

CA Prize-winner 2020: Daisy Dunn



The Classical Association Prize is awarded annually in recognition of work that has raised the profile of Classics in the public eye. Our 2020 winner is the acclaimed author, classicist and cultural critic Dr Daisy Dunn.

Daisy's interests in the history of the late Roman Republic and early Empire, classical literature, and the art of Renaissance Italy underpin a large part of her work. Having read Classics at St Hilda's, Oxford, before completing a Master's in the History of Art at the Courtauld Institute, she completed a doctorate on Classics and Art History at University College London where she was awarded an AHRC doctoral award, the Gay Clifford Award for Outstanding Women Scholars, and an Italian Cultural Society scholarship.

Daisy's earliest publications included *Catullus' Bedspreed: The Life of Rome's Most Erotic Poet* (2016), a biography of the poet that takes its name from Poem 64, the description of a wedding coverlet featuring Theseus and Ariadne that first captured Daisy's imagination as a schoolgirl and inspired her work on Catullus. The biography was written to coincide with the publication of her translation of the poems of Catullus, which sought to be true to the text while translating it for a modern audience. Daisy noted in the introduction that the poems offer a rare and highly personal window into the life of Catullus and his times, while showing us that 'the people of his world were not always so very different from us'.

Highlighting the familiarity between the ancient world and our own has become the hallmark of Daisy's work. Her recent *Ladybird Expert Book on Homer* (2019) not only offers a guide to the plots of the Homeric epics, but also explores their major themes, inspirations, and their legacies. Homer also makes an appearance in *Of Gods and Men: 100 Stories from Ancient Greece & Rome* (2019), an anthology in which Daisy has gathered together tales that showcase the diversity and vitality of classical literature and interwoven well-known translations with her own.

Last year also saw the publication of the much-anticipated *In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Life of Pliny*, a rich and lively biography that intertwines material from the younger Pliny's *Letters* and Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. This work has been met with great acclaim, being listed among the *Sunday Times's* 'Best Books of 2019 so far', *History Today's* 'Books of the Year 2019', Waterstones' 'Best History Books of 2019' and many more.

In addition to contributing features, reviews, and comment articles to *History Today*, *Literary Review*, *The Times*, and *New Criterion* – to name but a few – Daisy often gives talks and lectures in schools, museums, galleries, and at literary festivals. She has also made an enormous contribution in service to the discipline, having formerly served as trustee and Executive Officer of the Joint Association of Classical Teachers and as the current editor of *ARGO*, the biannual magazine of the Hellenic Society, since 2015.

In his review of *In the Shadow of Vesuvius: A Life of Pliny*, Tom Holland recently paid fitting tribute to Daisy's ability to breathe life into the ancient world: 'Without ever veering into historical fiction, she consistently succeeds in bringing what might otherwise seem dusty and remote to vivid life.... The result is a portrait of the Roman Empire that gives the reader something of the shiver down the spine that Herculaneum can inspire: a sense that we are as close to the vanished world of two millennia ago as we are ever likely to get.' It is this quality that makes Daisy so worthy a winner of this year's prize and, although the current global health crisis prevents us from honouring her achievement in person, we look forward to a time when we will be properly able to celebrate her success and thank her for enhancing the public appeal of Classics and for the joy that she brings to her readers.

Sharon Marshall (University of Exeter)
CA Outreach Officer