

CA Prize-winner 2019: Mai Musié



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The 2019 Classical Association Prize was awarded to Dr Mai Musié, Knowledge Exchange Project Officer at the University of Oxford, who has dedicated over ten years to outreach and public engagement initiatives in Classics and is an energetic activist committed to breaking down barriers of all kinds.

Born in Eritrea and moving to the UK as a child, Mai describes her pathway to Classics as ‘almost accidental’. With no opportunity to study the subject at school, the seeds of interest were nevertheless sewn early on in after-school trips to the library where she soaked up reading about creation myths. Later, in her sixth form college, inspiration came from a more unexpected place – Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* – where the chance discovery of her full Eritrean name kindled a desire to discover more about the history of her own cultural background. This was cemented by a college excursion to Greece, which finally encouraged her to make the last-minute decision to switch from studying Law to studying Classical Civilisation at Swansea University. She went on to complete her MA in Swansea, followed by a PhD on the Representation of Persians in the Ancient Novel under the supervision of Professor John Morgan.

After Swansea, where she had become heavily involved in outreach work, she was appointed as Outreach Officer for the Faculty of Classics at Oxford. There she was involved in the organisation and co-ordination of numerous projects, working with schools and colleges to raise the profile of Classics.

Mai was one of the co-founders of the Classics in Communities Project – a joint venture between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the Iris Project – which sought to promote and encourage the teaching of Latin and Ancient Greek at primary and secondary level in UK state schools. One of the outcomes of this project has been the volume *Forward with Classics*, which Mai co-edited with Arlene Holmes-Henderson and Steven Hunt. This pioneering and urgent collection of essays explores the teaching of Classics beyond the classroom – from parks to prisons – and the priorities for the future of Classics education.

In her current role, Mai has continued to think in innovative ways about how to break down barriers and how to help others to do so, including a current project to introduce Ethiopian and Eritrean communities to the medieval Ge'ez manuscripts held in the Bodleian Library. Passionate about increasing access to Classics, particularly for marginalised groups, she has also recently been appointed as a Trustee of the charity Classics for All.

After receiving the prize, Mai said: 'I am stunned and delighted to have received the Classical Association prize! Winning this award has meant so much to me. The award recognises and acknowledges all the hard work that goes into making Classics truly accessible to all. In this, I share the prize with so many people and organisations who work tirelessly in achieving that aim. Thank you to the Classical Association for continuing to support our vision of opening the wonders of the ancient world to the wider public.'

*Dr Sharon Marshall (University of Exeter)
CA Outreach Officer 2017-2020*