

Heavy Metal Classics:

The Enduring Reception of Greek and Roman Antiquity by Heavy Metal Bands

(RE = Reception Studies)

When considering the musical reception of Classics, scholars almost exclusively privilege opera and classical music over any other modern Western musical genre. Recent work, however, shows promising signs of moving away from such an arguably classist approach: Richard Thomas has explored the connection between Vergil and Bob Dylan at length, and two articles in a recent special volume of *Syllecta Classica* (2012) consider the prevalence of classical themes in modern folk and heavy metal music (Oosterhuis 2012, Umurhan 2012).

This panel has two main aims. The first is to make Classicists aware of the pervasive and enduring influence of the ancient world on heavy metal music, which is arguably more extensive than that shown by any other modern medium; at the same time, however, this medium receives far less mainstream attention than movies or television shows and reaches a more self-selecting audience, with the result that this connection has gone largely unnoticed by Classicists, even those interested in reception. Secondly, the papers on this panel explore the wide range of classical themes (icons, individuals, etc.) that inspire the lyrical content and composition of heavy metal music acts from around the world, including Virgin Steele (US), Iron Maiden (UK), Blind Guardian (Germany), Heimdall (Italy), Eluveitie (Switzerland) and Shadow Icon (Slovenia).

The papers on this panel collaborate to present key background information on the connection between heavy metal and the Classics and to emphasize the various manifestations of this connection, while also introducing avenues for further exploration. Topics will cover a wide

range, from the epic and fantastic elements of heavy metal at its very beginning (Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin); to heavy metal's position within a tradition starting with Plato and continuing through "classical" music over how musical moods affect their listeners; to ethnographic and nationalistic approaches to Roman constructs of national identity; to how these songwriters learn about the ancient world. All of these topics reflect the range of ways in which Classics can be applied in a particularly modern medium, one only made possible by technological innovations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and metal can serve as a microcosm for the reception of antiquity, from the simple to the complex.

Heavy metal music deserves closer attention since it not only engages with classical antiquity, but also illustrates some of its values and meanings in a modern social context. The papers will contribute to our understanding of how the reception of classical antiquity in various media recasts the ancient world to provide fresh and alternate insights for both a contemporary academic and non-academic audience. Accordingly, this panel applies recent work on reception studies on this untapped medium in the hopes of complicating and expanding current discussions of the relationship between the ancient and modern worlds.

Works Cited:

Oosterhuis, D. 2012. "Orpheus, the Original Penniless Poet: Plutus/Pluto in Anais Mitchell's *Hadestown*. *SyllClass* 23: 103-206.

Thomas, R. 2012. "The Streets of Rome: The Classical Dylan," in W. Brockliss *et al.*, eds. *Reception and the Classics. An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 134–59.

Umurhan, O. 2012. "Heavy Metal and the Appropriation of Greece and Rome." *SyllClass* 23: 127-152.

Time Requested: 2 hours

AV Requirements: LCD digital projection & sound cables for PPT with embedded video clips.

Other Special Request: A web link embedded in the CAMWS online program for access to audio and video clips pertaining to panel papers for consultation by interested CAMWS members before and after the presentations.