Watch out for an interview with Dr. Ben Brown (USyd) and Sarah McDonald on the ABC. This will be interesting and definitely provocative!

**iv. Myths Retold**

Nikitia Gill, a poet and playwright retells myths of Hekate, while actor and writer Zoe Terakes offers new takes on myths of Zeus, Eurydice, Hermaphroditus and others. Sydney Writers Festival, Sunday May 24<sup>th</sup>, Carriageworks. <https://www.swf.org.au/program/festival-2026/myths-retold>

**v. *The Oresteia* (an opera)**

The Sydney Chamber Opera is reproducing this Australian operatic take on *Aeschylus'* *trilogy* for the first time since its original performance in 1993. *The Oresteia* is directed by Imara Savage and will be performed in July this year (24<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>). For more details go to the Carriageworks website: <https://carriageworks.com.au/events/the-oresteia/>

**vi. *Prometheus Postponed* 😞**

The Sport for Jove production of this world premiere has been postponed until 2027. Details here: <https://www.sportforjove.com.au/prometheus-2026>

**vi. *The Iliad Out Loud | Four Winds***

28 June 2026, 10:00am - 6:00pm; Windsong Pavilion, 17 Four Winds Road, Barragga Bay.

Homer's poem will be performed over the course of the day by actor writer William Zappa, accompanied by Persian tar and oud player Hamed Sadeghi and percussionist Sohrab Kolahdooz. Zappa was a hit with this performance at the 2021 Four Winds Festival and at the Sydney and Adelaide festivals.

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/visiting-and-exploring-nsw/nsw-events/iliad-out-loud-four-winds>

**vii. Christopher Nolan's *Odyssey*!**

We will share details of our special private screening in the May newsletter.

### 3. CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

**i. Caesar**

Thinking about *Asterix and Cleopatra* inevitably led me back to Caesar himself. That, in turn, reminded me how central Caesar's *Commentarii*—both the *de bello Gallico* and the *de bello civili*—have been to generations of Latin teachers and students. Their place in the curriculum was once so secure that, for example, in 1785, Columbia University required applicants to demonstrate their ability to translate Caesar. As the admissions statute put it, 'No candidate shall be admitted into the college after the second Tuesday in April, 1786, unless he shall be able to render into English Caesar's *Commentaries of the Gallic War*.'<sup>1</sup> Think school Latin and you're likely to think of Caesar.

But is reading Caesar really that edifying? Sure, he writes lovely Latin (remember, he was the author of *de Analogia*, a two-volume treatise on Latin grammar, now lost, but there are plenty of scarred students out there!<sup>2</sup>

In 1918, William Alexander, a high school teacher in California, asked, 'Is Caesar Enough Latin?'<sup>3</sup> He comments: 'a) Read Caesar the second year to learn the necessary Linguistic Mechanics- the very essentials of Latin speech. (b) Read Caesar the third year not as a vehicle for grammatical "grinds" but as Latin Literature. - (c) Read Caesar the fourth year as a basis for Latin Composition, Roman History, Military Science, and as a study of the Roman mind as exhibited in the "Commentaries" by the greatest Roman of them all... Instead of being the "bogey" of the schools, Latin will be the most enriching, the most stimulating, and the most profitable of the courses, making for knowledge, skill, power - the eternal tripod on which must rest for all time the aims and ends of all scholastic effort).'

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<sup>1</sup> E. Owen, 'Caesar in American Schools Prior to 1860', <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3290974.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, see this: <https://sententiaeantiquae.com/2020/06/16/cicero-and-caesar-destroyers-of-latin-education/>, and this: <https://eidolon.pub/the-slaves-were-happy-high-school-latin-and-the-horrors-of-classical-studies-4e1123649916>.

<sup>3</sup> W. Alexander, 'Is Caesar Enough Latin?' <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/42798765.pdf>.

Do you agree with Alexander? What are your memories and thoughts on reading or teaching Caesar? **Please click this link** and let us know. We are looking forward to hearing what you think:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Hjix5Y-njmG5iGOFMIshYkLc9gv3PPg54pn\\_6gwUvcE/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Hjix5Y-njmG5iGOFMIshYkLc9gv3PPg54pn_6gwUvcE/edit)

## ii. **Empedocles discovered**

While working in the collections of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo (IFAO), University of Liège papyrologist Nathan Carlig has identified papyrus P.Fouad inv. 218 as a previously unnoticed fragment of *Physica*, Empedocles' principal poetic composition. This is the first original fragment of Empedocles' work that has been discovered.

<https://scitechdaily.com/researchers-discover-long-lost-words-of-ancient-greek-philosopher-after-2000-years/>

## 4. **2026: THE YEAR OF THE TROJAN HORSE**

Reflections on some of the productions of Homer's works by CANSW president, Tamara Neal.

The *Odyssey* may be heading our way very soon, but it is worth remembering Homer's other great epic, the *Iliad*. This poem too has enjoyed a vigorous afterlife—not only on the big screen but also through a remarkable range of theatrical adaptations. Right now, Sydney audiences are fortunate to have the chance to see David Wenham in *An Iliad*, staged by the STC.

This is far from the first time that Homer's epics, or their many retellings, have found a home on stage. *An Iliad* itself was written by Denis O'Hare and Lisa Peterson in 2012 and was last performed in Australia at the Adelaide Festival in 2014. Another extraordinary adaptation appeared in 2019, when acclaimed Australian actor William Zappa presented *The Iliad Out Loud*, a version he crafted in consultation with Elizabeth Minchin (ANU). The production returned in 2021 and will be performed again as a nine-hour marathon in 2026. I saw the 2019 staging and loved it; I also caught Zappa's short recitation at ANU in 2020, and in 2024 CANSW invited him to speak and perform at the Latin Reading Competition.

Beyond Australia, Aquila Theatre staged *Iliad: Book One* in 1995 under the direction of Peter Meineck, visually blending the Trojan War with WWII imagery. The production has

been revived several times, including at the 2009 Festival of the Aegean in Syros, Greece. More recently, Aquila presented *Our Trojan War* (2017), a collaboration between the company and American combat veterans of the Warrior Chorus. As the Aquila website notes, the work “sets epic scenes from Homer, Greek drama and literature alongside compelling questions on modern democracy.”

<https://www.aquilatheatre.com/>

Another company, Theatre of War, staged a dramatic reading of *Iliad* Book 6 alongside *Trojan Women*, directed by Bryan Doerries. More information is available here:

<https://theaterofwar.com/projects/theater-of-war-hector-andromache-and-the-death-of-astyanax>

Closer to home, *The Epics: Volume One*, directed by David Rienits, was staged at The Forge from 17–19 April 2026. The production aims to weave together a continuous narrative from ancient stories, combining traditional storytelling with live audio drama and surround-sound effects. As the company describes it, *The Epics* “hopes to bridge the gap and knit these recounts of mythology-infused Greek and Roman history into a cohesive and thrilling account of heroes, monsters, gods, and trials.”

<https://www.thediretheatre.com/>

Homer’s *Odyssey* continues to inspire an impressive range of live performances, including several recent productions in Australia. Both the Melbourne Fringe Festival and the Adelaide Fringe have hosted *Homer’s Odyssey – A Mini Musical*, now in its eighth consecutive year. Clearly a crowd favourite, it has been praised for its effortless charm: “The songs, the storytelling, the audience engagement: all of it feels natural, never forced ... [it] is the kind of show that reminds you why live performance exists.”

More information: <https://adelaidefringe.com.au/fringetix/homer-s-odyssey-a-mini-musical-af2026>

Another notable one-man adaptation is *Odyssey*, created by the theatre company Ad Infinitum and first staged in 2009. George Mann’s performance earned the Stage Best Solo Performer award, and the production has enjoyed several successful revivals since. Details: <https://ad-infinitum.org/odyssey>

In 2023, the National Theatre undertook an ambitious five-episode retelling of Odysseus’ journey, developed and performed across partner organisations throughout the UK. This community-centred project reframed the wanderings of Odysseus as a story of endurance, loss, healing, and collective renewal. In this musical reimagining, there is no Penelope waiting back in Ithaca and our hero Odysseus is a female, a ‘deeply relatable woman .. [who] longs to be reunited with Telemachus, the son she hasn’t seen in 20 years.” Production page: <https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/productions/the-odyssey/> Guardian review: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/apr/20/national->

[theatre-the-odyssey-epic-episodic-retelling-around-uk-2023#:~:text=The%20fifth%20and%20final%20episode,Where's%20the%20hope?](https://www.bbc.com/news/arts-67890123#:~:text=The%20fifth%20and%20final%20episode,Where's%20the%20hope?)

In our previous newsletter, we noted Derek Walcott’s translation of the *Odyssey*. Walcott later adapted his version for the stage (*The Odyssey: A Stage Version*), performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992 and 1994. Critics were divided on its bold fusion of registers—“ancient and modern, Standard English and Creole, high poetic, low pun and innuendo”—yet the production was widely recognised for its imaginative reworking of the epic. Here Penelope is not erased but refigured as poet and storyteller, and the narrative itself moves “beyond typical European binaries ... there are no clear heroes, or monsters, or even colonizers or colonized.” See: Pike Fiorindi, L. (2011). ‘Derek Walcott’s *The Odyssey: A Stage Version*: An Examination of the Function of Metaphor.’ *Wasafiri*, 26(3), 20–24.

Finally, Natalie Haynes—comedian, author, and former guest of the Sydney Writers’ Festival—continues to shape the modern reception of Homer through her popular BBC Radio explainers, including episodes devoted to the *Odyssey*. Her mythic retellings and non-fiction works remain widely read, and her podcasts are consistently engaging and full of wit. Recordings: <https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/m001brj5>

## 5. TRENDING CLASSICS

Retellings and re-imaginings of Greek myths continue to flourish. Here are a few recent and forthcoming titles you may wish to explore.

### i. *Hell or High Winter* by Andrew Rubin

A relatively rare contribution from a male author in this genre, *Hell or High Winter* offers a contemporary, urban reimagining of the myth of Hermes and Persephone. Described by Rare Bird Books (2025) as “a supernatural action/adventure with sharp wit and a deep soul,” it promises an inventive twist on familiar material. Rubin’s website—full of dry humour—is well worth a visit: <https://www.hellorhighwinter.com/>

### ii. *Aphrodite in Pieces* by Lauren J. Bear

Lauren J. Bear, already known for *Medusa’s Sisters* (2023) and *Mother of Rome* (2025), releases her latest novel, *Aphrodite in Pieces*, this month (April 2026). Website: <https://www.laurenjabear.com/aphrodite-in-pieces>

### iii. *Herc: Hero, Husband, Father, Villain* by Phoenicia Rogerson

Phoenicia Rogerson has earned considerable acclaim in this field. Her *Herc: Hero, Husband, Father, Villain* (2024) won a Somerset Maugham Award, and she followed it

with *Aphrodite* (2025). A new title is forthcoming, with details yet to be announced.

Website: <https://www.phoeniciarogerson.com/>

#### iv. *The Wandering Queen* by Clare Heywood

Clare Heywood, another well-reviewed author in the myth-retelling space, returns with *The Wandering Queen* (2026), billed as “an enchanting feminist retelling of the story of fierce Queen Dido and her tragic love affair with Prince Aeneas.” Her earlier novels include *Daughters of Sparta* (2021) and *The Shadow of Perseus* (2023). Website:

<https://claireheywood.info/the-wandering-queen/>

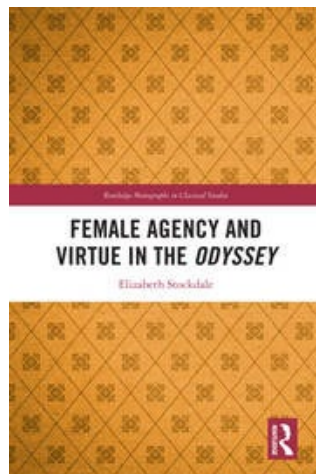
#### v. *Sweet Bitter Song* by Rosie Hewlett

Rosie Hewlett’s recent novel *Sweet Bitter Song* (2025) offers a sapphic reimagining of the *Odyssey*, centring on Melantho, one of Penelope’s handmaids who appears only briefly in Homer’s text. Hewlett has previously won both the International Rubery Book Award and an Alex Award for her novels *Medusa* (2021) and *Medea* (2024).

[Sweetbitter Song by Rosie Hewlett - Penguin Books Australia](#)

## 6. PUBLICATIONS

### i. Elizabeth Stockdale: *Female Agency and Virtue in the Odyssey*



Congratulations to Dr Elizabeth Stockdale on the recent publication of her book by Routledge (2026).

Her new study is the first to offer a comprehensive examination of the actions and conduct of both mortal and immortal female figures in the *Odyssey*, and of the value accorded to them within the poem’s moral world.

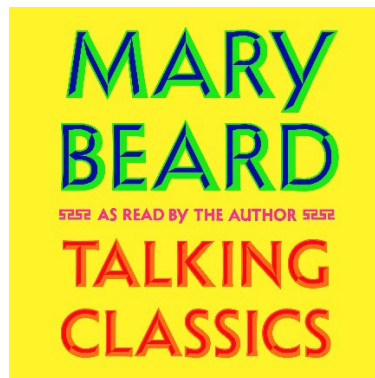
Drawing on feminist literary criticism and feminist virtue ethics, Elizabeth Stockdale explores the motivations, voices, and behaviours of all the *Odyssey*’s female

characters—from the unnamed and the silent to maidservants, semi-divine beings, mortal women, and goddesses. Her analysis reveals an Odyssean value system grounded in principles enacted by both male and female figures, while also showing that certain virtues are expressed exclusively by women. In doing so, the book highlights the agency of female characters and their central place within the poem’s ethical framework.

This work will be of particular interest to students and scholars of gender studies, feminist literary theory, and feminist virtue philosophy, as well as to those engaged more broadly with classical literature and Homeric studies.

<https://www.routledge.com/Female-Agency-and-Virtue-in-the-Odyssey/Stockdale/p/book/9781032982526>

ii. **Mary Beard, *Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old* (Hachette)**



Mary Beard is always worth reading and/or listening to. She is prolific and her latest publication is a new audiobook, *Talking Classics*. Here she explores the often surprising ways in which the ancient world continues to shape, and be shaped by, modern culture. From revolutionaries and dictators to Bob Dylan and Beyoncé, she traces the eclectic cast of contemporary figures who have found themselves captivated by antiquity. As she wryly observes, no one is obliged to be excited by the classical past, but it is certainly a pity if you are not.

Drawing on more than fifty years of teaching and writing about the ancient world, Beard fills the book with lively anecdotes, unexpected connections, curious details, and the occasional piece of well-placed gossip. *Talking Classics* makes a spirited case for why the deep past still matters, and how it continues to influence the way we think, imagine, and understand our world today. She argues that ‘we might get more out of the ancient world if we stopped revering it quite so much and started engaging with it instead, warts, oddities, and all.’ You can watch/listen to her talking about her latest publication on Classical Wisdom Speaks [here](https://www.hachette.com.au/mary-beard/talking-classics-the-shock-of-the-old).

<https://www.hachette.com.au/mary-beard/talking-classics-the-shock-of-the-old>

## 7. 🎵 CLASSICAL NOTES 🎵

### i. **How to party like an ancient Greek**

Konstantine Panegyres (University of Western Australia) on The History Guild website presents some of the evidence for what went on at Greek parties:

[https://historyguild.org/how-to-party-like-an-ancient-greek/?srsltid=AfmBOoq6b1YCXiDitSXkmkhhbKNvq\\_xtnqYOAJKZOqrlg-UpJvx0\\_fEf5](https://historyguild.org/how-to-party-like-an-ancient-greek/?srsltid=AfmBOoq6b1YCXiDitSXkmkhhbKNvq_xtnqYOAJKZOqrlg-UpJvx0_fEf5)

### ii. **AWAWS Project: From Lea Beness**

Members may be interested in a newly published blog post on Dr Cynthia Begbie (later Dean), who taught Latin at the University of Sydney during the late 1950s and 1960s. The piece forms part of the Australasian Women in Ancient World Studies (AWAWS) project, which documents the history and contributions of women working in Ancient World Studies across Australasia. <https://www.awaws.org/history-of-women>

### iii. **Classics teacher training**

Steven Hunt offers an update on Classics teacher training (and problems therein) in the UK: <https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2026/04/CUCD-2026.03-Maintaining-the-Classics-Teacher-Supply-Chain.pdf>

### iv. **Sydney Greek and Latin classes**

Seumas Macdonald ('The Patrologist') offers courses in Greek and Latin: <https://thepatrologist.com/2026/04/02/new-classes-at-seumasu-term-2-2026/>

### v. **CANSW socials**

CANSW offers you many ways to keep in touch with Classics in NSW: check out the Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/classicalassociationnsw/>

### vi. **Finding Prometheus: AHEPA**

If you missed the Myths and Monsters workshop at the Chau Chak Wing Museum, you can perhaps take the kids to this theatrical workshop offered by AHEPA:

<https://neoskopos.com/en/2026/04/08/life/stage/ahepa-sydney-and-nsw-to-hold-theatrical-workshop-on-myth-of-prometheus/>



### **i. CANSW Membership**

Now would be a good time for you to renew your membership. Please follow this link for the details:

<https://classics.org.au/association/membership>

### **ii. Upcoming events**

Events planned for CANSW will be posted on the Association's website.

<https://classics.org.au/>

If you want to be added to the mailing list for the University of Sydney Classics and Ancient History seminars, please contact Dr Tamara Neal ([t.neal@sydney.edu.au](mailto:t.neal@sydney.edu.au)).

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Classical Association of New South Wales

<https://classics.org.au/>