

## **Farewell Speech for Prof. Monika Asztalos · Tuesday 12 March 2019**

Dear Monika, dear colleagues and friends,

In my modest capacity as Head of Subject in Classics, I would like to say a few words on the occasion of the farewell of our dear colleague Monika Asztalos.

Monika came to the University of Oslo as a Professor of Latin in 2003, after having held several positions at different places in Sweden, and after also having spent some time in the US. Monika has thus been a member of our Department for sixteen years, and in what follows I would like to follow some of the countless traces she has left during that time.

When Monika joined the Classics team in Oslo in 2003 (which was long before my own time here), she brought with her a research project for which she had received funding by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. The project was entitled “A New Horace”. The title of this project sums up quite nicely (I think) much of Monika as a researcher (and also as a person). “A New Horace” – that sounds, in a nutshell, both modest and ambitious: modest in the sense that it does not indulge in the trend of using long-winded, verbose and trendy jargon, but instead simply and straightforwardly states what it is about. On the other hand, it sounds also, as said, very ambitious, for, the project promises, after all, nothing more than a renewal of one of the most important, and most challenging, authors from classical antiquity. And indeed, ambitious it was: the project was carried out over several years (it is now finished), in collaboration with several colleagues, amongst which was Professor Emeritus Egil Kraggerud, as well as several PhD students, amongst which Tor Ivar Østmoe, who successfully wrote and finished his PhD thesis in this context. The result of this long-time enterprise was nothing less than a comprehensive online databasa of 7500 conjectures on the complete works of Horace: basically, all conjectures that were ever proposed in printed works from the Early Modern Period to this day. The online database presents each single conjecture with its own entry, and the user can find full information and references to publications in which scholars from several centuries have proposed their own conjectures or discussed others’. Everyone who has ever worked on textual criticism knows how incredibly troublesome it can be to decipher a critical apparatus in a textual edition, and, even worse, how hard it often is to actually trace conjectures mentioned in a textual apparatus to their origin. Therefore it is by no means exaggerated to say that Monika’s Horace project was truly groundbreaking and that it has put research on Horace on a completely new basis for the decades and centuries to come – and that it has also set a general model of how to handle and present textual criticism in the future.

As I said, I think the nature of this project encapsulates nicely much of Monika as a researcher and as a person. Textual criticism is at the heart of Monika’s research, high ambition is her goal, unrelenting thoroughness and perseverance is her permanent

companion – and kindness and modesty is her nature. And, those who think that perhaps textual criticism was old-fashioned and arid and no longer relevant to the study of Classics, have probably just never been to a lecture or seminar with Monika. Textual criticism as Monika pursues it is vivid, to-the-point, anything but boring, creative yet not speculative, and it is never a goal in itself, but it is always directed at the understanding of the text and its context.

However, Monika's research has of course not been limited to Horace and textual criticism. Another long-lasting research project which she still is pursuing is that of a new forthcoming critical edition of Boethius's Commentary on Aristotle's Categories. Monika has also worked and published on other authors, such as (for example) Catullus and Apuleius; and in addition to this, she has of course also, equally importantly, made a priceless effort over many years in her role as a supervisor and a teacher. If you talk (randomly) to any (former or present) student of Monika, they will always say the same about her: that Monika is a most dedicated teacher, a professor who takes her teaching equally seriously as her research, a teacher who truly imbeds research into teaching – a teacher who has been practicing “research-based teaching and learning” for many years, long before the term became a slogan in higher education. Why so? Simply because Monika does not need a fancy term and an elaborate pedagogical concept in order to do the right thing – she just does it.

Last, not least, the way Monika pursues textual criticism is (I think) also typical of her as a person. For example, when you are in a meeting with Monika, she would never be the person who just talks for the sake of talking; rather, Monika would often just follow the discussion silently, and when everybody has spoken, she would finally raise her hand, and perhaps still hesitate for a moment, but then she would come forward with an idea or a suggestion of her own, and what she says would then often give a completely new turn to the discussion, and everybody wonders: why did *we* not come up with the same idea or solution before? Perhaps just because not everybody has the patience and the precision of Monika...

I think I speak for us all when I say that we are all very sorry and sad that you are leaving us, Monika! It has been a great pleasure to have you as a colleague, and you have been a true enrichment to the Classics team – and to the entire Department. Fortunately, though, we are not going to lose you altogether for the time being. You are still supervising a PhD student and therefore you are going to visit us approximately once a month for the time to come. In fact, there are at least *two* good reasons why you have to visit IFIKK on a monthly basis: one is, as said, your supervision; the other one is the cat calendar in my office – for, Monika and I share a profound love for cats, and Monika has developed a habit of passing by my office at the beginning of each month in order to check out the new cat on my calendar: a habit that you will, I hope, keep for a little while!

Silvio Bär, 12.03.2019