

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 29		
Title of case study: The Classical World: in modern policy making, in planning for diversity, and in the public sphere		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: From 2000		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Mary Beard	Professor of Classics	1984 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Beard's research into the uses of the classical tradition in contemporary cultural and political debates, and the role of women in antiquity and the modern world, undertaken at the University of Cambridge, has been particularly important in uncovering the classical origins of contemporary assumptions about women's power and voice. Her <i>Women and Power</i> has inspired political leaders and policy-makers worldwide, from UN Secretary General, António Guterres, to Hillary Clinton, to think differently about issues of gender, speech and power. Her presentations at, e.g., the Foreign Office, British embassies and the World Economic Forum have brought enriched historical understanding into equal opportunity and leadership debates. Her work lies behind a London fashion collection, an album track by award-winning US rap artist, Janelle Monáe, as well as changing the lives and aspirations of many people internationally.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Beard's research explores the complex ways in which the modern world is still – for better or worse – the inheritor of the traditions and debates of antiquity. Within this general theme, she has investigated in detail the relationship between the ideology of gender in antiquity and today. How does gender inflect our understanding of the classical world? What has been the role of women in contemporary classical scholarship? How far are modern assumptions about the place of women in (or out of) the public sphere still the legacy of Greco-Roman theories and assumptions?</p> <p>The interplay between ancient and modern is one important focus of her <i>SPQR</i> (2015) [R1], a radical new history of Rome, which rejects the popular idea that Rome's history can be <i>directly</i> relevant to modern political problems (there is no simplistic comparison here between US presidents and Roman emperors), and instead stresses the complex intersection between ancient and modern debates. Chapter 1, e.g., examines the Catilinarian conspiracy of 63 BCE in the light of more recent controversies over civil liberties, while also tracing how it is that Cicero's slogans from 63 are still plastered on banners in modern political protests. Throughout, the book focuses on Roman conceptions of cultural identity, on their mythical origins as refugees and asylum seekers, and on their characteristic practice of extending Roman citizenship, eventually to all free inhabitants in the empire. It prompts us to consider the contrast with modern nation states' assumptions about citizenship and migration.</p> <p>Much of Beard's research concerns the use of Classics in modern culture (notably in <i>Confronting the Classics</i> (2013) [R2], and 'Live Classics' (2011) [R3], which focuses on Tony Harrison's play <i>Fram</i>). One main research theme has also been the theory and practice of</p>		

gender in the classical world and classical scholarship. *Classical Art* (2001) [R4] contains a groundbreaking discussion of the ancient female nude. Even more notably, *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (2000) [R5] examines one of the earliest professional women classicists in the UK, and still one of the most influential, to consider the conditions under which a 'biography' (in conventional terms) of such a figure is possible, and to explore the ways in which Harrison *both* found a public voice, *and* was silenced and sometimes ridiculed.

Beard brought these themes together in *Women and Power* (2017) [R6]. Originating in two lectures given at the British Museum, this book, intended for a wide audience, is driven by years of classical and historical research. It exposes the origins in classical antiquity of many contemporary assumptions about the power and voice (or powerlessness and silence) of women – starting from the presentation (and silencing) of Penelope in the *Odyssey*, through the mutilation of the tongue of Philomela, to the satiric attacks on modern female politicians worldwide as new 'Medusas'. The achievement of the book is to use the classical world as a lens through which to examine modern structures and images of power, still largely coded as male. It is a rare and innovatory attempt to historicise contemporary issues of gender.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Beard, M. *SPQR: a history of ancient Rome* (London: Profile, 2015), ISBN: 9781846683817

[R2] Beard, M. *Confronting the Classics: traditions, adventures and innovations* (London: Profile, 2013), ISBN: 9781781250495

[R3] Beard, M. "Live Classics: What's the use of Aeschylus in Darfur?" in J. Bate (ed), *The Public Value of the Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 17-29, ISBN: 9781849660624 (available as open access through the [Bloomsbury Open Access programme](#))

[R4] Beard, M. (With John Henderson) *Classical Art from Greece to Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), ISBN: 9780192842374

[R5] Beard, M. *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), ISBN: 9780674008076

[R6] Beard, M. *Women and Power* (London: Profile, 2017) ISBN: 9781788160605

[R4] and [R5] have been peer reviewed; [R1] is a leading new history of Rome, widely used as a university course book in the USA; [R2] is an influential collection of critical essays and lengthy reviews, largely of major academic books; [R3] was specially commissioned (and reviewed) by the AHRC; [R6] is a ground-breaking account of misogyny from antiquity to the present day.

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

The research impacts on three areas:

(1) on political and policy forums; (2) on changing people's lives, assumptions and aspirations; (3) on art and cultural production.

(1) Political and policy forums

Women and Power [text removed for publication] has demonstrated to world leaders, debating policy on gender equality worldwide, just how ancient are the structures that silence women. António Guterres praised its explanation of 'deep power imbalances today' in his opening speech at the 63rd Session of the UN Commission on the status of Women [E1]; Hillary Clinton has often drawn on the analysis of *Women and Power*, e.g., on Instagram ("Historian Mary Beard opened doors to our past and future that were once closed"), in an interview on BBC1's, *The One Show* and in her *Book of Gutsy Women*: "When I had the opportunity to sit down with her on a visit to London in 2017, I refrained from reading back at her every line that had resonated with me, since we would have been there all day." [E2]; and it was cited in the UK

parliament to support reform of the “pairing” system, and in the Scottish parliament in support of women’s rights [E3].

Beard herself has presented the book’s themes at numerous events organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, prompting the rethinking of gender in the diplomatic service – including the annual leadership conference for all UK ambassadors in 2019, and events at UK embassies in Paris, Rabat and Rome. In 2018 Permanent Under-Secretary, Simon McDonald, acknowledged Beard’s inspiration in devising the FCO’s wall of mirrors representing senior positions never held by women [E4, E5]. She has also inspired constructive re-examination of women’s public voice by speaking at political events: the Festival of Politics in the Scottish Parliament (2018), the International Congress of Women’s Parliamentary Caucuses (Dublin, 2018); the Italian House of Representatives (2017) and the European Commission’s Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights. In 2020 she led a discussion based on *Women and Power* at the World Economic Forum at Davos. Outside politics, she has brought these ideas into a business context, addressing the ‘Flagship Seminar’ of the Bank of England and, with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Google Zeitgeist annual forum for senior Google executives [E6].

SPQR has also played a significant part in public debate, putting ancient history back at its centre. At another event at Davos 2020, with a group of world business leaders, Beard discussed the role of ancient history in modern politics, and *SPQR* has informed political commentary in the USA, by liberals and conservatives alike (e.g., a major article in the Washington Post questioning the parallels between the fall of Rome and the possible fall of the US, and articles on topics ranging from Google’s empire to the US Supreme Court [E7]. In 2016 Beard debated the “virtues” of ancient Greece and Rome with Boris Johnson, putting antiquity at the heart of political argument (the official YouTube video of this has been watched over 885,000 times) [E7].

(2) Changing lives, assumptions and aspirations

SPQR and *Women and Power* have both figured on prominent lists of best books of the year; *SPQR* was World Economic Forum Book Club’s book of the Month (July 2019). and listed as current reading by Booker Prize Winner, Marlon James (2015), UK Health Minister, then Culture Secretary, Matt Hancock (2018), and CEO of Agence France Presse, Fabrice Fries (2018). *Women and Power* figured in the *Guardian*’s 100 best books of the 21st century and as a “book of the year” internationally from Italy and Germany to Spain and Venezuela ; it was the current reading of Nicola Sturgeon (2018), recommended by Melissa Benn for Theresa May (“I can’t believe someone didn’t slip it into her Christmas stocking”), and underpinned Helen McGrady’s reforms at the National Trust[E8].

Women and Power has played an important part in different initiatives on equality and diversity, in the widest sense. In 2019 it was the book for Indiana University Northwest’s “One Book... One Campus... One Community’ initiative” (“integrated into classroom curricula, and explored on campus and in the community through discussions, film screenings, and other public events”); in 2019 it was given to all (more than 500) first-year students in the Faculties of Arts and Philosophy at Radboud University, Nijmegen (with whom Beard debated) [E9]. But the reach of the book goes further: from Beard’s address to the International “Inspiring Girls” conference in London (2019) [E5], through heritage projects at Hardwick Hall and the National Maritime Museum exploring how the historical voice of women has been heard or silenced (a visitor’s blog post shows that the link was understood) [E9], to attested success in changing individuals’ lives (“I will not allow my thoughts to go unheard. I owe that in large part to you”) in an email from Germany headed “Thank you for giving me my voice back”; “*Women and Power* gave me the strength to fight for State Pension justice” (claimed one tweet) [E10].

(3) Impact on the creative industries

Women and Power informed Juliet Stevenson's West End theatre portrayal of Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, provided fashion designer Edeline Lee's theme for her Autumn/Winter 2019 collection (with quotes from the book played at the catwalk show), and inspired "Crazy, Classic, Life" on Janelle Monáe's 2018 album, Dirty Computer (referencing, in particular, the cultural intolerance of women who "fail") [E11]. These appropriations of *Women and Power* in fashion and rap have provided an even wider and more diverse audience with a classical lens through which to understand and interrogate the contemporary world.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 1 references)

[E1] *Women and Power* sales figures and languages; Transcript of speech given by António Guterres at the 63rd Session of the UN Commission on the status of Women 19.03.2019

[E2] Hillary Clinton evidence: Instagram post 01.10.2019 [link](#); Interview on the One Show 11.11.2019 screenshot [link](#) & interview transcript; Extract from Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chelsea Clinton, *The Book of Gutsy Women* (Simon and Schuster, 2019), p310 (in a chapter on Beard, pp308-310, written by Hillary Clinton)

[E3] Citations in Parliament: House of Commons Hansard, Proxy Voting, 18.07.2018; The Scottish Parliament official report 07.03.2019

[E4] Permanent Under-Secretary at FCO, Simon McDonald on tweets Mirror Challenge; HM ambassadors' reactions to Leadership speech on Twitter

[E5] Letter from HM ambassador to Morocco

[E6] Political Events: Festival of Politics, Scottish Parliament, 13.10.2018; International Congress of Women's Parliamentary Caucuses, Dublin 09-10.09.2018; EU annual colloquium on Fundamental Rights, Brussels, 20.09.2017; Italian House of Representatives, Rome 02.11.2016; World Economic Forum, Davos, 22.10.2020; Bank of England Flagship Seminar, 05.07.2018; Google Zeitgeist Annual forum 21.05.2018

[E7] Ancient history and modern politics: Karabell, the Washington Post, *Stop saying America's problems are like ancient Rome's decline*, 23.09.2019; Taylor, Slate, *Countries don't control the internet. Companies do*, 21.11.2017; Miller, Forbes Magazine, *The Jurisprudence Of Doubt*, 02.07.2018; *Greece vs Rome, with Boris Johnson and Mary Beard* [link](#); The Guardian, *The 100 best books of the 21st century* 21.09.2019

[E8] *SPQR* and *Women and Power* media coverage: World Economic Forum Book Club *Why Rome continues to underpin western culture and politics* 02.07.2019 (p1-2); Espeland, Minneapolis Post, *Marlon James talks about adverbs, his writing habits, and books that matter to him* 04.11.2015 (p4); Financial Times, *Culture Secretary's Culture* 20.03.2018 (p7-9); Novininvite.com; Sofia News Agency, *Interview with Fabrice Fries Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of AFP* 05.10.2018 (p12); International books of the year examples (p47-49); The Guardian *The 100 best books of the 21st century* 16.10.2020 (p28-29); The Scotsman, *Nicola Sturgeon: I would spend my days hiding under the table reading* 16.09.2018 (p54); Benn, The Guardian, *Justine Greening's departure is bad news for anyone who cares about education* (p60); Aslet, The Times, *Hilary McGrady: This woman wants to breathe life into the National Trust* 30.04.2018 ([p61-64](#)); University of Oxford podcast, *Women and Power: The Women who Shaped the National Trust* – keynote by Hilary McGrady, Director-General, National Trust 07.03.2018 [link](#)

[E9] *Women and Power* in heritage and inclusion initiatives; Indiana University Northwest news, *IU Northwest selects 'Women and Power' for this year's campus-wide reading initiative* 29.08.2018; Radboud University cross Faculty First Year discussion, on *Women and Power*; Hardwick Hall Exhibition 'We Are Bess'; National Maritime Museum: 'Faces of A Queen' exhibition, on the Armada Portraits of Elizabeth I, online video [link](#)

[E10] Selected email and Twitter responses to *Women and Power*

[E11] Creative responses to *Women and Power*. Butter, Evening Standard, *Juliet Stevenson on playing two queens, feeling intimidated by directors and supporting refugees* 06.03.2018 [link](#); screenshot of catwalk show 18.02.2019 video [link](#) and youtube video with description [link](#); testimonial email from fashion designer; R.D, The Economist *Janelle Monáe's "Dirty Computer" is protest music done right* 01.05.2018 [link](#); Michael love Michael, Paper, *The 5 Most Life-Affirming Moments Of Janelle Monae's 'Dirty Computer'* 27.04.2018 [link](#).