



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of History, Classics
and Archaeology

**Transcription of Undergraduate Offer Holder Day Classics Talk
27 March 2019**

GAVIN KELLY:

Welcome everybody to Edinburgh which is... I hope you have time also to enjoy the city. If you don't know already, it's a wonderful city.

I have gone around asking people which degrees they're doing, and you are doing a great massive different degrees. I should introduce myself. My name's Gavin Kelly. I'm the Head of Classics here at Edinburgh. I specialise in Latin Literature and Roman History of the Late Empire, and I've put just this page from a manuscript in Switzerland, which some monk in the 9th century was copying out inscriptions in the city of Rome that are now lost. So... it emphasises my interest both in... the history of the Roman Empire and in the texts that record it. I did have on this PowerPoint a beautiful picture of a manuscript from the Vatican which I'm actually working on. But the reason I can't show that to you is that we are being recorded and the Vatican manuscripts are strictly in copyright of the Vatican, so I couldn't show it to you. The recording is for the benefit of those of you, of people in your position who cannot be here. But, it also has the advantage that you will... If you want to hear this again, you can do so, or more likely, you can fast forward to the bit that you missed and find what that was.

I'm going to speak for about 15 minutes, I hope. Then, I will give you a tiny bit of time for questions. And then we're going to hear from some students. You will have a tour of the building and it ends with a coffee in the undergraduate common room or other refreshments. And we are doing the whole thing again but with a different lecture. So, if you are really looking for punishment, you can come and, having heard my colleague, David Lewis, for 20 minutes at 2:05. You can hear my colleague, Lucy Grig at 3:50, but I won't, no-one would be offended if you don't come.

So... could I just ask one question. Who is at the open day? Could you put up your hands if you've been to an open day? OK, thank you. There'll be some elements of repetition in what I say from the open day simply because it's all quite complicated, so I apologise in advance for that. But I hope that... But my focus, really, is going to be trying to give you a sense of what's distinct at Edinburgh.

And... of course, it's a beautiful ancient university, but it's also a very lively place. We have, well, one of the biggest departments of Classics in the UK. And we try to cover all of the major areas of Classics, of Greek and Latin literature and that does include courses in Greek philosophy, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine History, Classical Art and Archaeology. And not pictured here are two new colleagues, a new lecturer in Greek Archaeology, Anya Slawisch, and a new lecturer in Late Antique Archaeology, Louise Blanke, who will join us in September. And we also extend the Classical world into looking at Latin after the end of the Roman Empire with a Medieval Latinist. And looking at the Roman Empire's continuation in the Greek. So, as I said, it's about 24 permanent full-time staff as of

next year. We have also have a lot of early career scholars at any time, who usually do some teaching.

We are extremely international and... we are, as I say, we have the advantage of covering a lot of areas. And despite that, I do feel that the department does have a somewhat... intimate feel, that it's not so big that people can't know their lecturers. We are serious about everything we do. And although, the emphasis today is obviously on teaching, I think it's also important too... so that we are one of the Europe's top research departments. We have had three European Research Council Grants in the last few years. Couple of million euros a piece.

Our teaching is highly regarded both internally and externally. We recently had an internal appraisal of our teaching where we got particular praise for the way we help people learning languages from scratch to join in with the cohorts of those who've done them before, and to make sure that they can - to make them feel comfortable. And just one example of the things that we do that are research related but also teaching related. My colleague, Judith Barringer, has written a prize-winning textbook on Art and Archaeology of Ancient Greece.

So that was a brief introduction, but I want to talk about for most of the talk is how the different degrees work, what are the typical courses, and... how we teach. So, you probably know this, but we teach in five different areas of Classics, and none of you is going study in all five of these. There simply isn't enough time in the syllabus.

There's Greek and Latin which together make the Classics degree, although you can take them separately or you can take them with other subjects. Ancient History, Classical Art and Archaeology, and Classical Literature in Translation. Perhaps, the distinctive thing in terms of many UK Classics departments is that we... is that we do do all of these areas. There are plenty of departments that don't really have a very large Classical Art and Archaeology side, but this is something that's important even if you're not going to study Classical Art and Archaeology because you may find you want to go on... the opportunity to go on excavation is open to everybody and it is supported financially by the department and the school. And we are very serious about doing the languages and doing them well. Really getting people up to a good standard.

So, the degree programmes... obviously... there are people here doing a whole range of degrees. Some of them are very straightforward like the MA Ancient History. What you do is you study Greek and Roman history. There's no expectation that you'll do Latin or Greek as part of them.

But the four, to just talk about the four big degrees, MA Classics learning Greek and Latin. MA Classical Studies which a lot of you are doing, this is a programme which is rather more complicated than MA Ancient History or Greek and Latin which do what they say on the tin because MA Classical Studies is really your opportunity to find out what interests you the most in Classics. So, you are encouraged but you don't have to do a language. You have to do a little bit of ancient history, a little bit of classical literature in translation, but your focus is very much your choice.

MA Ancient History and Classical Archaeology, which I have to tell you from next year, not from your entry but the year afterwards, is going to change its name to Classical Archaeology and Ancient History. And that is the primary degree for people who are interested in Classical Archaeology though you can also do a degree joint with Greek or Latin.

Now the reason that I am telling you all this is that Edinburgh is essentially, and like Scottish universities in general, is essentially very flexible about what you do, but it's also rather complex. And you can change between these degrees. You could arrive to study MA Classics and you could decide after a year that while you want to keep on Latin, Greek is not as exciting for you as Classical Art and Archaeology and you could change to Classical Archaeology and Latin. And these changes happen particularly in the first two years. In order to do that, all you would have to do is the required courses for Classical Archaeology as one of your additional outside subjects. And this is a very straightforward process. Lots of people change degrees. People change from Classical Studies to Ancient History, from Ancient History to Ancient History and Classical Archaeology, all sorts of changes. And we also have, of course, joint degrees with other subjects. And lots of these people also change. They change into read Classics, they sometimes change regrettably out of Classics to read the other subjects that they are studying. And this flexibility is wonderful.

There are I suppose not, you know, there are sometimes disadvantages. A number of people here are down to read MA English Literature and Classics which is a popular option. The disadvantage of the way it's done here is that the reason we can be so flexible is that we have English Literature. You'll study English Literature in the English Department on the one hand and Classics on the other hand with us, and you, in a sense, are the person that's joining those two subjects. Now that's being perhaps negative in a way I shouldn't be because what you will actually find is that you can join those subjects in many ways. You can do a dissertation on the reception of Latin or Greek literature in English literature. You can write, you can do courses on that subject, on the subject of classical reception. You can write essays that join your courses if you're given a choice that join those two as you often are in honours courses, that join those two subjects together. So, that's all of these courses you will spend in the first two years a third of your time doing one subject, a third of the time doing the other subject, and a third of the time free. And then in the final two years you'll spend half of your time on each of your subjects.

The degree structure which I'm describing is here and the things that are perhaps distinct which I'll come back to as distinct is, if you do a four-year degree at Edinburgh, you can have this year abroad without taking a great big chunk out of your degree. You know, if you're on a three-year degree and you had a year abroad, it would eat into it. If you're on a four-year degree, you can come back, and all your friends are still here. And also, the dissertation which is another jewel in the crown of the system.

And the way that the teaching works is from breadth to depth, from preparing you to getting deeper. So, if you are in the first year, you might say you are doing Ancient History. We have broad courses, two courses on the Greek world and two courses on the Roman world, which include elements of literature and translation and of classical archaeology and art. And the idea is to get a broad chronological sweep that covers the whole subject. Then in the second year, if you're doing Ancient History, you'll do courses that take a very different angle. They look at the writing of history in the ancient world. What the biases, agenda, literary aims of the histories that we use as our sources are. And then we have another course that looks at broad topics that go across Greece and Rome such as slavery or imperialism. And then the honours period where you have a huge amount of choice and you can choose the courses that most interest you. You can, in a sense, focus on the courses done by the lecturers that you've most enjoyed learning from. If you want to spend most of your time on Greek history, you can spend most of your time on Greek history.

And for the languages the way this might work would be let's say you've done Latin already, but you haven't done Greek, which is a common experience. So, in the first year, you'd be reading Latin texts, classic Latin texts, Cicero, Virgil, Petronius, that sort of thing. And you would be doing at the same time grammar tutorial, grammar-based tutorials every week. In the second year, the text becomes, perhaps especially in Latin, it will become slightly more exotic. You might do slightly different things. Then in the third and fourth years, a wide choice, but keeping the focus on, strong focus on linguistic training.

And similarly, in the first year, you do the beginner's Greek. You'd spend... it's tough. You know, it's four classes a week and a tutorial. It is.. you're trying to get basically to school leaving standards in one year. And people do it every year. This is, it's the one where the people really make remarkable progress and get this absolutely excellent standard from being beginners. And it involves a different work ethic to other courses because you have to do it every day. I'm sorry to tell you this but, if you're doing an ancient history course and you do no work for a week, that's disgraceful but you'll be okay. If you do it in Greek, you may have some serious catching up to do. So, that's the nature of the Greek coursework - a little and often.

So, the principle is to move from big courses with large numbers, because we have a lot of outside students who are interested in our courses, into these specialist courses of a size between ten and 25 in the third and fourth years, teaching you the basics in the first year and then really letting you become an expert.

And these courses are often based on the most up-to-date research of the scholars who are teaching them. So people who are studying Latin at the moment, might be doing the medieval Latin course taught by my colleague Justin Stover, where he's teaching two sets of pastoral poems from one, the middle ages, and one from the high ages, which have never been translated into English - which is quite good for sorting out people's knowledge of Latin, but it also means that they're completely free to discover things for the first time for themselves.

Just to emphasise, to show the way that the undergraduates... the syllabus works in the first two years. If you're doing Latin and Greek, you'll do beginners courses and then or advanced courses and then in the second year, the first of the two semesters, people who've done beginners will have a slightly easier version of the same courses the other second years to help them get to the same standard and then they will join together in the second semester of the second year. And really by the honours year, you can't tell the difference between people, if everything has gone well, between people who have learned the language at university.

Then you have the ancient history, classical archaeology and classical literature in translation courses. And the principle there is that you start off by doing all those subjects within these broad chronological courses and then you get specialised. So, if you're doing classical archaeology, you will do these two courses in the second year, having building on the context you found in the first year. If you are one to focus on classical literature and translation, the Greek and Roman epic and also this course from ancient history on ancient historians.

In all of this you can do the outside courses, the famous outside courses of Scottish universities. You can do Japanese, you can do French, you can do religious studies, you can do history, but you can also do other classical subjects. And that I think is really important, because if you are doing ancient

history, it really isn't a bad idea to learn Latin or Greek even if just for a year because it will really help later on, and if it's not for you it doesn't matter.

And these slides, I'm not going to talk about, but you can watch them on recording and see how it works. They show the progress from specialised to... from general with outside courses to the more specialised process in the next two years.

Just to give you a sense of what happens when you get to the specialised level and I'm not going again, these are slides that if you want you can look up later. But our ancient history courses, they range from early... from archaic Greece down to Byzantine history, the formation of the medieval Roman empire 602 to 867. They go across Greece and Rome they go... they do well-trodden things like the Emperor Nero, you know the political history, through to social history like my colleague David Lewis' course on Sparta and Greek, they do really a great variety of periods.

Greek and Latin, I'll just point out, these are perhaps a lot of them are courses you might expect, some of them are a bit surprising. We're the only university in the country, we think, that have both courses in Greek palaeography, that is Greek manuscript, and in Latin manuscripts and palaeography and that's something we're very proud of and that people really... something that I think people really enjoy hugely. And these days, of course, you can get manuscripts beautifully found online with great ease, but people do also go and work on medieval Greek manuscripts in the University library and help catalogue them.

Classical art and archaeology, we also have the benefit of courses from the archaeology department, but again it's going from early and archaic Greece down through the Roman Empire to the Hellenistic Roman empire, then the Byzantine period. And also, worth mentioning is, I've mentioned the possibility of going on excavations. Presently my colleague Ben Russell has a field school in the summer at Aeclanum, which is near Naples, possibilities in Jordan and Turkey from our new appointees. Our classical literature and translation courses including things going back as early as Hesiod Greek tragedy. So classic things but also, perhaps slightly more unusual things. Poetry and culture from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages.

The dissertation I've talked about, it's a really fulfilling thing to supervise student dissertations. I supervised this one on Purcell's Opera Dido and Aeneas and the relationship to the Virgilian text. People really do choose whatever they want to do, and we will try to supervise it if we can.

The year abroad is I think a really important element. I must say if you are thinking of doing a year abroad, do think of it from the very start, because if you want to have the widest possible choice you might think of learning a foreign language from the first year as your outside subject. And certainly, lots of our students who go to exchanges to Italy are people who've started Italian at university and it's a perfectly possible thing to do. You might prefer to go to... I think that going to Italy would be amazingly cool or to go to Munich or Berlin, but if you prefer to go to somewhere English-speaking, the places we've got exchanges with are really not bad universities. So, I think that this is a great opportunity and the people who do this often come back really inspired. It's not suitable for everybody but it's a wonderful opportunity and we do keep carefully in touch with you.

So, I think I'm in the way of...I've answered what I think are the reasons for studying Classics here which is really great rigour particularly in the Latin and Greek, of course, you don't have to do them.

The wide range of courses, I mean, the really wide range of course subjects but also within those subjects and especially when you get to honours-level. And the possibility of finding your own path in Classics and we like to think we cut a sort of middle way, or not a middle way but we do both highly traditional things and also highly innovative things. We teach texts in rigorous and difficult ways for example, but we also teach texts that people haven't necessarily thought of studying before.

There's a good system of support, personal tutor system, everybody is allocated one from the start. It will be somebody in classics, that's an important principle and this person you'll go to see and they're there to advise you academically, but also if life happens and you know, something goes wrong, they are there... we're not psychologists when we're doing this. We are not trying to sort of... we are not medical professionals and we can't solve every problem. But we can make sure that any problems that you do have, don't affect your degree badly. Because I think that's a really important thing to know that something like that is there.

So, there are things I haven't spoken of here that perhaps you'll hear from the students like the Classics Society, the possibility here of outreach work, you know, working with schools teaching Latin. You know you don't have to have very good Latin to teach 9-year-olds. I haven't really talked about the building but you'll see that later.

Here are a reminder that a classics degree is really a path not to a specific career but to any number of possible careers and you know, our alumni do pretty well.

Just the departmental website but we also have a Facebook page. I've also started a Twitter account although I'm not very good at using it yet.

Well, it's a great pleasure to welcome some of our students who are just going to tell you a bit about their experiences and then you can ask them questions. We've got Osana and we've got Camilla.

CAMILLA:

Hello everybody, I'm a first-year student in Classics.

LECTURER:

Fourth year.

CAMILLA:

Fourth year. Sorry. In Classics and so, Professor Kelly asked me to talk about my experience here. And yeah, as I said, I'm a fourth year. So, I'm in the process of writing my dissertation. Which is almost over, thanks God. And so basically, I'm talking about Greek literature and Greek tragedy. I'm investigating the Hippolytus by Euripides and I'm looking for instances of Greek religion in this tragedy to be compared to epigraphy. So, inscriptions. And to see how tragedy works with normal life. Real life. So, the epigraphic evidence.

I got much of the inspiration for this from my year abroad in the US, which was last year, and it was really remarkable time. I came to know many people, many professors and so my academic life really could benefit from this experience. In fact, because of this, I decided to actually apply for the

US again and I'm going back to Virginia, so University of Virginia in Charlottesville, to do a PhD in Classics. Which I mean, after four years here, I'm doing MA, it's actually a very good opportunity and so yeah. I mean, four years here have been quite a long time, but we're getting to the end and I would say I'm glad I chose to study here, Classics.

(APPLAUSE)

OSANNA:

Hi everyone. My name is Osanna and despite my misleading accent, I'm actually from Hong Kong. I think it's because of my background I think, I haven't had any sort of education in classics whatsoever. The only thing that I knew about classics before I came to university, was from Percy Jackson, right?

So, but now I'm in my final year studying Classical Studies. I'm doing independent research, I am writing my dissertation in Classics and you know, I feel like I've come a long way and so if you're staying there thinking, oh my goodness, I don't know anything about classics. Am I going to suffer? Like... you're going to be fine. Let me just reassure you that I was in the exact same place.

So, 'cause I'm in my fourth year, I'm doing my dissertation. And do you know the film '300'? That was briefly mentioned just now? You know with the six packs and stuff? That's the film I'm writing on, right? So, I'm writing it on Spartan warfare, specifically. So, I know the whole thing screams teenage boy. But I don't care. Down with labels, right? So, I'm having the time of my life writing this dissertation.

And also, as a fourth year, I'm also thinking about my plans for the future. For the past couple of years, I've done several internships. I've worked at a PR firm, I've worked at a start-up company that specialises in events management, I've worked at a gallery that deals contemporary art. So, none of these really is directly relevant to classics, but I think, you know, studying classics gives a lot of transferrable skills. Like writing skills, analytical skills, research skills. All these are very valuable in the job market and I think, especially if you're like me and you're interested in like arts and culture, I think Edinburgh is a really good place to be, cause it gives a lot of opportunity. I personally volunteer at the National Museum of Scotland as a young demonstrator, specifically with youth engagement and stuff. So, I organise youth events and youth tours and also at the Talbot Rice Gallery which is a contemporary art gallery. So, yeah, this is a really good place to be, to be studying Classics and you know, I'm feeling very excited about the future and I hope you are too. Yeah. So, thanks.