

## Professor Freddy Decreus: From Classical Antiquity to Postmodernism, and Beyond

This volume presents a series of papers which cover the general theme of the reception of antiquity, a topic which has in recent years become a discipline in itself, or what some might call a 'cross-discipline'. Indeed the *Nachleben* of the (culture of) classical antiquity, and of antiquity as a whole, manifests in a number of diverse domains, opening up the field of reception studies to scholars from disciplines other than Classics. This collection of papers illustrates this diversity, uniting as it does original research by scholars from a variety of disciplines: classicists, historians, theatre historians, architectural historians, psychologists, archaeologists, artists, and more, all of whom have treated some aspect of the so-called 'classical tradition' by means of their own individual approaches, leading to a volume rich and dense in themes, and methodologies.

*Receptions of Antiquity* has been written by friends of Freddy Decreus, in honour of his career, and in celebration of his thought. It is their creation, but reflects the spirit in which Freddy, the one for whom the book has been conceived, always operates: one of open, critical, self-conscious but at the same time highly auto-critical, free, non-dogmatic, and above all incessantly renewing curiosity. May this spirit live on in Freddy's own continuing quest for meaningfulness, and in those whom he has inspired.

Before inviting some of Freddy's closest friends to take the stage, we provide a short biography, which will be complemented, on pages 11-32, by Freddy's impressive bibliographical record.

Trained as a classical philologist (1967-1971), Freddy Maurice Oscar Decreus commenced his career at Ghent University in 1976. His doctoral dissertation dealt with the use of structural and semiotic theories (1983). Later on, he further developed his thought on epistemological and methodological notions about Classics as a discipline and a culture. His findings are well known to all who followed his Literature and Mythology courses at Ghent University: he became the quintessential example of a scholar who integrated his own, original research directly into his teaching, as it were 'putting it to the test' in real-time.

Over the years, Freddy Decreus has taught a series of courses in Latin Literature, Literary Theory, Mythology, Comparative Literature and Theatre History (especially Ritual Theatre). He acted as the primary catalyst for the

opening up of the Department of Latin and Greek to other disciplines and methodologies, which led, under his presidency, to an impressive increase in student enrolments. In this sense, it can rightfully be argued that Freddy Decreus effectively guided Ghent University's Classics Department into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, he also was involved in the Teacher Training Department for the pedagogical and didactic training of (future) classicists (Latin/Greek), making his work of great value for the teaching of Latin and Greek in the secondary school system. To this it can be added that he organized many training sessions and colloquia for teachers in Belgium, as well as the fact that he was invited to participate in international teacher training projects at the universities of Lisbon, Amsterdam, Oxford, Nicosia, Athens, Leiden, Salamanca, London, and at other institutions.

His publications in the field of Latin Literature focused primarily on the tragedies of Seneca and the poetry of Catullus, whereas he has also published widely on the reception of classical antiquity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, touching on topics such as feminism, postmodernist painting, and literature. On an organizational level, he also was a member of the Belgian Fund for Scientific Research for many years (Dutch-speaking affiliation or 'F.W.O.-Vlaanderen' and French-speaking affiliation or 'Fonds (National) de la Recherche Scientifique'). Until the end of his career at Ghent University, Freddy Decreus promoted research being undertaken by young, aspirant, scholars, making possible a series of doctorates and publications. His last scientific research programme was the application of the theories of Jacques Lacan to the study of Greek mythology (focusing largely on Hans Blumenberg). His most recent publications deal with Ritual theatre (2009), Mythology (2009), the Reception of Classics (2010), and the influence of post-structuralism on Classics (articles and courses on Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari).

In the field of Theatrical Studies, Freddy also organized, apart from the courses he taught in Ghent, Master Classes in collaboration with colleagues from Frankfurt, Amsterdam, Athens, and Oxford. As the Belgian representative of the European Network of Research and Documentation of Performances of Ancient Greek Drama, he was invited on a yearly basis as a lecturer at the Intensive Course (Summer school) in Epidauros. In addition, he participated at nine of the ten Symposia organized by the Cyprus Centre of the International Theatre Institute, and functioned as a lecturer at the Summer schools on Ancient Drama in Nicosia/Droushia/Polis/Limassol.

After his retirement in October 2010, Freddy and Gina founded a school in the Canary Islands (Therapy, Mythology and Film).

In conclusion, the editor would like to extend his gratitude to each individual author, and above all express his profound indebtedness to, and affection for, Freddy Decreus, as an outstanding scholar and as a remarkable human being. The testimonial of two of Freddy's closest friends, Luk Van den Dries and Nicos Shiafkalis, serves as a fitting ending to these brief introductory remarks.

Luk Van den Dries:

„Mit diesem Buch verabschieden wir uns von Freddy. Wir würdigen ihn als einen alles andere als ‚klassischen‘ Klassischen Philologen. Freddy war in vielerlei Hinsicht ein außergewöhnlicher Akademiker. Er entsprach nämlich überhaupt nicht dem stereotypen Bild des zurückgezogenen Schreibtischwissenschaftlers, der sich aus akademischer Distanz dem Forschungsgegenstand nähert. Freddys Tätigkeit war ganz und gar in der Praxis angesiedelt: Er genoss den direkten Kontakt zum Material, er liebte den organischen Austausch von Kenntnis und Erfahrung. Aus diesem Grund mag es sich nicht verwundern, dass er sich durch eine solche stetige Begeisterung für die Bühne auszeichnete, den Ort, wo der Text einen Körper und eine Stimme bekommt, wo Leidenschaften aufeinander treffen, wo geweint und gelacht wird. Die klassischen Werke untersuchte Freddy am liebsten aus einem heutigen Blickwinkel, indem er sich die Frage nach ihrer Relevanz für ein aktuelles Publikum stellte. Die Aufführungen wollte er in unmittelbarer Nähe erleben: Er tauschte sich ständig mit den Theatermachern aus, die ihn als flamboyanten Gesprächspartner sehr schätzten. Freddys profunde Theaterkenntnis war in hohem Maße von diesen intensiven Kontakten geprägt - ein einziges Mal kam diese Prägung sogar in der künstlerischen Zusammenarbeit mit Wayn Traub zum Ausdruck. Freddy war ein Akademiker, der seine Klassiker kannte, diese aber stets in Verbindung mit künstlerischer Reflexion zu setzen wusste. Diese Reflexion wurde genährt durch den permanenten Dialog mit der Inszenierungspraxis und eine Schatzkammer an Referenzen auf Theaterstücke, denen er selbst beigewohnt hatte. Freddy war für mich jahrelang mein Weggenosse in der unaufhörlichen Suche nach einem sinnvollen und künstlerisch relevanten Theater für die Gegenwart. Wie keinem anderen lag ihm das Theater am Herzen. Aus reiner Liebe nahm er darum auch die Misserfolge und die fehlgeschlagenen Versuche in Kauf. Aber wenn ihn während einer Aufführung etwas traf, konnte er einem so begeistert darüber reden, dass man sich tagelang daran erinnerte. Diese Begeisterung ein ganzes Leben bewahren zu können, ist eine große Kunst.

Dass sich darüber hinaus zu dieser Begeisterung eine tiefgründige Einsicht in die Wirkung der klassischen Werke gesellte, ist eine Gabe, die ihn einzigartig machte. In seiner Leidenschaftlichkeit war Freddy ein großer Fürsprecher des Theaters. Er war eine Persönlichkeit, die in bestimmten Fragen -vor wie hinter den Kulissen- den Weg in die richtige Richtung zu weisen vermochte. Im Hinblick auf meine Interessensgebiete handelte es sich dabei an erster Stelle um das flämische Theater und die Theaterwissenschaft. In beiden Bereichen war Freddy immer ein wichtiger Verbündeter, und dies immer aus einer großen Selbstverständlichkeit heraus: die Selbstverständlichkeit des Herzens am richtigen Fleck. Nur selten hat man das Vergnügen, einem so herzlichen Menschen begegnen zu dürfen. Freddy war, ist und wird immer sein, um dieses Wort jetzt zum dritten Mal zu benutzen: ein Mann nach meinem Herzen. Luk Van den Dries.“

Nicos Shiafkalis:

“MY FRIEND Prof. FREDDY DECREUS. As a theatre practitioner I am mainly interested in the staging of ancient Greek drama. Back in my days of youth, I was as a director; rather adamant and conservative in my views, I considered scholars and philologists as parasites of theatre, but as the years went by and I matured, I became more flexible and prepared to discuss different opinions. Back in the year 1992, the Cyprus Centre of International Theatre Institute held the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Ancient Greek Drama, the topic of which was ‘The philologist and the director - decoding the directions of the texts’. Prof. Decreus was one of the key speakers. His paper was entitled ‘Authenticity and the war against clichés in staging classical tragedy’. Prof. Oliver Taplin also attended, and presented a paper entitled ‘Interplay between scholar and director’. He suggested that the director should co-operate with a friendly scholar in order to be able to interpret the play according to the intentions of the playwright. And that is why I became a friend to Freddy. Because of this friendship I became aware of how little I knew. His amazing knowledge of the reception of ancient Greek drama in both the scholarly and the artistic field throughout all historical periods, in both East and West, made me think twice. He was able to discuss all the important interpretations of ancient Greek drama on the Western stage, and not only there. For nineteen years now, every year, Freddy honours the International Summer Institute For Ancient Greek Drama, lecturing to students for an entire week, analyzing famous productions of ancient drama from all over the

J. NELIS: PROFESSOR FREDDY DECREUS

world, giving a detailed account of the reception of tragedy in all continents and all periods. He focuses on classical tragedy, mythology, postmodernism, feminism and classics. The great value of Freddy's lectures lies in the fact that he accompanies them with projections of slides and DVDs on which he comments, leading elaborate discussions with the students, in a friendly atmosphere, adopting a pedagogical methodology. This practise makes him very popular. He even interacts with students during the intervals, discussing their views, as it were, 'on equal terms'. It is a great joy for me to sit with Freddy and Gina, in the evening, on the veranda of the hotel, or at the village tavern, sipping ouzo and chatting not only about tragedy and the classics, but also about the gods, the philosophers, the ways of life, nature and humanity. Considered to be one of the leading scholars in Europe, my dear friend Freddy is a very modest and humane person, making friendly conversation with students, waiters at the hotel, cooks and the simple people at the village coffee house. Discussing subjects on which he is an authority, he never assumes a superior attitude, but he always expresses his view by saying 'I think...', which is a sign of wisdom. It is a great honour for me to be considered his friend. Nicos Shiafkalis."

Jan Nelis  
(Ghent University/F.W.O.-Vlaanderen)