

TOWARDS A CRITICAL GLOBAL CLASSICS? Bromberg (J.A.) *Global Classics*. Pp. viii + 124.

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Faced with threats to the funding of university Classics programmes and urgent calls to diversify and decolonise the subject, few would dispute this book's claim that Classics and its cognate academic disciplines stand at a crossroads. Jacques Bromberg's concise yet wide-ranging volume provides a timely and powerful statement on why globalizing Classics can help to address these pressing challenges. Beginning with the goal of outlining the methods that comprise the recent 'global turn' in the study of the ancient world, the book swiftly moves beyond characterising the present state-of-the-art towards an inclusive manifesto of future directions, as contained in three chapters titled 'Transborder', 'Transhistorical', and 'Transdisciplinary', and supplemented by an introduction and short epilogue.

The extended introduction provides valuable scene-setting for those unfamiliar with the study of globalization and the transdisciplinary field of global studies, and how these subjects have thus far impacted on Classics. Here and elsewhere in the book, the value of globalization thinking is highlighted in its capacity to decentre Eurocentric and occidental histories in favour of polycentric syntheses that emphasise diverse perspectives and voices. However, Bromberg's vision of global Classics goes beyond stating the need to historicise globalization in an ancient setting. By giving equal weighting, for example, to the role of Classical reception studies in scrutinising the real and imagined genealogical connections between what we call globalizations in the present and globalizations in antiquity, the mission of globalizing Classics is an explicitly inclusive one, with relevance for all fields of the wider discipline. Global Classics is conceived as a multi-directional collaborative project that at once involves understanding the transformative role of connectivity and mobility from historical and archaeological perspectives, while researching the longer-term post-Classical lineages of texts, artefacts, and ideas. In outlining this mission, the author conveys his firm belief that global Classics needs to produce new and important results of real societal relevance, as well as bringing about changes in the discipline that go above and beyond the status of popular trends in academia. Put simply, unless global Classics takes on

a self-reflexive and critical stance, the discipline risks perpetuating its deeply problematic association with ‘Western’ cultural imperialism. This means, for example, countering popular stereotypical understandings of globalization as (only) one-directional, homogenising and inherently about transnational market capitalism, providing alternatives to the privileging of elite perspectives in the study of Classical receptions (a field which Bromberg considers internationalized, but not yet truly globalized), and re-situating hyper-specialised subjects like the study of the ancient Mediterranean (in Bromberg’s view) in the context of renewed interdisciplinary dialogue and cross-period comparison.

Following the introduction’s rousing call to arms on the need for something like ‘global Classics’, the following chapter ‘Transborder’ aims to outline the benefits of re-framing the study of antiquity in terms of globalization thinking. Focusing on the importance of decentring historical analysis, this chapter provides a more detailed overview of how concepts of globalization can bring novel perspectives to the ancient world. While those familiar with the unfolding debate may not find a great deal of novelty here, one of the chapter’s main strengths is surely its synthesis of disparate approaches that cut across different periods and perspectives from the study of ancient literature, history, and archaeology. Extended case-studies on Polybius, whose writings have influenced social science approaches to globalization since the early 1990s, and the site of Ai Khanoum (Afghanistan), used to effectively dispel the myth that (past) globalizations result in cultural homogeneity, are well-chosen to illuminate the significance of existing dialogue between Classics and Global Studies, as well as future possibilities.

Chapter 2, ‘Transhistorial’, shifts the book’s attention from the spatial novelty of many recent approaches to the ancient world inspired by globalization ideas, to the problematisation of temporal issues. The chapter begins with a critique of the dangers of existing historical periodisations, especially those deriving from the rise of political centralisation and military events, noting that such frameworks have limited meaning for the understanding of cultural practices that are often highly localised. While Classical reception studies are praised for producing transhistorical and culturally diverse histories of ancient texts, as well as raising ethical questions over texts’ reproduction, circulation, meaning and access, Bromberg reminds us of the risks of methodological nationalism, by continuing to place the

‘West’ at the centre of ‘global’ literary narratives. Indeed, this need to overcome methodological nationalism is equally valid if we are to truly globalize archaeological studies, especially for the kind of archaeology that tends to be practiced within the confines of nation-state borders, leading to the reification of artificial boundaries of study that make little sense if we wish to understand the logics of dynamically connected entities like the Roman empire (e.g. Romano-British studies). Chapter 2, then, closes with the important reminder that globalizing classical antiquity is not automatically or inherently an inclusive endeavour. Striving for narratives of both multiple globalizations and multiple antiquities ought to challenge researchers to make critical judgements when defining the temporal, spatial and human parameters of their research, and not just perpetuate the status quo of (sometimes inherently colonized) past approaches.

The third chapter, ‘Transdisciplinarity’, considers how to realize the book’s vision of an inclusive and critical global Classics. Achieving this end in practical terms, Bromberg argues, requires not only engagement with bodies of theory and methodology produced in other disciplines, but moreover, increased sub-disciplinary dialogue within Classics. On this subject, the author is probably correct to identify the need for more conversations between researchers interested in history, archaeology, economics, and anthropology on one hand, and those concerned with art, literature, philosophy, and reception on the other. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the origin of such a perceived divide owes more to the different kinds of study materials and research questions asked by scholars in these different fields, and less a failure of dialogue within Classics (although this can certainly be improved). Another important desideratum outlined by Bromberg is for the practitioners of global Classics to push for a more ethical stance that does more than look back at past cultures, to actively confront and even prevent some of the negative human and environmental effects of contemporary globalization. This is a lofty goal that the book concedes may not always be possible for all Classics researchers to meet all the time, but is certainly of utmost importance for the long-term future of the discipline.

Closing with a short epilogue that recapitulates a series of conceptual, methodological, and ethical challenges raised earlier in the book, *Global Classics* leaves the reader with much food for thought.

Bromberg has certainly succeeded in creating a new transdisciplinary vision that is at once optimistic, sustainable, and compelling. It offers valuable critical perspectives on ‘globalizing Classics’ for both newcomers to the field as well as seasoned trail-blazers who may be less aware of the wider scope of research on the subject, and indeed its relevance beyond more specialised lines of inquiry. Despite the slimness of the volume, what might have been lost, for example, from a more in-depth treatment of the burgeoning literature of specialised applications of globalization thinking in Classics, is more than made up for by the book’s refreshing take on the bigger picture and possible future directions of the discipline.

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