

Editorial Note

The current issue of the *Journal of Latin Cosmopolitanism and European Literatures* forms a diptych with the forthcoming seventh issue, scheduled to appear in Spring 2022. Its title, *Winckelmann's Victims*, was the topic of a three-day conference that took place at Ghent University in September 2018. At the heart of the two issues lies the question of classical normativity—with its prejudices and exclusions—and the way in which it affected European cultural self-fashioning (through both art and literature). While issue seven will predominantly deal with literary normativity, the classics and their canonicity, this issue tackles the problem from a more purely art-historical point of view, looking at how Winckelmann's thinking influenced our ideas and perception of the *classical* norm.

Classical works, and the ideals that were projected on them, have frequently been considered as the standard against which the quality of a literary work should be measured. Whether a text or artistic object was positively or negatively evaluated depended on the extent to which it could meet the 'classical' requirements. This idealization of the Classical past had begun very early, already at the very end of the fifth century BC, when, for example, the comic poet Aristophanes in his *Frogs* argues that no contemporary tragedian can compare with their glorious predecessors. Fast forward into Roman times, and in spite of the ambiguous relationship of Rome with Greek culture and literature, this admiration of Classical Greek culture and literature took an even more precise turn: not only were Classical Greek authors, and, for example, sculptors the best, but contemporary production was in many cases intentionally despised.

This point of view that the grandeur of Classical Athens was only followed by a long period of decadence re-emerged at various times throughout (European) history, often with problematical consequences and uses. An example of someone whose works were used to justify and advocate for such a classical norm was the German art critic Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68). His *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* may be considered as the embodiment of the idea that the classics should be the norm for aesthetic or even any evaluation, such as has

recurrently cropped up in Western Europe, to a greater or lesser degree, from the Early Middle Ages until modern times.

Almost inevitably, this normativity has implied, shaped, and fed prejudices and thoughts of exclusion towards literary features and aesthetic characteristics that seemed to deviate from classical ideals. In this first of two issues, we present three case studies that deconstruct this process in the field of art history and provide a nuanced point of view on the influence of Winckelmann.

Melissa Gustin's article on the American sculptor Harriet Hosmer paves the road with a fascinating analysis of how her two earliest works—entitled respectively *Daphne* (1853) and *Medusa* (1853/54)—clearly react against Bernini's baroque sculptures, indirectly influenced by Winckelmann's ideas of classicism.

In the second contribution to this issue, Elizabeth Prettejohn takes a more theoretical approach to the long afterlife of Winckelmann's normativity, especially through the figures of Walter Pater and Frederic Leighton, and demonstrates that Winckelmann's classicizing ideals even influenced the history of twentieth-century modernism. Her article has far-reaching consequences for the study of often overlooked works that did not seem to fit the right definition of modernism.

Yannick Le Pape, in the third and last article, considers how the classical norms of ancient Greece and Rome made it difficult to come to an unbiased view of Assyrian art. He examines how the discoveries of Near Eastern sites such as Nineveh were, despite the initial thrill of the findings, looked down on by so many people, even Nineveh's supporters.

Finally, Rosa M. Rodríguez Porto wraps up the sixth issue with an illuminating response piece. From her own background as a medieval art historian, Rodríguez Porto sees ways to “re-engage with Greek art, Winckelmann, and the history of art historical practice in a more inclusive way” and ends with two examples of contemporary sculpture. This de-construction of classicism is a fruitful way to think about the process of (aesthetic) exclusion and inclusion, while it does not necessarily require a total rejection of the classical tradition.

For further information about RELICS and announcements about forthcoming issues of JOLCEL, you can consult our websites at relicsresearch.com and jolcel.ugent.be.

THE JOLCEL EDITORIAL BOARD
DECEMBER 2021