

Conclusion

Literary modernism developed on the ‘Celtic fringe’ in the early twentieth century at the same time as revivals of self-declared Celtic civilizations were underway and as the character of British and Irish classical education was also evolving in drastic fashion.¹ As such, classical reception was transformed in this period, in conjunction with – and in reaction to – nationalist narratives of rebirth. As classical learning slowly became dislodged from a central role in marking a sense of civic entitlement for the British Empire’s elite, formal knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity saw its wider cultural prestige diminish, leaving receptions of antiquity open to new forms of social, political and aesthetic reconfiguration. Hannah Arendt once observed that the “end of a tradition does not necessarily mean that traditional concepts have lost their power over the minds of men”: the “full coercive force” of such “concepts” might be unleashed, she wrote, “only after its end has come” when the “well-worn notions and categories” of a tradition could become perhaps “more tyrannical as the tradition loses its living force and as the memory of its beginning recedes.”² As classics and the institutions that governed its transmission gradually lost something of their living authority, the “well-worn notions and categories” of classical knowledge did indeed become more coercive: the range of possible receptions was widened, and the notion of the ‘classical’ became a far more pliable but volatile phenomenon. In this context of dislocation and recovery – a moment of “particularly intense hybridization” to borrow from Peter Burke’s analysis in *Cultural Hybridity* – a variety of new, eccentric stylizations of classics also emerged.³ Poets, artists, political extremists and

¹ On the ‘Celtic fringe,’ see Gikandi (1996) 29 and O’Connor (2006). See Introduction, pp. 3–5, especially n23.

² Arendt (2006) 25–26.

³ Burke (2009) 66.

social controversialists offered radical attempts to revive or reinvent the cultural credibility of antiquity. Greek and Roman antiquity thus remained a vital and compelling force in both Anglophone politics and in the literature of the period, its “more tyrannical” appeal driving fresh, unconventional ways of engaging the ancients to new, experimental heights.

In 1925, in a piece she composed for *The Common Reader*, Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) observed this tyranny at work, noting in her essay “On Not Knowing Greek” how powerful yet enigmatic the place of ancient Greek had become. Although Woolf had spent some of her youth, as Quentin Bell (1910–96) noted, “fairly active learning both Greek and Latin,” it then seemed “vain and foolish” to still “talk of knowing Greek, since in our ignorance we should be at the bottom of any class of school-boys.”⁴ Greek had been “taught her by Miss Clara Pater, the sister of Walter Pater” and then by the Cambridge-educated suffragette Janet Elizabeth Case (1863–1937), but by 1925 Woolf felt her ‘schoolboy’ drills had done little to teach the true nature of the language.⁵ However lamentable that was, she thought, too few scholars had addressed the deeper reality of classics’ present position in European culture – namely, the “tremendous breach of tradition” – the “very real and very great” difficulties at play in struggling to ‘know’ the ancients.⁶ “To our thinking the difficulty of Greek is not sufficiently dwelt upon,” she observed, “chiefly perhaps because the sirens who lure us to these perilous waters are generally scholars of European reputation.”⁷ Haunted perhaps by her tutor’s work in translating *Prometheus Bound* – Janet Case’s efforts to “grope after Aeschylus’ meaning in the uncertain light of what is left of the Trilogy” – Woolf insisted that forms of error and ignorance held all claims to knowing Greek under their sway.⁸ No scholarly approach could lift the veil from the ancients, for the “few hundred years” that separated

⁴ Bell (1972) 68. Virginia Woolf, “On Not Knowing Greek,” in Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 38.

⁵ Bell (1972) 68.

⁶ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 38. Virginia Woolf, “The Perfect Language,” in Woolf *EVW2* (1987) 115.

⁷ Woolf *EVW2* (1987) 115. On Woolf’s sometimes dismissive attitude towards classical scholarship, and its effects on her knowledge of Greek, see Prins (2017) 38–45.

⁸ Case (1905) 7. In the introduction to her translation, Case argued that the “attitude of Aeschylus” in *Prometheus* could not be deciphered. The “loss of the *Prometheus Unbound* leaves us sadly in the dark.” Particularly difficult to discern were the “conflicting and often degrading conceptions” of Zeus. Against the “old crude Zeus” which Aeschylus had inherited from the “early myths” was set a “more spiritual conception of deity ... much in common with the monotheism of the Hebrew prophets” found in his other dramatic work. In composing *Prometheus*, however, “Aeschylus,” she surmised, “had here such savage old tales to deal with that not even his genius could wholly purge them of their grosser elements, and he was confronted by the stubborn task of

“John Paston from Plato, Norwich from Athens,” had made “a chasm which the vast tide of European chatter can never succeed in crossing.”⁹ Greek literature thus appeared written “in the shadow,” “just on the far side of language” where ambiguity clouded “exactly what it means.”¹⁰

But again (the question comes back and back), Are we reading Greek as it was written when we say this? When we read these few words cut on a tombstone, a stanza in a chorus, the end or the opening of a dialogue of Plato’s, a fragment of Sappho, when we bruise our minds upon some tremendous metaphor in the *Agamemnon* instead of stripping the branch of its flowers instantly as we do in reading *Lear* – are we not reading wrongly? losing our sharp sight in the haze of associations? reading into Greek poetry not what they have but what we lack?¹¹

As Woolf saw it, the “whole of Greece” still lay heaped behind every line, every word of Greek literature, yet claims to understand that heap required a “dangerous leap through the air.”¹² “When we read Chaucer,” she explained, “we are floated up to him insensibly on the current of our ancestors’ lives, and later, as records increase and memories lengthen, there is scarcely a figure which has not its nimbus of association, its life and letters, its wife and family, its house, its character, its happy or dismal catastrophe.”¹³ By contrast, few such associations could be easily drawn out for Greek literature. Yet it was because the Greeks had left only “their poetry, and that is all” that the imagination was nonetheless compelled to “fashion itself surroundings,” to import new details with which to stamp the more impersonal nature of Greek.¹⁴ “[S]ome background, even of the most provisional sort” had to be drawn from elsewhere even when such backgrounds could result in further “sources of misunderstanding, of distorted and romantic, of servile and snobbish passion.”¹⁵

grafting his own more spiritual conception on the rugged stock of early myth.” Shelley understood that stubborn task and took note of Aeschylus’ failure to fully moralize Zeus in *Prometheus* “making good spring from the seeming cruelty.” Recognizing the “impossibility of reconciliation between Prometheus and the malevolent Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound*,” the English poet “abandoned Aeschylus in his own *Prometheus Unbound*” and gave “his own solution of the difficulty by recasting the *dénoûement*,” overwriting an absent original with “certain arbitrary discretion.” See Case (1905) 8, 13, 8, 11–12, 11, 8 as well as Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Author’s Preface,” in Shelley (2002). On Woolf’s efforts to translate *Agamemnon*, see Prins (2017) 35–56.

⁹ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39.

¹⁰ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39, 50, 45.

¹¹ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 48.

¹² Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 48, 44.

¹³ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39.

¹⁴ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39.

¹⁵ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39, 49–50.

With the best will in the world the translators are bound to stamp their individuality or that of their age upon the text. Our minds are so full of echoes that a single word such as 'aweariness' will flood a whole page for an English reader with the wrong associations. And such is the power of the Greek language that to know even a little of it is to know that there is nothing more beautiful in the world.¹⁶

These difficulties, though, were not unique to the 'amateur' experience of Greek, she thought, but evidence rather of an all too human compulsion to 'fill in' the apparent emptiness of ambiguity, of 'not knowing'. Seduced by the classical, one might invent from variously "incongruous odds and ends" an "all the more strange" vision of the ancients, which, though forged in ignorance or in partial knowledge, could be passed off as bearing "slight resemblance to the real meaning of Greek."¹⁷ "Back and back," she declared, "we are drawn to steep ourselves in what, perhaps, is only an image of the reality, not the reality itself, a summer's day imagined in the heart of a northern winter."¹⁸

By questioning the possibility of an authentic translation 'matching the original', Woolf presented Greek as a volatile linguistic enigma whose sheer difficulty invited one to stamp the classical with the contemporary, to re-embed or reorganize the ancient along a wide spectrum of current knowledge and ignorance. Thus to translate, allude, adapt or appropriate aspects of antiquity was not to transfer something stable into the present but rather to work openly in an "ethically charged and politically engaged act of interpretation," one in which a profound sense of "linguistic estrangement" provoked a fusion, a fluid hybridization of the past and present.¹⁹ Woolf's remarks – what Nancy Worman has called a "feminist critique of imperial adventuring" and "triumphalist Hellenism" – glimpse suggestively at a growing pattern at work in the receptions then given to classical learning.²⁰ As classics' authority diminished among elite institutional communities, it remained subject to "continual processes of recontextualization, of recombination in the widest variety of forms of politics, religion, and social life."²¹ With respect to literature, these processes often hybridized or set classics more expressly in a comparative relation to modern vernacular literatures, sometimes in ways that advanced the

¹⁶ Woolf *EVW2* (1987) 118.

¹⁷ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 38, 39.

¹⁸ Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 48.

¹⁹ Venuti (2019) 40. Prins (2017) 37.

²⁰ Worman (2019) 5.

²¹ Haynes (2019b) 6.

political, social, economic and aesthetic interests of some ‘Englishness’, and at other times in ways that resisted the dominance then being ceded to or encoded in English as a language, literature and institutional power. Thus growing *avant-garde* interest in antiquity during this period was bred in oscillation, caught between forces or “traditions of appropriation” and those of “resistance” as well.²² For nearly a century prior, a reputedly authentic knowledge of Latin and Greek (or at least instruction in them) had played a relatively secure role in Victorian society. The growth and professionalization of university instruction in classics had been linked to the “expanding bourgeois demand for an education which would make gentlemen of their sons” and thus help legitimize the emerging commercial classes.²³ Classical education thus became, for a time, a critical mechanism in settling the broader cultural processes of “distinction and social exclusion,” learning Greek and Latin being essential to anchoring a sense of “self-recognition and social closure” among an “assimilated noble-bourgeois élite.”²⁴ However, as the century drew to a close, the “linguistic hierarchy of Greek, Latin, and English” that had been a marked feature of British social stratification began to break down, leaving classics’ ability to resolve questions of “social incorporation and enfranchisement” in a more volatile state.²⁵ “The contest,” Stray observes, “between an aristocratic ideology of indeterminacy (grace and mysterious style) and bourgeois ideology of determinacy (the following of explicit rules)” had long been enacted in Victorian society through “the differential status and definition of Greek and Latin.”²⁶

The bourgeois groups who completed the social ascent to gentlemanly status may have seen Greek learning as something above them; Latin, however, formed the material for their maintenance of barriers against their aspirant inferiors ... the centre of gravity of such exclusionary practices moved down the social scale, paralleled by a gradual shift from the predominance of Greek to that of Latin.²⁷

Yet as educational practices and university curricula evolved, the “centre of gravity” moved further still, shifting the social ladder and resetting the significance of antiquity primarily in terms of its relationship with the

²² Burke (2009) 67.

²³ Stray (1998) 21.

²⁴ Stray (1998) 29.

²⁵ Stray (1998) 32.

²⁶ Stray (1998) 32.

²⁷ Stray (1998) 32.

dominant national vernacular: English.²⁸ In this context calls for formalized ways of studying of English letters first became louder at British and Irish universities, there being something “national and classical in the genius of English literature.”²⁹

By the mid-1880s, as universities took on a central role in determining what the critic John Churton Collins (1848–1908) called “the organization and control of a system of advanced popular education,” it was thought that the “genius of the Schools” had to be brought into “harmony with the genius of national life.”³⁰ No longer would mere adherence to “the local interests of specialism and Philology” suffice: institutions of higher education had to cultivate what Robert Bulwer-Lytton (1831–91) called “the preservation of what is national and classical in the genius of English literature.”³¹ Yet, even as the push to ‘classicize’ the vernacular grew stronger, fear abounded too. Would this “specious but perilous gift” only “disturb or weaken the existing classical system”?³² “The study of the classics,” wrote Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert (Earl of Carnarvon),

– the most useless if inaccurate – is, if exact, the best instrument for forming the mind; it has stood the test of “infinite time,” and it has been immemorably honoured in the University. Further, it is not too much to say that a real understanding of English literature is impossible without a knowledge of at least Latin. For these reasons it seems to me that a further reduction of classical instruction in the supposed interests of English literature would be only a melancholy delusion, and a fresh and mischievous tribute to the “smattering” tendencies of modern education.³³

Calls for the study of English were often predicated explicitly on connecting modern literature with the Greek and the Roman. Matthew Arnold notably insisted that “the great works of English literature” could be “taken in conjunction with those of Greek and Latin literature in the

²⁸ Stray (1998) 32.

²⁹ Collins (1891) 115.

³⁰ Collins (1891) 149. George Goschen (1831–1907), president of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching, noted in 1887 that there was “no subject in which there is greater demand for courses of Lectures than English Literature,” even though many universities across the United Kingdom had yet to take serious steps to meet this need. Goschen (1887) 381. On the “extramural” nature of early study in English literature, see Lawrie (2014). For a series of primary source materials on English studies in Victorian Britain, see Bacon (1998).

³¹ As quoted in “Petition Addressed to Hebdomal Council for the Foundation of a School of Modern Literature,” *Quarterly Review* 164.327 (January 1887) 256, as cited in Collins (1891) 115.

³² “English at the Universities – III, Letters from Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone, and the Earl of Carnarvon,” *Pall Mall Budget* 34.949 (December 2, 1886) 8.

³³ “English at the Universities – III, Letters from Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone, and the Earl of Carnarvon,” *Pall Mall Budget* 34.949 (December 2, 1886) 8.

final examination for *Literae Humaniores*.³⁴ However, anything less than teaching English with the ancients in clear sight would be, as William Gladstone also suggested, “injurious to the interests of education.”³⁵ Conversely, for others, formalizing English literary studies was seen as a means to wholly renew the classical system, to give “more life and reality to the method of studying Greek and Latin authors.”³⁶ “[T]here can be no doubt,” observed Collins, “that they would greatly gain in interest and educational value if their relations to Modern Literature were made more generally intelligible.”³⁷ Nevertheless, Oxford and Cambridge both remained slow to bring the study of modern English literature into their curricula, for, as D. J. Palmer noted, it was “one matter to illustrate the debt of English literature to the Classics, and therefore to expect a student of English to know something of Greek and Latin literature, but quite another matter to design a school on the basis of such a relationship.”³⁸ However, the reluctance of these prestigious institutions did not deter other provincial colleges and universities from sanctioning English as a form of “broad cultural education” in “the spirit of Classics.”³⁹ Used

³⁴ Matthew Arnold, as in Collins (1891) 107–8. See also Arnold (1910) and Arnold (1977) 500–1.

³⁵ English at the Universities – III, Letters from Mr. Bright, Mr. Gladstone, and the Earl of Carnarvon,” *Pall Mall Budget* 34,949 (December 2, 1886) 8. It was to be taken for granted, William Walter Merry (1835–1918), rector of Lincoln College, wrote in 1886, that the subject “be taught in connection with the Greek and Latin classics. It seems to me the only scholarly method of such a study. A knowledge of the classics may not indeed be necessary to the ordinary reader for the appreciation and enjoyment of English literature, but it is quite indispensable to the student of English literary history. Without such a knowledge much of the matter and form of our literature can have no intelligible meaning.” As quoted in Collins (1891) 104.

³⁶ Merry, as in Collins (1891) 104.

³⁷ Collins (1891) 104–5.

³⁸ Palmer (1965) 85. Since the University Commission of 1877, Oxford and Cambridge had in fact been slowly adapting their curricula to meet growing interest in English studies. At first, though, it was the scientific study of English Philology that was stressed, not the humanist examination of literature. Oxford conferred some legitimacy on the academic study of English in 1885, naming a specialist in Germanic languages, Arthur Sampson Napier (1853–1916), as the first Merton Professor of English Language and Literature. Napier’s approach, however, remained mostly philological (notably to John Churton Collins’ displeasure – he vowed to free English literature “from its present degrading vassalage to Philology”). It would not be until 1904 when Sir Walter Raleigh (1861–1922) took up the newly established Chair of English Literature at Oxford that its study moved beyond largely philological considerations to include the study of literature in its “wide acquaintance with human life and human passion.” At Cambridge, English with a heavy philological emphasis was likewise admitted for study in 1878 under the umbrella of the medieval and modern languages tripos. However, it was not until 1917 that a Cambridge University report recommended that the modern languages tripos be separated and an independent English literature tripos be created. Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863–1944), then holder of the King Edward VII Chair of English Literature, warmly supported it. See Collins (1891) 4; Walter Raleigh, *Shakespeare* (1907) 3, as in Palmer (1965) 124.

³⁹ Palmer (1965) 79.

to forge greater “agreement on fundamental social goals” – perhaps even to impose a “sense of spiritual continuity” on the nation – English studies made especially significant inroads in the more geographically ‘peripheral’ areas of the United Kingdom and, eventually, across the empire itself.⁴⁰ As such, it became an “ideal carrier for the propagation of the humanist cultural myth of a well-educated, culturally harmonious nation.”⁴¹ Prominent professors of literature and history in Ireland, Scotland and Wales were some of the first academics to take up its cause. It has been suggested that because their relationship to the core of Englishness was more “ephemeral,” those on the “periphery – the Celtic fringe, and even the emerging lower classes – came to have greater emotional investment in an invented British nationalism than the old aristocratic classes did.”⁴² English literature, with its images of an “old thatched and timbered romantic England,” possessed an appeal that promised not only greater national cohesion but the extension of broad civic privileges beyond the British Isles as well.⁴³ Across the empire devotion to the ‘civilizing’ spirit of its literature motivated many fledgling academics, for just as it was thought that “English cultural history and the internal history of the race” might advance “the privilege of citizenship” on the British Isles, so too was knowledge of England’s literary inheritance increasingly regarded elsewhere as “an intrinsic measure of the progress of ‘civilization’.”⁴⁴ In this way the study of English literature became an imperially minded *via media*, a “class-conscious alternative” between both the reputed rigor and elitism of classics on one hand and the “utilitarianism and the vulgarities of a *declassé* society” on the other.⁴⁵

Advocates of Celtic languages and their revival, however, were often incensed that English literature had been proclaimed an “instrument of great moral and spiritual influence,” and accorded a “special rôle at the centre of the humanities, supplanting the declining Classics.”⁴⁶ Both Matthew Arnold and Henry Morley (1822–94), professor of English

⁴⁰ Court (1992) 14.

⁴¹ Court (1992) 14. See also Eagleton (1996) 23–24, and Palmer (1965) 78.

⁴² Gikandi (1996) 29. See Introduction, pp. 3–5, especially n23. As the Newbolt Report noted, it could be said that “the teaching of academic English began in Scotland and Ireland.” Newbolt Report (1921) 243.

⁴³ Court (1992) 155.

⁴⁴ Court (1992) 132. See, for example, the account of Mungo William MacCallum’s experiences and influence in Wales and Australia, in Dale (2012) 65–77, as well as the analyses of John Nichol’s and David Masson’s careers in Scotland, in Court (1992) 123–41.

⁴⁵ Court (1992) 155.

⁴⁶ Palmer (1965) 169.

Literature at University College London, had tried, throughout the 1860s, to insist on a “union of native races” across Britain and Ireland, on the essential “brotherhood” between “Celts, Gael and Cymry” and the “Teutonic races, or the Anglo-Saxons” – but both nonetheless largely presented Celtic influence as significant so far as it had contributed to the flowering of English literature.⁴⁷ Morley put it squarely in 1867 when he asserted that “without help of the Celts the Anglo-Saxons could not have produced a Shakespeare.”⁴⁸ “[T]he honest, earnest, practical, God-fearing Anglo-Saxon mass,” he argued, “was leavened with the artistic feeling of the Celt,” and “there it was, and only there, that the best energy of a true literature appeared in England, before the establishment of a dominating centre of thought among men gathered from all districts to the capital.”⁴⁹ The presentation of the Celt as indispensable to the apotheosis of the “solid Saxon mind” did not mitigate the Anglophobia that pervaded Irish writing in the 1890s.⁵⁰ As noted, while advocates of the Literary Revival sought to generate new ‘classical’ forms for the country’s vernacular literature(s), the value of English itself and its relationship to Irish literary work was hotly debated. At Trinity College, Dublin, professors Edward Dowden (1843–1913) and J. P. Mahaffy were perhaps the most vociferous agitators for English literary studies, seeing its growth as an extension of the legacy left by Greek and Roman antiquity. Though Mahaffy did bemoan the diminishment of Latin – “the purest, the most grammatical, the most logical idiom which a man could learn” – he nonetheless accepted the “growth of English influence and English speech” as “a matter of certainty” that would ensure the “commercial and political progress of the world.”⁵¹ Bolstering this new “imperial language” across the university would not only help secure greater political consensus on the British Isles but ward off “modern confusion” as well.⁵² “The test point is this,” he declared, “which is made compulsory, the imperial or the local tongue? If the former, we are advancing, if the latter, we are receding, in civilisation.”⁵³ The legacy of Greece and Rome would be best advanced when English attained the position once occupied by Latin – a language to be acquired by all educated classes across Europe.

⁴⁷ Morley (1871) 279, 283. On Morley’s contributions to English studies in the United Kingdom, see Palmer (1965) 50–54 as well as Court (1992) 141–48.

⁴⁸ Morley (1871) 283.

⁴⁹ Morley (1871) 283.

⁵⁰ Solly (1898) 305.

⁵¹ Mahaffy (1896) 782, 791, 784.

⁵² Mahaffy (1896) 784, 788.

⁵³ Mahaffy (1896) 784–85.

It is obvious that the use of one common language in addition to the mother tongue of each people would produce an enormous saving of time, and tend to the nearer and better knowledge of the world's progress among them all. This position of the common language was once attained by Greek, then in a wider sense by Latin, both of which commanded not only the business transactions, but even the literature of the world for some centuries.⁵⁴

Provided that English remained the primary “means of easy and wide communication” in matters “of the courts, of Parliament, of science,” Mahaffy was content to have some “indulgence and consideration” given to some tongues whose existence was thought to reflect “purely national sentiment.”⁵⁵ “[L]et us have poetry and prose in every tongue,” he declared:

let the Scotch heart beat faster to the jargon of Burns, or the Dorsetshire to that of Barnes; let us have the flavour of each nationality, and the perfume of its finest bloom, expressed in myriad tongues; but when we come to international questions, imperial policy, discoveries in science, history, economic and social problems, we should surely insist upon some limitation in the vehicle employed.⁵⁶

Dowden, a staunch Unionist and prominent scholar of Shakespeare, likewise saw English as an essential tool for maintaining national unity and advancing global progress. Eager to see its study elevate the “democratizing of literature” above the “merely utilitarian” and “merely commercial,” Dowden stressed the humane value of English’s “higher spirit,” a spirit whose careful examination could help keep democracy from drifting towards indecency and vulgarity.⁵⁷ Though present forms of democracy were sometimes derided as “devoted to mediocrity” and “intellectual sterility,” “literary research” he thought provided a wide-ranging means to “save the democracy, if possible, from what is unfruitful in its own way of thinking and feeling.”⁵⁸ With an “exact and thorough” approach, its careful study would cultivate a

temper of mind ... fitted to hold in check the rash ardours of the democratic spirit, a temper of mind at once courageous and cautious, strong in serious hopes and free from illusions, faithful to the best traditions of our

⁵⁴ Mahaffy (1896) 795.

⁵⁵ Mahaffy (1896) 784, 785.

⁵⁶ Mahaffy (1896) 785.

⁵⁷ Dowden (1895) 7, 6, 31.

⁵⁸ Dowden (1895) 6, 30, 9.

forefathers and not bound in subjection to them, but rather pressing forward to those high ends towards which they and we together work.⁵⁹

In this way Dowden felt that a “people educated and intellectually alive” might have their past illuminated, their sympathies widened; rather than remain in a “state of half-culture,” a “multitude of readers” could learn how to “meet this half-culture with a culture less incomplete, trained to exact methods of thought and observant of the details of fact.”⁶⁰ Like Mahaffy, he too remained highly skeptical of forming any “separate channels” in British letters, treating those who sought to “cut for the flow” of “several streams of sentiment in literature” with studied distance.⁶¹ Though Dowden had heard of “plaintive demands for an Irish literature with a special character of its own,” of the “enthusiasm with which Welsh bards are listened to at the national Eisteddfods” and even of the “spirit of Scottish patriotism,” he was convinced that political and aesthetic unity could be best maintained in English.⁶² The variety, the “distinctive genius characterising each of the peoples of Scotland, Wales and Ireland,” would be better explored within “the unity of our literature,” a unity that “if twisted together should make up a cord which is both strong and delightfully coloured.”⁶³

Although these other traditions had claims of being “rooted in the soil,” Dowden saw the study of English as essentially “Imperial or cosmopolitan” like classics, and thus he dismissed the “conscious effort to promote a provincial spirit” across literature.⁶⁴ No clamor, no “flapping a green banner in the eyes of the beholders,” he warned, could persuade those “who ‘speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake’” to “nurse the dream of four separate streams of literature.”⁶⁵ In this way Dowden saw the nationalism of the fledgling Literary Revival as provincial.⁶⁶ Its kneejerk impulse to court “dear delusions” – to “view all things through an emerald mist” – was a “huge absurdity,” as, for example, when on reading “a popular life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald [*sic*],

⁵⁹ Dowden (1895) 30, 13.

⁶⁰ Dowden (1895) 6, 9, 8, 10.

⁶¹ Dowden (1895) 16.

⁶² Dowden (1895) 15.

⁶³ Dowden (1895) 17.

⁶⁴ Dowden, as quoted in Boyd (1918) 156. See Kiberd (1996) 159–60.

⁶⁵ Dowden (1895) 18, 15.

⁶⁶ The notion, as Kiberd writes, that the Revival itself comprised a variety of attempts to “revolt *against* imitative provincialism completely escaped Dowden.” On Dowden’s struggle with cultural politics of Irish revivalism, see Kiberd (1996) 160, 159–65, and Murphy (2017) 105–10.

published in Dublin,” Dowden found himself outraged with the following poetical exordium.⁶⁷

“Not Greece of old in her palmiest days, the Greece of Homer and Demosthenes, of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, of Pericles, Leonidas, and Alcibiades, of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, of Solon and Lycurgus, of Apelles and Praxiteles, not even this Greece, prolific as she was in sages and heroes, can boast such a lengthy bead-roll as Ireland can of names worthy of the immortality of history.” How partial, then, have been the awards of history! How true the saying that the world knows nothing of its greatest men! And how modest the writer of this life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, to set forth the bead-roll of Greece in such ample detail and to throw the veil of a general statement over the glories of his native land! If in the Irish literary movement we are to step to such a tune as this, I think on the whole I should rather fall out of the ranks, or even step to music as rhetorical as that of “Rule Britannia.”⁶⁸

For Dowden, “art & literature as a whole” would “move with the general movement of society ... & reflect its ideals” but “the poet & artist,” he argued, still “ought seldom to meddle with the details of practical politics.”⁶⁹ Therefore no matter how loud “literary claims of contending nationalities” might grow, artists and students of history had to remain “patient, disinterested, and exact,” in a word “to hold in check, chiefly in ways that are indirect, the superficial views, the partisan representations, the crude generalisations of the amateur sociologist and political manipulator of half knowledge.”⁷⁰ “Let an Irish poet teach his countrymen to write a song free from rhetoric,” he declared,

free from false imagery, free from green tinsel, and with thoroughly sound workmanship in the matter of verse, and he will have done a good and a needful thing. Let an Irish prose writer show that he can be patient, exact, just, enlightened, and he will have done better service for Ireland, whether he treats of Irish themes or not, than if he wore shamrocks in all his buttonholes and had his mouth for ever filled with the glories of Brian the Brave.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Dowden (1884) 164–65. See also Dowden (1895) 18.

⁶⁸ Dowden (1895) 18.

⁶⁹ MS No. 3124/4, Manuscripts Room, Trinity College Library, as in Court (1992) 151.

⁷⁰ Dowden (1895) 15, 13.

⁷¹ Dowden (1895) 20. Yeats publicly criticized Dowden’s condescension, writing that, though the professor had been “for years our representative critic” in Ireland, he had given the “new creative impulse” of Irish literature “too little attention.” Yeats, “To the Editor of the *Daily Express*, 26 January 1895,” in Yeats *CLT* (1986) 431.

The views that Dowden found clumsy in various Revival-era manipulations of the literary and the political, had done little to arrest what he saw as an inexorable reality, namely that modernity's "larger movement" had made English letters a new "head-quarters of literature," a place which nonetheless still had to be conceived "aright" using "a broad outline map of the whole course of history, a map not crowded with petty names, but clearly setting forth the facts of prime importance."⁷²

The convergence of English studies with classical learning proved consequential. Though it would take at least another fifty years, the expansion of liberal arts education swept across the Anglo-American world, and the study of England's 'national' literature slowly stepped out from classics' shadow, overtaking it as a seemingly more democratic, more accessible "status marker" among those "seeking distinction in relation to ... perceived superiors and inferiors."⁷³ More immediately, however, the commingling of English and classics stoked fierce resistance in what might be called the linguistically 'peripheral' parts of the British Empire. As Jason Harding and John Nash have observed, "the near-global spread of English by the dawn of the twentieth century, and in particular its dominant status in colonies and former colonies, encouraged dissonant voices of artistic and linguistic experimentation, of resistance and of co-optation."⁷⁴ Across Ireland, Scotland and Wales, a widespread – though politically and aesthetically diverse – backlash openly disputed the coming of English as an all-pervasive language for commerce, journalism, literature, the academy and government. Armed with nationalized claims regarding the classical character of ancient Gaelic and Brythonic languages, these reactive, revival movements aimed to resuscitate the Celtic and to resist the encroachment of English on a national scale.⁷⁵ In such anti-colonial or postcolonial contexts of the early twentieth century, receptions of classical antiquity often emerged as important sites in the struggle between metropolitan and provincial interests, providing what Emily Greenwood has called "a rich source of literature and myth" to circumvent (or perhaps even to advance) the notion of "English literature" as a national institution."⁷⁶ What is especially notable about these 'Celtic' contestations is that they first arose as the very claims of England's

⁷² Dowden (1895) 421, 420.

⁷³ Stray (1998) 29.

⁷⁴ Harding and Nash (2019) 13.

⁷⁵ Kiberd (1996) 136–54.

⁷⁶ Greenwood (2019) 577.

own national 'tradition' were still openly under dispute in the curricula of many British and Irish institutions of higher education. Though attempts to enshrine English literature as canonical were pervasive, the literature then possessed only the promise of becoming a so-called "single 'great' or 'classical' tradition."⁷⁷ That threat alone, however, emboldened a number of writers towards revival and resistance. In an effort to displace, or at the very least obstruct, English dominance, many agitators fused a rabid Anglophobia with broader efforts to distinguish alternative channels of national culture on the British Isles.⁷⁸ Though the resulting movements of 'Celtic' resistance would inflame popular rancor and cruder expressions of nationalist sentiment, their impact was also felt in more unexpected ways. Principally, they nurtured a complex, multiform "aesthetic of renovation" across various 'Celtic' engagements in English literature – one whose renewed openness to linguistic hybridization and creative invention helped articulate their formative, 'peripheral' experiences of modernity on "new grounds of recognition and understanding."⁷⁹

This aesthetic permeated the eccentric receptions that Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid gave to classical literature, receptions which complicated the widespread ideological animus against the growth and dominance of English. On the whole their work oscillates between two poles – first, a belief that preserving and fusing the classical and Celtic together could somehow be effective for immediate political and social ends and then, also, an avant-garde impulse to disrupt, to twist Celtic and classical *residua* in more experimental forms of self-critical exploration and critique. At one end classical learning was sought after because its prestige, it was thought, could be recentered or recontextualized as a key accelerant in the heroic romance of national rebirth. As a catalyst in these coming-of-age stories, the classics were enlisted to contest the dominance of conventional English, giving voice to what Yeats called "the spontaneous expression of an impulse which has been gathering power for decades."⁸⁰ At the other end, however, nationalized mergers of the classical and Celtic fell victim to deepening skepticism, one which nonetheless generated, in its wake, further exploits of stylistic divergence. Often these exploits rearticulated the collective appetite for a national vernacular made classical, but they did so also while radically undercutting the very

⁷⁷ Greenwood (2019) 577.

⁷⁸ Gikandi (1996) 27–29.

⁷⁹ Castle and Bixby (2019) 14.

⁸⁰ Yeats, "To the Editor of the *Daily Express*, 26 January 1895," in Yeats *CLT* (1986) 431.

same phenomenon simultaneously. The broad arc of Yeats' engagement with Greek antiquity encompasses the tension, from his neo-Romantic desire to forge for the Irish "plays and poems like those of Greece" to the *saeva indignatio* of his later poetry and drama.⁸¹ There claims of Hellenic beauty no longer advanced the prospect of a new classical age in Ireland but stood only in stern counterpoint to modernity, "like a tightened bow, a kind / That is not natural in an age like this."⁸² Joyce, by contrast, believed that ancient Greece, like Ireland and ancient Egypt, was dead and beyond revival or resurrection. In *Ulysses*, however, he set forth elements of the *Odyssey* as a "cracked lookingglass" through which pivotal events from Dublin, June 16, 1904, could at once be skewed and illuminated.⁸³ The collage of narrative experiments that resulted – experiments Joyce developed around notions of error, satire and misinterpretation – willfully mistranslated the 'original' classical world, throwing light on the folly of using a Homeric pattern as a master key to unleash Irish nationality. In this way Joyce's reconfigurations of antiquity in *Ulysses* did not order, or tame, the ragged forces of quotidian Dublin: they extorted instead, by comic misalignment, the revivalist obsession with Homer, with his power to make Ireland a 'nation once again'.

While David Jones regarded Joyce as "super-sensitive" to "the formal problems of art" and the "artistic dilemmas" of modernity, he did not see a "radical incompatibility," a satirical pastiche in *The Anathemata's* alignments of mythologies and languages.⁸⁴ The poem was rather a "series of fragments, fragmented bits, chance scraps really, of records of things, vestiges of sorts and kinds of *disciplinae*" whose irregularity nonetheless accorded with Jones' own eccentric sense of a whole.⁸⁵ Its heaping-up of ancient languages, myths and cultural deposits had adumbrated an "ancestral mound," but Jones' synoptic vision of cultural translation did not smooth out this heap – acculturating its complexity with the "loppings off of meanings or emptyings out" of linguistic particularity – Jones instead hoped to integrate its difference and diversity across wide chasms of linguistic and cultural variety.⁸⁶ The "modernist drive toward effects of simultaneity through juxtaposition" drew him to the reception of

⁸¹ Yeats, "The Galway Plains" (1903) in Yeats *CW4* (2007) 158.

⁸² Yeats *VE* (1987) 256–57. See Introduction, pp. 33–34, Chapter 2, pp. 88–91, and Chapter 3, pp. 135–38.

⁸³ Joyce *Ulysses* (1986) 6 (1.154). See Introduction, pp. 34–36.

⁸⁴ Jones, "Preface to *The Anathemata*," in Jones (1952) 26, 17.

⁸⁵ Jones (1952) 34.

⁸⁶ Jones (1952) 26, 24.

Romanitas espoused by Collingwood, Myres and Cochrane.⁸⁷ While discussions of Welsh history, and this phenomenon in particular, were popularly peddled across nationalist circles, it was not sympathy for crude Welsh-Wales claims on cultural purity that attracted Jones. It was rather the reputed hybridity of *Romanitas* that drew his interest; historically understood, he thought, its enduring historical pattern demonstrated the possibility of authentically integrating many literatures and cultures within a tradition and across time – one wherein the foreign was not sacrificed to the native, nor the local to the universal, nor even the national to the imperial. As Jones saw it, *The Anathemata*'s “mixed data,” its many languages, did not unnaturally warp the poem's greater unity, a unity informed by Jones' sacramental vision of art and making in human history.⁸⁸ Marked with devotion to the rhythmic structures of Catholic ritual – in “time of the Mass” – the poem's “trains of distraction and inadvertence” and “sprawl of the pattern – if pattern there is” were “initially set in motion, shunted or buffered into near sidings or off to far destinations, by some action or word, something seen or heard, during the liturgy.”⁸⁹ Thus the “ambivalences” of culture and history registered in the poem's hybridized “meanderings to and fro” across language and myth were linked analogically – indeed ordered, as Jones saw it – by one central event, the original act of sign-making given in Christ's anamnetic command to “Do this for a recalling of me.”⁹⁰ That moment, Jones believed, promised a “totality of connotation” for the poet, a moment that could authenticate “this whole business of sign and what is signified,” with all its “loves and validities of many sorts and kinds.”⁹¹ “It would seem,” he explained,

that the forms which strategy shows forth can be typic only of that archetypal form-making and ordering implicit in the credal clause *per quem omnia facta sunt*. That is to say they partake in some sense, however difficult to posit, of that juxtaposing by which what was *inanis et vacua* became radiant with form and abhorrent of vacua by the action of the Artifex, the Logos, who is known to our tradition as the Pontifex who formed a bridge ‘from nothing’ and who then, like Brân in the *Mabinogion*, himself became the bridge by the Incarnation and Passion and subsequent Apotheoses.⁹²

⁸⁷ Wray (2019) 428.

⁸⁸ Jones (1952) 9. See also Collingwood (1924) 14.

⁸⁹ Jones (1952) 31–32.

⁹⁰ Jones (1952) 31.

⁹¹ Jones (1952) 24, 25.

⁹² Jones, “Art and Sacrament,” in Jones (1959) 159–60.

Despite such bold statements of faith – ‘in some sense’ affirming the divine significance of art and ‘making’ – Jones had his own doubts about the very making of *The Anathemata*. He frequently complained of being badly read in the many languages the poem employed, and that he had failed, too, formally in the very arrangement of the first published edition.⁹³ Because of the difficulties inherent in his polyglot idiom, Jones provided footnotes to the poem, insisting that these might help “*incant* something for the English reader” of “the undertones and overtones” of foreign fragments he drew on.⁹⁴ The footnotes may have lessened some caustic accusations – especially those that rejected the poem for intellectualism and spiritual obscurantism – but the crudity and brevity of the ‘translations’ Jones offered in the footnotes also betrayed the poem’s “*main fundamental* difficulty”: both reader and poet remained at arm’s length from the “raw stuff” of “the past,” stuff whose contexts were “virtually forgotten and available perhaps (as in the Welsh case), in another linguistic tradition and moreover a tradition separated fm [*sic*] us by centuries of a contrary tradition.”⁹⁵ Though Jones laid some claim to the catalytic power of *Romanitas*, seeing it as a living and ideal, integrative model of cultural translation, the reception he gave it was troubled too by the forces of entropy and widespread ignorance – forces that would indeed mar Jones’ practice of composition and influence contemporaneous criticism of his work.

By contrast Hugh MacDiarmid, despite his relative lack of formal schooling, betrayed no fundamental misgivings about the adequacy of his own knowledge of other languages, or their place within his poetic idiom. He would have little use for footnotes. His own eccentric liaisons with ancient and modern literatures – those that became characteristic of his ‘synthetic English’ – were made possible, he felt, by his exceptional imagination, which was “accustomed to contemplating the unity of the human spirit.”⁹⁶ For MacDiarmid, “differences between languages and cultures” appeared seemingly “less marked,” so much so that *In Memoriam James Joyce* commonly apposed “Graeco-Roman references with elements of other cultural origin, usually including Asian material as an instantiation of the ‘East–West synthesis.’”⁹⁷ This “great range of allusions and references” was, to MacDiarmid at least, “rarely obscure and often exciting,”

⁹³ Jones (1959) 171. See Chapter 4, pp. 182–84.

⁹⁴ David Jones, Letter to Vernon Watkins (April 11, 1962) in Jones (1976) 57.

⁹⁵ Jones (1976) 58. On Jones’ footnotes, see Chapter 4, p. 185n162.

⁹⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Author’s Note,” in MacDiarmid (1955) 14.

⁹⁷ MacDiarmid (1955) 14. Wray (2019) 423.

no less because it allowed him to bring together the ‘classical’ from many languages and civilizations.⁹⁸ The multilinguistic hybridity that resulted documented the “cerebral pattern” of an autodidact whose “magpie-like appropriation of ideas,” polyglot intromissions and incongruous juxtapositions MacDiarmid proudly hailed as “jujitsu for the ‘educated’.”⁹⁹ The poem’s focus, however, remained anchored in a ‘spiritual’ Marxism, in MacDiarmid’s belief that a growing “planetary consciousness” across art and literature would soon give better expression to the “consciousness of the millions of the dead, of the multiplicity of souls, of the profound of Times.”¹⁰⁰ *In Memoriam*’s internationalized idiom had suggested a world seemingly beyond tribal affiliations and “our Western chaos,” a ‘new classicism’ global in scope and thus more resistant to “British Imperialism, English Ascendancy and centralization in London.”¹⁰¹ Despite MacDiarmid’s ambition, however, his kaleidoscopic celebration of the classical-in-the-global carried profound risk. In manipulating antiquity in this way MacDiarmid tried to disrupt the predominant “nimbus of association” that had surrounded Victorian forms of classical reception, the very reality which kept the growing strength of English literature tethered closely to the legacy and ‘leftover’ prestige of Greek and Latin learning.¹⁰² No claim of equality with classical languages ought to serve, he thought, the imperial ambitions of Englishness. Yet his efforts to untether English from such exclusive claims became increasingly idiosyncratic, MacDiarmid’s “hectic pursuit of new forms of radicalism” leading him, by the mid-1930s, to a “career as a political heretic” and poetic eccentric.¹⁰³ His notion, moreover, of revolutionizing ‘classics’ – of casting its presence as the organizing principle by which all ‘minor’ traditions could authenticate their value – slowly emptied classical literature of clear substantive links to Greece and Rome; and many in MacDiarmid’s audience, it seems, wondered whether his very interest in ‘exotic’ languages, to say nothing of his incendiary and ferocious Anglophobia, reflected simply a predilection for “the cachet and shibboleth” of the foreign or, worse, what William Aitken (1913–98) called an “objective admiration for anything which claims to oppose the existing order.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ MacDiarmid (1955) 11, 12.

⁹⁹ MacDiarmid (1955) 11, 18. Hart (2010) 71.

¹⁰⁰ MacDiarmid (1955) 14, 15. See also Lyall (2011) 68–81. See Chapter 5 pp. 196–98, 221–24.

¹⁰¹ MacDiarmid (1955) 18. MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 376.

¹⁰² Woolf *EVW4* (1994) 39.

¹⁰³ Hart (2010) 74.

¹⁰⁴ Collins (1891) 149. William Aitken, as in Hart (2010) 74. See also W. Aitken “The Puzzle of Mr. Grieve,” *Free Man* (August 13, 1932), as in McCulloch (2004) 342.

By the early 1950s the eccentricity at work in the receptions of Celtic modernism had become apparent; moreover, by that time the volatility of classical learning had been roughly restabilized within the Anglo-American academy. This process of institutional restabilization had itself, in fact, helped curricularize some of the achievements of literary modernism, but the work of Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid were treated in different ways. By the time Jones published *The Anathemata* in 1952 and MacDiarmid *In Memoriam James Joyce* in 1955, there existed a desire to ‘sweep the stage’, to rediscover “rational structure and comprehensible language” and be “empirical in its attitude to all that comes.”¹⁰⁵ Enough already had been written by the so-called “Lallans-mongers” and the other “Residual nuisances like the Social-realists ... the church-furnishers and the neo-Georgians.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the “tendency to over-intellectualise” poetry and poetics had become a mark of critical opprobrium, driving some writers from polyglot solutions to the problems of cross-cultural encounter to writing new work that was “deliberately and self-confessedly *provincial*,” fixed in the “central tradition of all English poetry, classical or romantic.”¹⁰⁷ “[N]obody wants any more poems on the grander themes for a few years,” declared Kingsley Amis (1922–95), “but at the same time nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems. At least I hope nobody wants them.”¹⁰⁸ The difficulty of such poetry, Hugh Kenner suggested, lay in the fact that certain poets, and their poetry with all its erudition, lacked a “conception of an active culture” to which they “might contribute.”¹⁰⁹ Despite his “devotion and learning,” Kenner argued, David Jones appeared in *The Anathemata* without a distinctive voice, as though his interests had been “channelled into mere book-making, on the assumption that someone else will be able to think up a use for the results.”¹¹⁰ The mid-life work of both Jones and MacDiarmid suffered from this reception, lying down fatefully, it seems, in the idiosyncratic semantic codes that both writers had traced to preserve, or revive, the dying, minority languages and cultures they cherished. Whatever ‘active cultures’ they might have thought to defend, these too had become – as the Scottish classicist Douglas Young (1913–73)

¹⁰⁵ Conquest (1956) xviii, xv.

¹⁰⁶ Conquest (1956) xii.

¹⁰⁷ Conquest (1956) xvi, xv. Davie (1977) 47.

¹⁰⁸ Kingsley Amis, as in Enright (1955) 17.

¹⁰⁹ Kenner (1954) 301. See Chapter 4, pp. 192–94.

¹¹⁰ Kenner (1954) 301.

once noted of Scots – “more and more diluted, through education and the mass media, with standard English or American.”¹¹¹

Yet, even as Jones’ work and MacDiarmid’s work failed to gain wide public acclaim, the popular canonization of Yeats and Joyce as exemplars of so-called high modernism was well underway by this time; and ironically, it was largely British and American educational establishments – with their wholesale ‘Englishing’ of the liberal arts (and of modernism at large) following the end of the Second World War – that provided the ‘active culture’ in which Irish modernist receptions of antiquity were embraced. It should be noted, too, that both Yeats and Joyce were seen not just as key contributors to the modern canon of English literature but as the most recent inheritors of a reputedly European ‘classical tradition’. As reimaged by Gilbert Murray and other prominent American and English academics, nothing in the matrices of reception seemed excessively fraught: all that was classical had served a common, elevated purpose across history, namely the “common worship” of the Muses. Between Europe’s many linguistic, religious, national and ethnic differences there was no “competition,” Murray wrote, “in which each individual writer is expected to produce something new, to assert his personal claims, to outstrip his neighbor, and to put the old poets into the shade”;¹¹² and yet, despite Murray’s insistence, the concentric force of institutionalizing this ‘classical tradition’ at Anglo-American universities stripped, in part, some modernist engagements with the ancients of their deeper cultural and linguistic contexts. Academic interest in links between the classical and the contemporary increased, but the ambiguities modernist works enacted through their adaptations and allusions were often misjudged by the early proponents of ‘tradition’.¹¹³ The classics, though read primarily in

¹¹¹ Young (1966) 395.

¹¹² Murray (1927) 260. Following the “long strain” of the First World War, Murray saw Hellenism and the classical tradition as “the basis of a reforming and educative mission” for European civilization, one which could help mend the then “widespread degradation of political conduct.” Molded by his involvement with Liberal politics and commitment to the League of Nations, Murray argued that classics’ ongoing influence in Europe betokened a “central and permanent” civilizational unity. He himself had been shaped by an “intense immersion in ancient Greek philosophy and history,” and Murray hoped his own teaching could likewise lead “some undergraduates to a commitment to change the world, or at least to become enlightened administrators of the British Empire.” Invited by Harvard University in 1925 to take the inaugural Charles Eliot Norton Chair of Poetry, Murray lectured on the tradition at length, aiming to forge a “proper instrument for detecting” those aspects of style “which are the direct though unconscious fruit of ancient influence and have been in poetry from the beginning.” See Murray (1921) vii; Stray (2007b) 3; as well as Murray (1927) xvii, 26, 27. See also Griffith (2007) 51–80.

¹¹³ On the scholarly turn from the classical tradition to an emphasis on reception, see Hardwick and Stray (2008) 4–5; Budelmann and Haubold (2008) 13–25, as well as Martindale (1993) 23–29 and Haynes (2019b) 7–15.

translation at university, were then often said to exude a “strong, noble, statuesque” presence in modern literature.¹¹⁴ On the whole, their reception and contemporary literary purpose was said to document “how sordid the men and women of to-day have made themselves.” “[B]y contrast with the heroism or beauty of classical legend,” modernity was, Gilbert Highet (1906–78) once claimed of *Ulysses*, an “explosion in a cesspool.”¹¹⁵ The works of Yeats and of Joyce, like those of MacDiarmid and Jones, however, had simmered in a far more complex and capricious world, a world where the hydra-headed forces of classical reception could be used to bolster competing aesthetic claims and a variety of aggressive nationalisms – not only those that would ‘outstrip neighbors’ and rival nations of civic authenticity but also those of artists and scholars all too eager to put other poets, other nations and other languages “into the shade.”¹¹⁶ Thus the early codification of some forms of Celtic modernism as the “latest stage” of ‘classical’ growth at times divested their experimentalism of more controversial accretions.¹¹⁷ References to antiquity were often glossed as though they passed on a largely unwavering or invariant sense of cultural stability – conceived, Lawrence Venuti suggests, as though “contained in or caused by the source text, an invariant form, meaning, or effect.”¹¹⁸ With the further democratic expansion of the university, the volatility of modernist receptions could thus be steadied and rebranded for broad institutional consumption. Echoes of the struggles to define the classical grew fainter, and the stylistically eccentric forms of Celtic modernism were domesticated or sometimes ignored, leaving allusions and adaptations of the Greek and the Roman fraught with misreading. Their presence then evoked not the labyrinth of ways in which the classics were mediated to Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid but a more contemporary need to claim comfort from the ancient ‘Western’ world, to engender some “aesthetic consolation against the stresses, dangers and vulgarities of life.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Highet (2015) 512.

¹¹⁵ Highet (2015) 512. Having studied with Gilbert Murray at Balliol College, Oxford, Highet became professor of Latin and Greek at Columbia College in 1938. He first published *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* in 1949.

¹¹⁶ Murray (1927) 260.

¹¹⁷ Highet (2015) 546.

¹¹⁸ Venuti (2019) 1.

¹¹⁹ Highet (2015) 518.