

Section A		
Institution: Durham University		
Unit of Assessment: 29 Classics		
Title of case study: Living Poets		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 1 October 2000 and 31 August 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Nora Goldschmidt	Associate Professor	Pre-2014-Present
Barbara Graziosi	Professor	Pre-2014-2018
Edmund Richardson	Associate Professor	Pre-2014-Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between 1 August 2013 – 30 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
Section B		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The Living Poets project has transformed access to classical lives and letters in some of the most socially and economically marginalised areas, schools and communities in the North of England. Throughout the afterlives of antiquity, readers have drawn upon their own experiences to understand ancient texts, and to construct biographies of the ancient poets. This case study uses research-led insights to develop a radically decentred, personal model of outreach, benefitting pupils and teachers in the North of England. A set of activities, including teaching materials, an exhibition and performances, have made space for pupils and readers to value their own biographies and life-experiences as tools for understanding ancient literature.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>This case-study emerged from two strands of research at Durham University, carried out by Goldschmidt, Graziosi and Richardson. The first strand grew out of a major European Research Council grant secured by Graziosi, ‘Living Poets: A New Approach to Ancient Poetry.’ ‘Living Poets’ built on Graziosi’s <i>Inventing Homer</i> [R4], which explored how Homer was imagined by ancient Greeks, to focus on people who recognised the value of ancient poetry, ensured its survival, and reconfigured its relevance for their particular contexts. These people often had, and still have, a powerful sense of the poets’ presence: they saw the ancient poets in dreams, had imaginary conversations with them, made fun of them, wrote biographies and anecdotes about them, produced portraits of them, and visited the places where they were supposed to have lived and died. The ‘Living Poets’ research project uncovered a community of readers who appropriated and reconfigured the ancient poets’ lives in light of their own lived experiences.</p> <p>Graziosi and Goldschmidt coedited a book with a focus on the poets’ tombs [R3], a source of inspiration for communities over the centuries, combining literature and material culture. Goldschmidt has engaged with Roman poets through ‘biofiction,’ combining ancient and modern receptions [R1, R2]. The ‘Living Poets’ project also resulted in conferences, edited volumes and support for several PhD students and Postdoctoral researchers, who extended the reach of the project. The ERC supported the creation of a research and impact website (https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk), which allows users to explore how the poets of Greece and Rome have been re-imagined across time.</p> <p>The ‘Living Poets’ project rendered visible a highly significant strand of classical reception: it demonstrated that throughout the afterlives of antiquity, understanding ancient literature has</p>		

been a personal and highly creative act. Here, it intersected with the second research strand, the 'Classics in Extremis' project, which has been ongoing in Durham since a 2014 conference involving Goldschmidt, Graziosi and Richardson. This led to a 2018 volume edited by Richardson [R5]. 'Classics in Extremis' argues for a decentred model of classical reception, acknowledging and building on the subjectivities and historical situatedness of all readers, including ourselves. It suggests that we must move beyond seeing scholarship as the 'centre' of classical reception, and as entitled to define it. It argues that such assumptions distort both research and pedagogy.

Classics is a field which has often, as Dan-el Padilla Peralta put it, lacked 'the courage to acknowledge its historical and ongoing inability to value scholars from underrepresented groups.' The Living Poets impact case-study recognises not just the ways in which young, marginalised audiences can benefit from Classics, but also on the ways in which Classics can benefit from their voices. As the underpinning research has demonstrated, readers ask new, vital questions of ancient texts because of, not in spite of, their own life experiences. Poetry, in other words, is personal. This project has opened up space for marginalised readers to make their voices heard, by encouraging them to recognise the value of their own experiences as tools for understanding the classical past. As 'Classics in Extremis' postulated [R5, R6], this has proven to be a more effective model for engaging marginalised audiences with ancient literature than 'top-down' approaches which centre on, and privilege, the academic perspective.

3. References to the research

R1. N. Goldschmidt, *Afterlives of the Roman Poets: Biofiction and the Reception of Latin Poetry* (Cambridge University Press, 2019, 360 pages, DOI [10.1017/9781316847879](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316847879)).

R2. N. Goldschmidt, 'After-Lives: 20th-century Biographical Receptions of Greek and Roman Poets in the Long Twentieth Century', in K. de Temmerman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2020, ISBN: 9780198703013).

R3. B. Graziosi, and N. Goldschmidt (eds.), *Tombs of the Ancient Poets: Between Text and Material Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2018, DOI [10.1093/oso/9780198826477.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198826477.001.0001)). Graziosi and Goldschmidt co-edited the volume, co-wrote its introduction, and contributed articles to it.

- Reviewed by Tomasz Mojsik (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*) 'Tombs of the Ancient Poets is a balanced and exceptionally accomplished publication.'

R4. B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer* (Cambridge University Press, 2002, 300 pages, ISBN 9780521038133).

- Reviewed by Andrew Ford (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*): 'A detailed, stimulating and fresh examination of the evidence for receptions of epic.'
- Reviewed by Stephen Halliwell (*Greece and Rome*): 'Lucidly demonstrates that it is well worth being interested in what motivated and shaped Homeric biography.'

R5. E. Richardson (ed.), *Classics in Extremis: The Edges of Classical Reception* (Bloomsbury, 2018, 272 pages, DOI [10.5040/9781350017283](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350017283)).

- Reviewed by Justine McConnell (*Classics For All*): 'This is a thought-provoking, engaging volume... pushing us to think further not only about the reception of classics in contexts that have often been seen as 'marginal', 'peripheral', or in extremis, but also to see how these 'edges' have been altered and re-shaped by those engaging with Graeco-Roman antiquity.'
- Reviewed by Joshua R. Hall (*Ancient World Magazine*): 'Proof that "Classics" has never truly been the exclusive realm of the elite male, despite attempts by the latter to make it so... *Classics in Extremis* is an excellent and timely addition to the contemporary scholarly zeitgeist.'

R6. E. Richardson, 'The Harmless Impudence of a Revolutionary: Radical Classics in 1850s London,' in E. Hall and H. Stead (eds.), *Greek and Roman Classics in the British Struggle for Social Reform* (Bloomsbury, 2015, DOI [10.5040/9781474220217](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474220217)): 79-98.

- Reviewed by Richard Jenkyns (*Times Literary Supplement*): 'Usefully reacts against... the idea that classical culture was used as a barrier to keep the workers out.'
- Reviewed by Paul Cartledge (*Classics For All*): 'A pioneering project.'

Many of the publications cited above have developed from major conferences, bringing together the leading scholars in the field [R3, R5]. In addition to the reviews cited above, all publications have been subject to rigorous peer-review of the highest standards, and have been published by some of the leading presses in the field.

4. Details of the impact

The Living Poets project has developed a new and highly effective approach for engaging marginalised groups with classical material. As the underpinning research argued, and as the project activities have demonstrated, making space for diverse audiences to draw upon their own life experiences enables the creation of new and powerful relationships between those audiences and the ancient world.

Developing new approaches to engagement with classical material

Research from the 'Living Poets' project explored how readers of ancient poetry, throughout history, appropriated and reconfigured ancient poets' lives in light of their own lived experiences [R3]. In 2015, this finding was the basis of an exhibition in Durham University's Bishop Cosin's Library, a unique space decorated with Renaissance portraits of authors. '**On Seeing the Author**' was curated by Graziosi, and ran from January to April that year, attracting 3,886 visitors [E3]. Later that year, Living Poets researchers collaborated with regional writing development agency New Writing North and portrait photographer Julian Germain to produce new portraits of the writers who took part in the 2015 Durham Book Festival. Audience members for both exhibitions found that the face of an author invoked their biographical experience, which, in turn, led the viewer to reconsider the author's works. Two thirds of visitors said that '**On Seeing the Author**' had led them to 'think differently about ancient poets.' A day of workshops, featuring the author Gillian Cross, enabled young people to engage with the exhibition materials and project team, and articulate their own visions of Homer, from their own perspectives: 'Maybe he could have been a little girl.' 'It doesn't matter if you're a girl or a boy, it's what you think that counts' [E3].

The next phase of the project involved taking the Living Poets approach into schools. Researchers collaborated with theatre company Changeling Productions to develop a touring performance of the '**Spennymoor Odyssey**' which retold the *Odyssey*, then shifted the narrative agency to the audience, inviting pupils to consider who the poet Homer might have been, by using both their own life-experiences, and stories taken from ancient biographical sources, based on research findings from Graziosi and Goldschmidt's work [R1, R2, R3]. The '**Spennymoor Odyssey**' was supported by an AHRC Cultural Engagement Fellowship grant of GBP20,000 and was led by Dr Francesca Richards [E9]. This production was performed for 325 KS2 pupils [E7], with audiences focused in and around some of the most economically marginalised areas of the North East: Spennymoor, for instance, is one of only seven areas in the UK with GDP per head worth 75% or less of the EU average (*The Guardian*, 10 December 2019). Richards followed each performance with a classroom session, where pupils were able to develop further their own ideas about who Homer was [E5]. Pupils made Homer their own, reimagining him as 'searching for inspiration, sitting on the bench next to the bin beside Kwiksave,' a 'rapper with a hoodie, trackie bottoms and hi-top trainers' or someone with 'glasses and a flat cap. He'd have a notepad' [E7].

This approach to connecting pupils with the ancient poets, based on the findings of the underpinning research [R4, R5], was praised as 'highly original' by teachers, and was said to facilitate 'a great learning experience.' Children were said to be 'engrossed,' 'completely spellbound,' and 'thoroughly engaged.' [E9]. An 86 page Teachers' Guide was produced [E5]. Building on the success of this program, two follow-up workshops expanded the reach of the

project: one, 'In search of Homer,' involved a 'hunt' for Homer in Oxford, led by Richards in the guise of Calliope; the second, the 'RAF *Odyssey*,' was a day of storytelling based on the *Odyssey* for young children of military families, in collaboration with Dr Emma Bridges. Bridges commented: 'I invited Francesca [Richards] to join the project as a direct result of the work she had done on the Living Poets project' [E4].

Widening access to Classics in education

The charity Classics For All noted, in a recent report, the urgent need to champion Classics in schools within areas which have been socio-economically marginalised. Their report showed that engaging pupils with classical material can help to close the achievement gap: evidence suggests that 'the specific impacts [of Classics teaching] on special educational needs pupils and in socio-economically challenging areas are particularly noteworthy'. However, pupils in such marginalised areas often do not have access to Classics teaching, and previous public engagement work within the university sector has struggled to address this. A 2019 report by the Council of University Classical Departments demonstrated that, in university Classics departments in the UK, only 3.61% of reported public engagement work focused primarily on North East England, Yorkshire and the Humber, and only 6.02% focused primarily on North West England.

Classics For All recognised the potential of the Living Poets approach to close these gaps, and provided GBP15,000 to support the next phase of the project, '**Bringing Classical Literature to Life**.' Classics For All stated: 'At Classics for All, we are committed to work with the University of Durham to widen access to the study of classics in school and university. The Living Poets project has had a tangible impact in the classroom. It shows how use of imaginative approaches to the ancient world including storytelling can make Classics relevant to the lives and experiences of young people today' [E2]. The '**Bringing Classical Literature to Life**' project built on the potential identified by the early activities, to create a project to enhance the curriculum at Key Stage 2 through Classics. It involved a significant step up in the ambition of Living Poets: engaging more people with more material than before. Dr Craig Hannaway, in the guise of a bard, engaged KS2 classes in schools using the poetry and biographies of Homer and Ovid. These sessions encouraged pupils to draw upon their own experiences to make the ancient world their own. Once again, the project focused on pupils in socio-economically marginalised areas in the North East of England. The more conventionally 'challenging' the audience, the more effective the Living Poets methodology has been in building bridges between that audience and the ancient world. As one teacher put it: 'We find it particularly difficult to engage boys in literacy; however, you provided them with a brilliant role model and as a result they are hooked – we even have some of the 'hard to reach' boys saving up their pocket money and spending it on abridged versions of the *Odyssey*.' Teachers noted the long-term effects of the Living Poets work for the children [E8]: 'My cohort have 50% SEN [Special Educational Needs] ... I was visibly surprised when the children were discussing the 'romance languages' of their own accord. They could also recall the Latin taught the previous week, which is a massive thing for my children.' 'Not only have you had a huge impact on the children this year,' as another teacher put it, 'but you have left a legacy.' Teachers committed to sharing practices from the Living Poets workshops – 'I will share your outstanding practice with colleagues and encourage all... groups to engage with Classics.' A dedicated website was set up by the project team, to disseminate lesson plans and project materials further [E8]. Throughout this project, the Living Poets website has also provided resources to allow users from across the world to explore how the ancient poets of Greece and Rome were re-imagined, throughout the ages, and to start on the journey of making the poets their own [E6].

Perspectives and insights gathered as part of the impact case-study came to shape the underpinning research. The 'Classics in Extremis' project began as an exploration of marginal receptions of antiquity. It developed, however, into a model of classical reception which rejected the dichotomy of 'centre' and 'margins.' Over the course of the project, the researchers recognised that diversity, driven by intensely personal relationships between readers and ancient texts, is how classical discourse has always operated, and that Classics

must embrace diversity over discipline. New voices open up new insights into ancient material. As one student, quoted in *Classics in Extremis* (2018), put it: 'I've actually experienced having to flee from my home country after violent disaster. I do think that gives me a special perspective on Aeneas.' Or, as a pupil in Spennymoor put it, 'Homeless people are the best poets: they see, hear everything. Look at where they sleep. What tragedy has led them to where they are?' [E7].

Establishing a regional hub for Classics engagement and education

On the basis of these successes, Classics for All awarded a further grant of GBP8,000 to support the creation of a **North East Regional Classics Hub** at Durham University [E2]. This Hub, co-ordinated by Dr Catherine Rozier and Justine Wolfenden, is focused on introducing new audiences to Classics, by working with teachers in schools where Classics provision has not previously been part of the curriculum. Durham County Council stated: 'The work of the Classics department has raised awareness within the council of how classical subjects can be used across the curriculum to support learning and teaching' [E2]. Methodologies developed through the underpinning research are central to the Hub's approach: echoing the findings of the 'Classics in Extremis' research [R5, R6], a decentred model of engagement, focused on making space for pupils' individual agency, is key to its work in connecting socially and economically marginalised audiences with the ancient world. The Hub's flagship project is '**Seven Stories**', an educational resource, targeted at secondary schools, supporting the teaching of English at Key Stages 3 and 4, is based on a series of stories drawn from ancient literature: from 'Overcoming the Monster' to 'Rags to Riches' [E1]. The '**Seven Stories**' educational resource will anchor the work of the Hub over the coming years and has been developed in cooperation with schools across the North East and North West of England [E1], ahead of a full roll-out of in-school workshops once the current COVID-related restrictions are lifted. '**Seven Stories**' encourages pupils to find connections between their own experiences and ancient literature, and so to gain new perspectives on both. '**Seven Stories**', and the Living Poets project more broadly, allows pupils to make their voices heard, through Classics.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1. 'Seven Stories.' (a) Resources for schools; (b) Curriculum plans; (c) Implementation plans.

E2. 'Classics For All.' (a) Details on activities of the North East Classics Network; (b) Feedback from schools and local stakeholders on activities; (c) Classics For All testimonial.

E3. 'On Seeing the Author: Portraits in Libraries from Antiquity to the Present' exhibition. (a) Visitor data; (b) Press coverage; (c) Visitor responses and feedback; (d) Accompanying photographic exhibition – statement and materials; (e) Schools workshop – plans and materials; (f) Photographs, materials and visitor feedback from event with Gillian Cross.

E4. 'Who Was Homer' nationwide workshops. (a) The RAF *Odyssey*; (b) In Search of Homer.

E5. 'Who Was Homer?' workshops for schools. (a) Workshop Plans; (b) Examples of pupils' work from workshops; (c) Workshop photographs; (d) Workshop reports and feedback; (e) Teachers' guide.

E6. 'Living Poets' website: Overview of resources.

E7. The Spennymoor *Odyssey*. (a) Reports on Activities and Feedback; (b) Video of activities; (c) Photographs from activities.

E8. Bringing Classical Literature to Life. (a) Feedback, testimonials and reports on activities; (b) Materials used in project activities; (c) Overview of accompanying project website (<http://www.bcltl.org/>); (d) Photographs and examples of pupils' work.

E9. AHRC Cultural Engagement Report and supporting materials.