

EPIC: The Musical as a Learning Tool in the Classics Classroom

Works of classical reception have long been an entry point for new students interested in classics. Be it Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, *Troy* (2004), directed by Wolfgang Petersen, or the video game *Hades* (2018), the works students love are the works they want to learn about. Many classics instructors can and do embrace these kinds of works, while others find them frustrating or inaccurate. No matter the opinion of an instructor on a single piece of media, student interest in any representation of the classics is an opportunity ripe for the taking, if only one could implement the use of these works in their curriculum.

Implementation of classical reception in the classroom is far easier said than done. Instructors cannot be expected to be aware of every forthcoming piece of media that may reference the classical world, let alone be familiar with even a fraction of them. We may be able to connect and engage with our students using some of the works we are individually familiar with, but focusing on our own familiarity and the works we specifically enjoy or hate leaves much to be discovered. Learning about things with which they are familiar strengthens students' ability to engage and remember course content and seek out opportunities for learning. There is no one right way to integrate reception into the classroom or curriculum, but leaving it out entirely will leave much fertile ground untilled.

As current works of reception are created and released constantly, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a comprehensive review of all methods that one might use to adapt works of reception to a classroom, for the purposes of this paper, I must limit the works of reception we will discuss. I also endeavor for this paper to be helpful to instructors in the construction and improvement of their own pedagogical practices. *EPIC: The Musical* (Official

Concept Album) is a work of classical reception retelling Homer's *Odyssey* through nine mini albums called 'sagas' by the creators. Only seven sagas have been released during this paper's authorship, with two more on the way. The story loses the *in medias res* introduction and storytelling framing device we are used to from the original poem, and begins with the sack of Troy by the Achaeans, which alters moments of tension surrounding the deaths of Odysseus's companions. The modern listener becomes emotionally invested in the survival of Odysseus and his crew and may lack the knowledge of their fate. Odysseus's choices are changed and obscured in moments of infidelity to make him more sympathetic to a modern audience. This change may demonstrate for students differing cultural norms between themselves and ancient Greeks for the first time. The musical and repetitious emphasis in and between songs reflects the repetition in the oral tradition of epic poetry and is an accessible way to introduce the concepts of oral tradition and even the Homeric question to students.

As it is a work of reception that is ongoing in its release and takes on a story with relevance outside of our immediate field, *EPIC* presents a strong entry point for students interested in classics and a wealth of opportunities for instructors to engage with their students on the content of the works, both ancient and modern. In this paper, I discuss briefly the reception of Homer's *Odyssey* in *EPIC: The Musical (Official Concept Album)*, as well as methods for implementing the work into class material by instructors who are familiar with it and by interested students, guided by instructors with little or no knowledge of this work.