

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 31 – Classics
Title of case study: Exhibiting antiquity on film
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Maria Wyke’s research on representations of classical antiquity on film has had significant influence on public access to and understanding of antiquity in silent cinema, both nationally and internationally, through a series of public screenings, film festivals and broadcasts. Her research has influenced the curation, restoration and exhibition of such films by national archives (such as the British Film Institute) as part of the cultural heritage of Europe and the USA. It has also led to the development of ‘antiquity on film’ as an established course in universities in the UK, the USA and Australia.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Maria Wyke’s research is on the representation of ancient Rome in cinema from its beginnings to the present, and the representation of ancient civilisations in silent cinema. She joined UCL as Professor of Latin in 2005, where she initiated a long-term research project on <i>Ancient Civilisations in Silent Cinema</i> (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/research/research-projects/CINECIVS) with Pantelis Michelakis of the University of Bristol. The project led to the publication of an edited collection [a] containing a chapter by Wyke on Buster Keaton’s comic representation of antiquity and a substantial, pioneering introduction on antiquity in silent cinema by Wyke and Michelakis. Additionally, her parallel research into the reception of Julius Caesar in western culture, supported by an AHRC Research Leave Award at UCL (2007), led to the publication of two monographs [b, c] in which she discussed extensively Caesar’s place in silent Italian and Cold War Hollywood cinema. These publications, and the screenings and talks based on Wyke and Michelakis’ findings, were preceded by substantial archival investigations and interviews with archivists in Los Angeles, Washington, New York, Amsterdam, Rome and London, particularly between 2009 and 2011.</p> <p>Wyke’s individual and collaborative research [especially a] has revealed a fascination with antiquity as one of the most distinctive features of cinema since its emergence in 1896. More than 400 films set in antiquity (from epics to cartoons) survive, alongside screenplays, publicity, reviews and other ephemera scattered in archives around the world. Wyke’s research reveals how silent cinema provided a crucial pathway for antiquity to enter modernity and how antiquity provided silent cinema with a platform on which to build much of its claim to cultural value. It considers: how antiquity films (aesthetically rich, ideologically complex and technologically innovative) are situated within silent cinema and in relation to later types of filmmaking; the inter-relations between these films and other conceptualisations of antiquity in painting, sculpture, dance, theatre and opera between 1896 and 1928; the contribution made by antiquity to early film (especially in terms of cultural legitimation); how antiquity changed on entry into cinema (gaining embodiment, movement, colour and music); and what contemporary interests cinema’s antiquities served (playing out in extremis issues of nationalism, politics, religion, class, race, gender and sexuality).</p> <p>Wyke’s research has included investigations of Julius Caesar in western culture more broadly, and in the USA in particular. Representations of Caesar in silent and sound cinema are considered in relation to those in other popular media (including comic books, television and the popular press), and to the specificity of their social, historical and technological contexts [b, c]. These examinations of Caesar on film demonstrate vividly the ideological roles he has played in later cultures, especially in the making of national and political identities. Scholars have only recently acknowledged the crucial importance of exploring the ‘democratic turn’ in the modern reception of the ancient world; that is, the entry of the ancient world into modern mass culture. This research on antiquity in cinema therefore makes a vital contribution to the relatively new field of ‘popular’ receptions of classical culture.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] Maria Wyke / Pantelis Michelakis (eds.), <i>The Ancient World in Silent Cinema</i>, Cambridge 2013 [co-edited volume, includes co-authored introduction on this new field of classical research and a</p>

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single-authored article on Buster Keaton's comic representation of antiquity; submitted to REF2].

[b] Maria Wyke, *Caesar in the USA*, Berkeley 2012 [single-authored monograph; submitted to REF2; silent and sound film and television discussed in chapters 2 (Americanisation), 3 (Militarism), 5 (Totalitarianism) and 7 (Empire)]; sample review by Diana Spencer in *The Ancient History Bulletin* online (2013): 'W's elegant observations and formation of a new kind of canon for Caesar makes for an enormously rich resource, one that will shape future interest in the impact of Caesarism on the USA's long twentieth-century.'

[http://ancienthistorybulletin.ca/AHBOR03\(2013\)/AHBReviews\(2013\)19.SpencerOnWyke.pdf](http://ancienthistorybulletin.ca/AHBOR03(2013)/AHBReviews(2013)19.SpencerOnWyke.pdf)

[c] Maria Wyke, *Caesar: A Life in Western Culture*, London & Chicago 2007 [single-authored monograph; film discussed in chapter 5 and television in chapter 2. Available on request. Sample review by W. Jeffrey Tatum in *Journal for World History* 21.3 (2010): 'With this splendid book, Maria Wyke solidifies her standing as our leading student of the European and, more generally, of the Western reception of Julius Caesar.'

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_world_history/summary/v021/21.3.tatum.html].

Key peer-reviewed grants:

'Caesar in the USA: Popular culture, Classical reception, American identity', AHRC Research Leave Award to Maria Wyke (Jan–Mar 2007), £24,187 RL AN:121276 / APN: 121146, final report graded satisfactory. Resulted in [b, c].

'The Ancient World of Silent Cinema', British Academy Small Research Grant to Maria Wyke (2009–2011) £7079 SG-54637. Resulted in [a].

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

[1] *Enhancing public access to and understanding of antiquity in silent cinema:*

Wyke's research has resulted in better public access to and understanding of silent films set in antiquity. After close study of those that survive in the Joye collection of the British Film Institute (BFI), Wyke and Michelakis chose a representative selection of 34 silent films to screen, with piano accompaniment, nationally and internationally. These included screenings at UCL's Bloomsbury Theatre 1 (2009; enthusiastically previewed on BBC Radio Night Waves; audience c. 300, with some travelling from Germany, Portugal and the USA); UCL's Bloomsbury Theatre 2 (2009; audience c. 200); the Getty Villa Los Angeles (2010; audience c. 250); the Berlin Zeughauskino (2011; reviewed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Faz.net*); Bristol's Wickham Theatre (2011, audience c. 70); the University of Washington, Seattle (2013, audience c. 100) and UCL's Bloomsbury Theatre 3 (2013; audience c. 200). Wyke and Michelakis contributed programme notes, introductions to the project, and detailed talks on the films screened, which were followed by public discussion. Audiences totalling about 1,200 people, comprised the general public, silent film fans, school children, students and academics from a wide variety of higher education institutions [see 1.1 in section 5].

The reception of these activities by silent film enthusiasts may be gauged by reviews in special interest blogs such as *The Bioscope* or *Bible Films*. For instance, in its review of the UCL Bloomsbury 1 event, *The Bioscope* wrote enthusiastically of the promise of fresh insights and new angles that would emerge from having the films exhibited by a classical studies department. The reviews also highlighted the impacts of the events in terms of engaging new audiences with these films. Thus the *Bioscope* reviewer continued: "Of course, we hacks turned up and occupied the front row, but the theatre was full of some 250 or so new enthusiasts, who had for the most part never seen such films, and who were clearly thrilled at the sense of discovery" [1.1 in section 5]. An evaluation of feedback after the UCL Bloomsbury 3 screening highlighted the impacts of the event on the awareness and understanding of a quite diverse audience. Sample comments included: 'I found the introduction [to the film about Caesar] fascinating ... in classes I could certainly use the ideas raised' (Classics teacher); 'Throughout the viewing I was aware that my response was also deepened by your presentation, giving a context to the making of the film and its original reception in different countries' (entertainment professional/part-time student); 'I got talking to the woman next to me, who told me that she's not seen many silent films ... exposing people such as this to the wonderful world of silent cinema is certainly something to be applauded!' (independent filmmaker); and 'absolutely amazing evening, extremely interesting, clear commentary & wonderful music' (classic film fan) [see 1.2 in section 5].

[2] *Contributing to curation, restoration and exhibition of silent film as cultural heritage:*

This research facilitated the work of film archivists, curators and programmers in cataloguing, restoring and exhibiting silent films set in antiquity. As well as catalysing and supporting the exhibition and elucidation of the antiquity films selected from the BFI collection (described above), Wyke's research brought wider public attention to their significance, enriched the organisation's own knowledge of them, and enhanced their cataloguing [see 2.1 in section 5].

In 2010, Wyke approached a senior programmer at the Bologna Film Festival, *Il Cinema Ritrovato*, one of the world's most important festivals for restored films, attracting historians, archivists, fans and the general public. Stimulated by the research project [a], and supported by further advice from Wyke about film selection, the programmer found the confidence to run an antiquity strand in 2011 – programme 3: 'decadenza e progresso. verso *Quo Vadis?*'. Wyke introduced the films and the project and, with Michelakis, provided programme notes for the festival catalogue. This led to an ongoing partnership: further discussion with Wyke motivated the programmer to run another antiquity strand at Bologna in July 2013 – programme 7: 'la resurrezione cinematografica, ovvero il fascino irresistibile dell'antichità'. On this occasion (celebrating 100 years from the release of the significant silent feature, *Quo Vadis?*), Wyke and Michelakis introduced the two-day screenings and led much of the discussion at three workshops held on the theme. Wyke's research [a, b] stimulated the choice of some of the films screened, featured in a considerable part of the two-day discussions, drew in new audiences (including classics students from the University of Bologna and the curator of antiquities from the local museum), and assisted in the process of getting one important feature film, *Spartaco ovvero il Gladiatore di Tracia* (1913), restored specifically for screening at the festival [see 2.2 and 2.3 in section 5].

[3] *Enhancing wider public understanding of antiquity in silent and sound cinema:*

Wyke's research on both silent and sound films [a, b, c] has achieved further impacts (which cross over into public engagement) by promoting cultural debate on 'antiquity on film'. This was accomplished particularly through her role as a 'talking head' for a BBC4 Timeshift documentary on *Epic: A Cast of Thousands* (audience figures 254,000 for broadcast on 24/12/2011; 131,000 for 28/12/2011; 161,000 for 05/08/2012). Wyke also contributed to a documentary on the genesis of Biblical films that was included in the commercial DVD produced for Warner Brothers Homevideo of *Quo Vadis* (1951) (sales c. 45,000 worldwide), released in 2009. The documentary received a rating of 7.5/10 on the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) website, and received a rather better review at DVD Movie Guide than *Quo Vadis* itself, with particular note being made of the information provided on the film's silent predecessors [see 3.1 in section 5].

Wyke also spoke at literary festivals including Hay (2008 on Julius Caesar) and Cheltenham (2010 in conversation with Mary Beard and Kevin Macdonald, the director of the epic film *The Eagle*, during a panel on 'Swords, sandals & celluloid') [see 3.3 in section 5]. She spoke on Newstalk Radio 106 Ulster about the television series *Spartacus – Blood & Sand* (2010; audience for the radio show c. 15,000) and provided the keynote address at an Oxford schools conference on Classics in Film (2008; audience c. 190). She also talked to a public audience about the Roman empire on film at a Roman Night at the British Museum in association with the Hadrian exhibition (2008) and curated a film season in association with its Pompeii and Herculaneum exhibition (2013).

[4] *Influencing curriculum development of 'antiquity on film' in higher education:*

Wyke's research has had a significant impact on the shape and content of courses concerning 'antiquity on film' or 'classical reception' in universities in the UK, the USA and Australia. For example, in 2008 she was invited to the University of Miami for consultation on teaching film in the undergraduate classical curriculum; its Professor of Classics refers to the 'subtle and well-informed discussions' of the political context of the films and explains how her scholarship has influenced his 'Antiquity through a Lens' course [see 4.1 in section 5].

Her research [b, c] is also used as course reading in postgraduate and undergraduate courses at New Mexico State University, the University of Illinois, the University of Exeter and the University of Sydney. Wyke organised the digitisation of a selection of silent films from the BFI archive (funded by the libraries of UCL and the University of Illinois at a cost of £3,363, split 25:75); these have

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recently been made available for research via interlibrary loan. The Professor of Western Civilisation & Culture from Illinois writes of the benefits to students enrolled in a 2012 course of Wyke's 'pioneering' work on the silent era, and states that the research itself and the provision of the DVDs for student use has created 'new horizons' for both him and them. He has also now instated a course on the reception of Julius Caesar (launched 2013) in which Wyke's research will be required reading [see 4.2 in section 5]. The Chair of Classics at the University of Sydney comments that Wyke's work 'plays a crucial part in our syllabus. Her centrality in the field of reception studies demands that our students are familiar with her work' [see 4.3 in section 5].

At the American Philological Association's annual meeting in Seattle in January 2013, a special panel was held, sponsored by the American Classical League (the main body devoted to the teaching of Latin and Greek in the US), in which Wyke's work set the agenda for discussion about new research that could be easily incorporated by instructors into their curricula. As the Chair in Classics at Sydney remarked, 'this session made it clear that Wyke represented the benchmark of international best practice' [see 4.3 in section 5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] *Enhancing public access to and understanding of antiquity in silent cinema:*

1.1 Audiences figures were supplied by the theatre managers or, in the case of Seattle, estimated by Wyke. Reviews in *The Bioscope*: Bloomsbury 1: <http://thebioscope.net/2009/01/30/visiting-the-ancient-world/> (January 2009); Bloomsbury 2: <http://thebioscope.net/2009/06/23/bible-stories/> (June 2009), also reviewed at <http://biblefilms.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/ancient-world-in-silent-cinema-report.html> on the Bible Films Blog.

1.2 For UCL Bloomsbury 3 (May 2013), audience feedback available on request.

[2] *Contributing to curation, restoration and exhibition of silent film as cultural heritage:*

2.1 Statement provided by the Curator of Silent Film at the BFI.

2.2 Statement provided by the Programmer at the Bologna Film Festival.

2.3 Copies of the Bologna festival catalogues: *Il Cinema Ritrovato: XXV edizione* (Cineteca Bologna, 2011), pp. 25–7 and *Il Cinema Ritrovato: XXVII edizione* (Cineteca Bologna, 2013), pp. 36–40. Several thousand copies were produced for the festival audiences. Details of the screenings for 2011 are listed in the blog of a film programmer from the National Audiovisual Archive of Finland: <http://anttialanenfilm diary.blogspot.it/2011/06/cento-anni-fa-decadenza-e-progresso.html>

[3] *Enhancing wider public understanding of antiquity in silent and sound cinema:*

3.1 A clip is accessible online, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00mlx45>, of Wyke explaining the marketing and distribution of Hollywood epics for BBC4's flagship social and cultural history documentary series, *Timeshift*. Audience figures for *Epic!* were provided by its BBC producer. Sales figures for the *Quo Vadis* DVD were supplied by Warner Brothers. IMDb rating of the documentary contained in the DVD of *Quo Vadis* <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1395042/>; review of the documentary at <http://www.dvdmag.com/quovadis.shtml>.

3.2 Mary Beard on chairing a productive discussion of *The Eagle* with Wyke and the film's director, in the Classics strand of the Cheltenham Literary festival, and recalls a lively audience response: http://timesonline.typepad.com/dons_life/2010/10/how-to-read-a-latin-poem-the-ancient-booker-and-other-cheltenham-events.html

[4] *Influencing curriculum development of 'antiquity on film' in higher education:*

4.1 Statement provided by the Professor of Classics at University of Miami, Ohio.

4.2 Statement provided by the Professor of Western Civilisation and Culture, and of Media and Cinema Studies, at the University of Illinois and email exchange concerning funding of digitisation.

4.3 Statement provided by the Chair of Classics & Ancient History at the University of Sydney. See http://www.apaclassics.org/images/uploads/documents/meeting/144/144th_Meeting_Program.pdf, session 37 p. 44, for details of the APA session.