

## Playing with Time: Anachronism in Ancient Literature

This paper starts from a modern instance of anachronism – the use of 1970s music in Brian Helgeland’s 2001 movie, *A Knight’s Tale*, a romantic adventure set in medieval Europe of the 1370s – which highlights the pointedly transgressive potential of temporal anomalies. The dominant *ancient* discourse about anachronism appears in a passage of Athenaeus (216c- 217a) containing an extended discussion of anachronism in philosophical and historical texts. Here most anachronism appears inadvertent, an error resulting merely from ignorance or carelessness; the critic’s job is to correct it – an approach that figures prominently in the scholia to Greek tragedy. Do ancient sources recognize a more artful use of anachronism, however, comparable to that described in Helgeland’s film? And if so, how might ancient audiences have reacted to it? For answers to these questions, I look at passages from Plato’s *Symposium* (212 c, 205 d-e) and Theocritus’ *Herakliskos* (*Id.*24) that suggest that ancient authors understood the transgressive potential of anachronism, and could expect their audiences to appreciate it.