

Introduction
*“At Once the Bow and the Mark”: Classics and Celtic
Revival*

“On the morning when I heard of his death a heavy storm was blowing and I doubt not when he died that it had well begun.”¹ So wrote W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) in March 1909, four days after the death of his friend and protégé, the 37-year-old playwright John Millington Synge (1871–1909). For Yeats, the death of Synge marked an important turning point in his life and, broadly, in the development of modernist expression across the literatures of Ireland and Britain. A heavy storm was indeed blowing; and in the weeks that followed Synge’s death, Yeats, though awash in grief, slowly began to envision his reinvention as a poet, elaborating a new theory of artistic genius anchored in reflection over Synge’s art and life. A “drifting, silent man, full of hidden passion,” he wrote, Synge had long been marked by “physical weakness,” but that weakness had done little to diminish his imagination.² On the contrary, as his body grew weak in the last months of life, Synge’s imagination became “fiery and brooding,” undimmed by disease and decay.³ Even as death approached, Yeats argued, Synge could not be stopped from embodying in literature all his “hidden dreams.”⁴ Deprivation and impending death had been vital to the final flourishing of Synge’s art. “[L]ow vitality,” Yeats explained,

helped him to be observant and contemplative ... What blindness did for Homer, lameness for Hephaestus, asceticism for any saint you will, bad health did for him by making him ask no more of life than that it should keep him living, and above all perhaps by concentrating his imagination.⁵

Illness had driven Synge “to reject from life and thought all that would distract” him from struggling with “despair or a sense of loss produced in

¹ Yeats *Mem* (1972) 200. The phrase in the introductory title is taken from MacDiarmid (1967–1968) 15.

² Yeats *Mem* (1972) 203.

³ Yeats *Mem* (1972) 203.

⁴ Yeats *Mem* (1972) 204.

⁵ Yeats, “J. M. Synge & the Ireland of His Time” (1909) in Yeats *CW4* (2007) 232–33.

us by the external world.”⁶ In that struggle Synge had discovered “creative joy,” a phenomenon Yeats defined as “an acceptance of what life brings, because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred of death for what it takes away.”⁷ Far from drowning Synge’s voice, deprivation emerged as a creative force, its pressure provoking “through some sympathy perhaps with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or the sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.”⁸ Synge’s death, as Roy Foster has noted, drove Yeats into a “long process of self-examination,” one in which a preoccupation with loss would lead him to scrutinize not only his friend’s life but the very grounds of the “intellectual movement” that he, Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932) and Synge had tried to foster through the Irish Literary Revival.⁹ Shaken by the idea that they had, perhaps, not ‘understood the clock’, that the Revival had faltered in the face of public pressure and propaganda, Yeats nonetheless began to wonder whether he too, amid his grief, might discover a renewed sense of “creative joy.”¹⁰ Drawn to memories of childhood, Yeats began composing “reveries about the past,” ruminating, in part, over the ways in which his early education had left him unprepared for the aims of the Revival.¹¹ Central among these reflections was the lasting fascination Yeats expressed for the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome, worlds that had – though he bemoaned his

⁶ Yeats *Mem* (1972) 203; Yeats, “Theatre of Beauty – December 1913.” Yeats Papers, MS 30052, National Library of Ireland, Dublin (NLI).

⁷ Yeats *CW4* (2007) 233.

⁸ Yeats *CW4* (2007) 233.

⁹ Foster (1997) 526; Yeats, “*Sambain*: 1901,” in Yeats *CW8* (2003) 5. The years following Synge’s death proved to be a time of discouragement, as Yeats watched the Abbey Theatre, then under the stewardship of Lennox Robinson (1886–1958), gradually make new accommodations with popular taste, accommodations that he thought derivative of bourgeois expectations for the theatre. That served Robinson’s work well but, as David Krause notes, Robinson’s “benign light comedy” possessed none of the depth that Synge, Yeats and Gregory had prized, having “no rogue heroes, no sharp ironies, no dark shadows.” Yeats lamented what had become of the Abbey, admitting to Lady Gregory in 1919 that, “not understanding the clock, [we] set out to bring again the Theatre of Shakespeare or rather perhaps of Sophocles ... We thought we could bring the old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the folk-life all the life of the heart ... but the modern world is more powerful than any propaganda or even than any special circumstance.” Krause (1982) 195; Yeats, “A People’s Theater, A Letter to Lady Gregory” (1919) in Yeats *CW8* (2003) 129, 130. On this period at the Abbey Theatre, see C. Murray (1997) 113–37.

¹⁰ Yeats *CW8* (2003) 129; Yeats *CW4* (2007) 233. In a similar manner, Yeats noted losses of great imaginative significance in the life of Dante Alighieri, namely “the death of Beatrice which gave him a vision of heavenly love, and his banishment which gave him a vision of divine justice.” Caught in the “contest between dream and reality,” Dante required recompense for such loss; he sought in poetry what life did not provide, namely “some compensation, something that would complete his vision of the world.” Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

¹¹ Yeats, Letter to Susan Mary “Lily” Yeats (July 28, 1914) in Yeats *CW3* (1999) 16.

lack of fluency in both Latin and Greek – stirred his imagination and guided his desire to “build up a national tradition, a national literature” in Ireland, an Anglo-Irish ‘classical’ literature “none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language.”¹²

Although Yeats played a critical role in the Irish Revival – and though he felt, after some years, that his own lack of a classical education had left him unprepared for its onerous demands – scholars ignored, for some time, the prominent place classical reception occupied in the spread of Celtic revivals – not only in Ireland but in Scotland and Wales as well.¹³ While the “Graeco-Roman classical tradition” was broadly regarded as pivotal to the development of history and culture across the Celtic countries, the critical assessment of classics and the Irish Revival from W. B. Stanford’s *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (1976) was characteristic for some time.¹⁴ Stanford had insisted that “classical quotations and appeals to classical precedents” became scarce as the “Gaelic revival reached its full strength,” leading many to believe that Greek and Roman receptions had little part in fomenting distinctively Celtic forms of literary dissidence and dissatisfaction with English rule.¹⁵ Because formal study of Greek and Latin at university was central to the socialization and education of Britain’s governing elite, the classics were thought to be no friend, no “natural ally” to Anglophobic movements bent on resurrecting Celtic literature, let alone compelling political movements, untethered from the ‘main line’ of English dominance.¹⁶ Accordingly, the institutional presence of classics in Ireland, in Scotland and in Wales was often seen as inimical to movements of Celtic revival or, at the very least, as something whose allegiance and affiliation could best be described as benignly ‘unionist’.

However, as Fiona Macintosh first observed in *Dying Acts* (1994), the classics were not, in fact, an “alien adversary” to movements of Celtic revival but instead a contested site wherein a wide range of literary and ideological manipulations of antiquity were employed – not only by those eager to hold fast to the security of union but by a variety of cultural nationalists keen to confront a growing ‘anglicization’ across the British

¹² Yeats, “To the Editor of *United Ireland*, 17 December 1892,” in Yeats *CLI* (1986) 338. See Chapter 1, pp. 53–55; Chapter 2, pp. 105–08; Chapter 4, pp. 163–65.

¹³ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 108.

¹⁴ Stanford (1976) viii.

¹⁵ Stanford (1976) 219.

¹⁶ Macintosh (1994) 3. On this untethering, see O’Connor (2006) xi–xviii. See also Impens (2018) 6–7 on Stanford.

Empire.¹⁷ Thus, often in the rhetoric of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Celtic revival, the classics – with its enduring devotion to dead Mediterranean languages – became allied to what Nicholas Allen has called a “fluid resistance to the solid presence of empire.”¹⁸ Joined to efforts to revive dead and dying tongues from the Celtic world, classical *exempla* and precedents were cited widely in attempts to challenge English rule and to envision a world beyond the United Kingdom, a world where new forms of ‘vernacular classics’ could aid the social and linguistic purification of the Celtic nations.¹⁹ Since the publication of Macintosh’s work, significant scholarship in the diverse fields of Celtic studies, translation studies, classical reception and comparative literature – work by Macintosh and Allen but also by Declan Kiberd, Michael Cronin, Len Platt, Robert Crawford, Ceri Davies, Laura O’Connor, Lorna Hardwick, Richard Martin, J. Michael Walton, Marianne McDonald, Leah Flack, Tony Crowley, Gregory Castle, Matthew Hart and Margery Palmer McCulloch, among others – has widened our understanding of how receptions of the ancient world, both classical and Celtic, became pivotal forces in the “nationalist imaginary.”²⁰ Employed in efforts towards purportedly national renewal, the classics were not merely a “useful guide” for defending against further English incursion but a catalyst

¹⁷ Macintosh (1994) 3. See also the discussion in McDonald (1995) 183–203. For a broad overview of literary devolution in this period and the place of ‘Anglocentricity’, see Robert Crawford’s extensive account of “British Literature” and “Modernism as Provincialism” in Crawford (2000) 45–110, 216–70, Declan Kiberd’s examination of revivalist rewritings of William Shakespeare in Kiberd (1996) 268–85, as well as Ceri Davies’ discussion of the Welsh university system in Davies (1995) 115–55.

¹⁸ Allen (2010) 18.

¹⁹ Numerous examples of this practice exist. For example, when announcing the third Oireachtas festival of 1899, *An Claidheamb Soluis*, the bilingual journal of the Gaelic League, insisted that “after community of blood and community of language, community of festivals was the strongest bond that held the various independent Greek republics together as one Greece. What the Pythean, the Olympic, the Nemean and Isthmian games were to the Greeks, the assemblies of Tara, Emania, Carman, and Tailteann, were to the men of Ireland.” “The Oireachtas,” *An Claidheamb Soluis* 1.2 (March 25, 1899) 24. For other accounts analyzing reception and the development of various modern nationalisms and imperialisms, see Stephens and Vasunia (2010), Bradley (2010), Stead and Hall (2015), Goff (2005) as well as Hardwick and Gillespie (2007).

²⁰ Allen (2010) 18. See Kiberd (1996) 131–88; Cronin (1996) 1–7, 131–66; Platt (1998) 99–127; Crawford (2011) 131–46; Davies (1995); O’Connor (2006); Hardwick (2000) 79–95; Martin (2007) 75–91; Walton (2002) 3–36; McDonald (2002) 37–86; Flack (2015); Crowley (2005) 128–63; Hart (2010) 3–25, 51–78, and McCulloch (2009). On primitivism and the Irish Revival, see Castle (2001) 1–39. For a discussion of earlier ‘revivals’ and the contexts of earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical receptions in Ireland, see especially Vance (1990) 1–164, Cronin (1996) as well as O’Higgins (2017). On Scottish reception, see Davie (1961) and Crawford (1998) 225–46. On the role of ‘minor’ literatures in literary modernism, see McCrea (2015) 1–46. For a broad examination of so-called Hellenizing impulses in modern Irish literature, see Arkins (2005).

for reinventing the collective “social fabric and cultural unconscious” of the British Isles.²¹ Nevertheless, though greater attention has been given to the links between classics and Celtic revival, considerably less has been written about the eccentric associations that Irish, Anglo-Welsh and Scottish practitioners of literary modernism had with institutions of classical learning and with movements of national revival.²² In considering the work of Yeats, James Joyce (1882–1941), David Jones (1895–1974) and Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978), this book documents part of this history. It traces a comparative genealogy that shows how modernism’s so-called Celtic fringe was roused to life as the evolution of classical education, the insurgent power of cultural nationalisms and the desire for new, transformative modes of literary invention converged.²³ Writers on the ‘fringe’ sometimes confronted, and sometimes consciously advanced, ideological manipulations of the ‘inherited’ past. As they did so, however, their modes of receiving the classics also helped animate freshly decentered idioms of English, literary vernaculars “so twisted and posed” that they expanded the “stock of available reality” across Anglophone literature.²⁴

Throughout the first of his memoirs, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (1914; 1916), Yeats detailed his preoccupation with pain and deprivation, principally by examining his early life. “Indeed I remember little of childhood but its pain,” he declared, and nowhere was that felt more acutely than in “the ordinary system of education.”²⁵ As a young boy, he confessed, he had been thoroughly “unfitted” to formal instruction:

though I would often work well for weeks together, I had to give the whole evening to one lesson if I was to know it. My thoughts were a great excitement, but when I tried to do anything with them, it was like trying to pack a balloon into a shed in a high wind. I was always near the bottom of my class, and always making excuses that but added to my timidity.²⁶

²¹ Macintosh (1994) 3; O’Connor (2006) xvii.

²² There have also been surveys detailing the evolving engagements that Yeats and Joyce maintained, individually, with the literatures and civilizations of classical antiquity. Included among these are Arkins (1990); Liebrechts (1993) as well as Schork (1997, 1998). More recent is Flack (2020). See also Arkins (1999) as well as Arkins (2009) 239–49.

²³ The phrase “Celtic fringe” is here borrowed from Jones (2016) [10]. Jones elaborated on the phrase further in a 1962 letter to Aneurin Talfan Davies (1909–80). See Jones (1980) 86–88. See also Simon Gikandi’s use of the term in Gikandi (1996) 29, as well as O’Connor’s extensive discussion of the Pale/Fringe distinction in O’Connor (2006) xiv–xvii.

²⁴ Blackmur (1935) 108.

²⁵ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 45, 99.

²⁶ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 64–65.

As the firstborn son of the barrister John Butler Yeats (1839–1922), expectation loomed over Yeats: it was thought he would excel, continuing the family's history of success at university. "My father had wanted me to go to Trinity College," he recalled, "and, when I would not, had said, 'My father and grandfather and great-grandfather have been there.' I did not tell him that neither my classics nor my mathematics were good enough for any examination."²⁷ Yeats was a poor student of Greek and Latin, evidently unable to manage even the memorization necessary to pass Latin.²⁸ "I was expected to learn with the help of a crib a hundred and fifty lines [of Virgil]," he remembered,

The other boys were able to learn the translation off, and to remember what words of Latin and English corresponded with one another, but I, who, it may be, had tried to find out what happened in the parts we had not read, made ridiculous mistakes.²⁹

Though he labored at times to correct his errors, his trouble with Latin and Greek persisted. No vision, no passion induced by ignorance seemed to grow in him; he was left then, he wrote, with only a "timidity born of excuse and evasion," one that gnawed at him even as his reputation began to flourish.³⁰ Yet Yeats would find solace in the example of John Keats (1795–1821), who, he suggested, had composed much of his work in struggle with a lack of education. Born the "ill trained son of a livery stable keeper," Keats was "ignorant," Yeats contended, "separated from all the finest life of his time."³¹ Nevertheless, despite that lack of inherited wealth, he still managed to cultivate what Yeats called "a passion of luxury," a passion that manifested itself in his verse as "Greece and the gods of greece [*sic*]."³² Keats had no formal training in Greek, and despite his fervor for the language, he failed to teach it to himself. He once hoped, he told Joshua Reynolds, to "feast upon Old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare," but his progress with the language was slow.³³ So, by

²⁷ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 90. John Butler Yeats firmly believed his son could pursue classics at Trinity: "When he entered the VI form its master, who is now a classical fellow in TCD [George Wilkins, the Headmaster's brother], told me that he could be as good in classics as in science if it were not that, having read Huxley, he despised them. When the other boys of the form entered Trinity he on his own responsibility decided to remain outside, and he entered the art school, where he studied for two years." John Yeats, "Memoirs," 8, as in Foster (1997) 35.

²⁸ On Yeats' knowledge of Greek and Latin, see Arkins (1990) 1–23 and Liebrechts (1993) 7–21. See Chapter 1, p. 55n35; Chapter 3, pp. 131–32, especially n60.

²⁹ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 75.

³⁰ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 76.

³¹ Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

³² Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

³³ John Keats, "To J. H. Reynolds" (April 27, 1818) in Keats (1958) 1:274.

the autumn of 1819, Keats gave up on Greek, insisting that he would make himself “complete in latin, and there my learning must stop. I do not think of venturing upon Greek.”³⁴ Because of this, Yeats envisioned Keats “always as a boy with his face pressed to the window of a sweet shop.”³⁵ “Kept from Greece by his ignorance, kept from luxury by his unlucky birth,” he had been “denied all expression in his surrounding life”;³⁶ and yet, because the poet lacked what Simon Goldhill has called the “position of cultural assurance” that knowing Greek might grant, Keats was driven to spend his days “reading the classics in translation,” and from these “frantic strivings after Greece and luxury,” he drew inspiration.³⁷ Keats had desired, Yeats believed, some vision of beauty commensurate to what he himself lacked in wealth, education and training.³⁸ Therefore it was not from intimate knowledge but rather from ignorance of Greek – from a partial knowledge or understanding of the language – that Keats forged his singular vision of the Hellenic world. He could not translate its letter, but his verse was said to breathe an English marked with Greek, marked with “the very spirit of antiquity, – eternal beauty and eternal repose.”³⁹

Keats’ achievements notwithstanding, Yeats still could not shake the feeling that “the system of education from which [he] had suffered” had prepared him inadequately for the future.⁴⁰ His father, he complained, could have spared him, teaching him nothing but the classics himself;⁴¹ but John Yeats was “an angry and impatient teacher,” and when he “often interfered” in the poet’s education, he did so “always with disaster, to

³⁴ Keats, “To George and Georgiana Keats” (September 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 1819) in Keats (1958) 2:212.

³⁵ Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

³⁶ Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

³⁷ Goldhill (2002) 189; Yeats Papers, MS 30052, NLI.

³⁸ Yeats may have developed an abiding interest in privation, in part, from his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Nietzsche’s discussion of art and suffering in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* (1878) suggested that an artist’s genius was often possessed by a “moving and ludicrous pathos,” generated by the “lack of others” to enjoy his work. Needing *Compensation für diese Entbehrung*, the artist’s “sufferings are felt to be exaggerated because the sound of his lamentations is louder, his mouth more persuasive; and *sometimes* his sufferings really are great, but only because his ambition and envy are so great.” See Nietzsche (1878) 142. See also Nietzsche (1986) 83. On Yeats’ knowledge of Nietzsche, see Heller (1988) 127–40, as well as Oppel (1987) and Liebrechts (1993) 116–26.

³⁹ Smith (1857) 57.

⁴⁰ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 98.

⁴¹ Though Yeats regarded his father as a capable, amateur classicist, John Yeats’ own account of his experience at Trinity College, Dublin, was one of alienation. He found his fellow students to be “noisy and monotonous, without ideas or any curiosity about ideas, and without any sense of mystery, everything sacrificed to mental efficiency.” The college was “intellectually a sort of little Prussia.” John Yeats, “Memoirs, 1,” in Murphy (1978) 33.

teach me my Latin lesson.”⁴² If he had perhaps been a better teacher, he might have

taught me nothing but Greek and Latin, and I would now be a properly educated man, and would not have to look in useless longing at books that have been, through the poor mechanism of translation, the builders of my soul, nor face authority with the timidity born of excuse and evasion. Evasion and excuse were in the event as wise as the house-building instinct of the beaver.⁴³

Though Yeats would never gain fluency, he continued to associate knowledge of Greek and Latin with intellectual achievement, social prestige and political confidence.⁴⁴ The lack of a classical education did provoke timidity in him; but, as Yeats aged, he began to draw strength from a desire to overcome that timidity, to incite a vision deeper than excuse and schoolboy evasion. Just as Keats’ ignorance of Greek resulted in an English laced with passion for antiquity, the partial knowledge of classics Yeats did possess provoked both sharp thematic engagements with classical subjects and a broader transformation of style across his poetry and drama.

Though Yeats felt that his failure to acquire fluency in Latin and Greek had a detrimental effect on his intellectual life, his experience of youth was not unusual for the time. At the end of the nineteenth century, knowledge of Greek and Latin still remained central to the “organization of expert knowledge by university scholars and the civil service” in both British and Irish civic institutions, but the preeminent position classics occupied in liberal education was by then beginning to erode, due in large part to the successful rise of professionalism within the academy and the “increasingly pluralized nature of the curricular field.”⁴⁵ To trace the institutional history of classics in the British Isles from the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth is to trace, as Christopher Stray notes, “just how marginalized” a once dominant subject could become, a subject “which once lay at the heart of English high culture.”⁴⁶ As the

⁴² Yeats *CW3* (1999) 53, 75.

⁴³ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 76.

⁴⁴ R. R. Bolgar’s remark in 1954 that the “classical student of Edwardian times” felt that in studying Greek and Latin “he, if any man, possessed the magic key which would unlock the kingdoms of this world” aptly describes Yeats’ belief in the power of classical learning – a power he did not possess. Bolgar (1954) 1.

⁴⁵ Haynes (2019a) xiii; Stray (1998) 259.

⁴⁶ Stray (1998) 1. See also the discussion in Richardson (2013). Richardson notes that the “narrative of antiquity in Victorian Britain” was predominantly one of “cultures triumphant, of a classically

“relaxed amateur scholarship of Anglican gentlemen” gradually “gave way to the specialized, methodic activity of a community of professional scholars,” classics became a contested field of knowledge, one whose preeminence in university education was soon to be supplanted by a variety of competing academic interests, perhaps most powerfully by the study of English.⁴⁷ The rise of English was swift, so much so that, by 1921, Henry Newbolt (1862–1938), the principal author of a government report on *The Teaching of English in England* (often cited as the Newbolt Report), declared:

it is now, and will probably be for as long a time as we can foresee, impossible to make use of the Classics as a fundamental part of a national system of education. They are a great watershed of humanistic culture, but one to which the general mass of any modern nation can, at present, have no direct access ... The time is past for holding, as the Renaissance teachers held, that the Classics alone can furnish a liberal education. We do not believe that those who have not studied the Classics or any foreign literature must necessarily fail to win from their native English a full measure of culture and humane training.⁴⁸

With classics’ importance diminished, the social and political utility of Greek and Latin also came under scrutiny. Where once a “knowledge of the Classics conferred a certain social distinction,” that “glamour,” with its “traditional association with high place,” began to fade: English became “not less valuable than the Classics and decidedly more suited to the necessities of a general or national education.”⁴⁹ One might “have expected an élitist subject centered on the learning of dead languages to have been discarded after the industrial revolution, the emergence of parliamentary democracy, and the triumph of the vernacular.”⁵⁰ Yet the value of studying Greek and Latin in the prewar period managed to maintain – however tenuously – something of the promise of

educated British elite, commanding all corners of the world.” Yet, in spite of that, the period was also marked by an unstable “insecure relationship with the ancient world.” “The past rarely satisfied the present’s whims – and triumphant Victorian classicism was never assured: its grandeur could disintegrate in a heartbeat; its disciples were lost in longing, not fulfillment.” Richardson (2013) 4.

⁴⁷ Stray (1998) 2. On the history of classics at Trinity College and other prominent Irish universities, see Stanford (1976) 45–72; Dillon (1991) 239–54; Stubbs (1892) 113–24, and Ross (2013) 22–33.

⁴⁸ Newbolt Report (1921) 13, 18.

⁴⁹ Newbolt Report (1921) 39, 15. On the ‘invention’ of English literature in the academy, see Court (1992) 119–61; Palmer (1965) as well as Eagleton (1996) 15–46, and Crawford (2000) 1–44. See Conclusion, pp. 239–50. On the diminishment of classics’ institutional presence in the United Kingdom and Ireland after 1960, see Harrison (2009) 1–16.

⁵⁰ Stray (1998) 1.

“entitlement to full civic participation.”⁵¹ Though its credibility would diminish, the grip Greek and Latin maintained over the public imagination proved tenacious, not only in England but across the British Isles. In this context, as the institutional structures governing the transmission of classical knowledge shifted slowly, new burgeoning forms of cultural nationalism and language purism in Ireland, in Scotland and in Wales emerged. These movements – calling for devolution, new national literatures and the preservation of Gaelic and Brythonic languages – would soon set their sights on the dominant institutions of English society and struggle to ally their cause with what remained of classics’ claims to social prestige, political authority and intrinsic literary value. In this way, though classics was soon surpassed by English as the preeminent subject of liberal arts education, what was left of its “cultural glory from the era of Victorian Hellenism” was deployed – often in *ressentiment* – as a blunt, ideological weapon in the ‘Celtic nations’.⁵² Scholars, critics, controversialists and poets – figures such as Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), Saunders Lewis (1893–1985) and Hugh MacDiarmid – argued for the preservation or resuscitation of the Celtic on ‘classical’ grounds: the Irish, the Welsh and the Scottish could confront the “Anglocentric voice” of the British Isles because each bore what MacDiarmid called “an alternative value of prime consequence when set against the Greek and Roman literatures which are all that most of us mean when we speak of ‘the Classics’.”⁵³

As classics became pervasive in the rhetoric of revival, interest in its creative potential likewise grew among the ‘Celtic’ avant-garde, and new experimental forms of expression began to rise in response to the ideological pressures of cultural nationalism. Poets and artists at times promoted, and at times interrogated, the visions of classical antiquity advanced by these pressures, using their work to contest the meaning of the ancient world for contemporary ‘Celtic’ societies. Yet it is worth noting that comparatively few of the writers considered critical to Celtic literary modernism possessed a fluent knowledge of classical languages. This was a bitter reality about which Yeats wrote in *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*. A similar sense of deprivation also dogged James Joyce who, despite a high degree of competence with Latin and other modern European languages, lamented in midlife (just months before the

⁵¹ Haynes (2019b) 3.

⁵² Stray (1998) 2.

⁵³ Crawford (2000) 11. MacDiarmid, “English Ascendancy in British Literature,” *The Criterion* 10.41 (July 1931) 593–613, in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63.

publication of *Ulysses* [1922]) that “I don’t even know Greek though I am spoken of as erudite. My father wanted me to take Greek as third language, my mother German and my friends Irish. Result, I took Italian.”⁵⁴ David Jones, the poet, painter and engraver, likewise complained of a “terrible ignorance one is trying to make up all the time” that kept him from mastering “even one language besides English.”⁵⁵ “If I’d gone to school,” he exclaimed, “at least they’d have taught me Greek and Latin.”⁵⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid too, though he lived life as a brash autodidact, received little formal instruction in classics: “alas I can speak no Greek,” he complained, “And am now too old to learn / And nil leiyas ogam air.”⁵⁷ For each writer, however, the largely untutored exposure to antiquity they did have pushed them towards the “fertile chaos” of bold literary experimentation.⁵⁸ Like Keats, the loss of immediate access to antiquity in no way kept classics from becoming midwife to literary invention. On the contrary, it was the tension between knowledge and ignorance, between the apparent loss of classics and the cultural significance still attached to its traceable presence, that proved powerful.

⁵⁴ Joyce, “Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 24 June 1921,” in *Joyce LJJ* (1957) 167. Joyce first chose to study Italian instead of Greek when he enrolled at Belvedere College around the age of eleven. The classical Greek he did acquire later was, as Ron Bush notes, “self-taught and mixed up also with his self-taught study of modern Greek.” His instruction in Latin was more consistent and effective, beginning at Clongowes Wood College, and continuing through his studies at University College, Dublin. The results of Joyce’s formal examinations were often better in Latin than in English. See Bush (2019) 349, as well as Bradley (1982) 112, 115, 129, 138–39; Ellmann (1982) 46–47 and Sullivan (1957) 80–81, 94–95, 98, 159–61, 236–37. On classical education at University College, Dublin, in Joyce’s time, see *Fathers of the Society of Jesus*, comp. (1930) 194–203.

⁵⁵ David Jones, as in Roberts (1964) 7.

⁵⁶ Roberts (1964) 7. On Jones’ education, Dilworth (2017) 23–34; on his approach with Latin, see Miles (1990) 45–46. Jones’ Greek was poor. In 1952 when thanking his friend Rev. Desmond Chute for sending an engraved Greek inscription, he told him: “I can’t read Greek but someone staying in this house translated it for me and I like the sound of it and what it says very much.” David Jones, Letter to Rev. Desmond Chute (December 29, 1952) in Jones *IN* (1984) 25. For further discussion, see Chapter 4, pp. 182–84.

⁵⁷ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 797. The Irish Gaelic of this quotation may be translated in English as, “There is no cure for it.” MacDiarmid encountered a slight variation of this quotation in the letters of Stephen MacKenna (1872–1934), the linguist and translator of Plotinus’ *Enneads*. In a 1926 letter to a friend, MacKenna had complained of his lingering knowledge of Irish: “God knows why I don’t let the Irish die in me but I don’t, can’t: I always have – for one thing – the idea, which would make Bergin snort, of one day quite suddenly and gan fhios dom fhéin blossoming out into a Irish Essayist. Anyhow this bee has built his nest in my bonnet and nil leiyas agam air. No fool like an old Gael.” “gan fhios dom fhéin” is glossed as “unbeknownst to myself.” See MacKenna (1936) 229–30, as well as Grieve (2011) 33–34. When MacDiarmid moved to Edinburgh to train as a teacher at Broughton Junior Student Center in 1908, he did receive some training in languages and the classics, but he was never fluent in Latin or Greek. See Kerrigan (1988). See Chapter 5, pp. 225–27.

⁵⁸ Carne-Ross (1979) 11.

Untethered from more conventional modes of reception, Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid therefore redeployed classical receptions variously with “unexpected freshness,” eccentrically overwriting competing visions of the classical past in the contemporary moment.⁵⁹ Their work would challenge not only institutionalized receptions articulated in common educational establishments but those advanced by ideologues of Celtic nationalism ‘at home’ as well. Because – to paraphrase Declan Kiberd – the very notion of classics, or a ‘classical tradition’, was then rapidly evolving, the Greek and the Roman could no longer be presented as a “museum of nostalgias” commanding obeisance from contemporary artists.⁶⁰ Instead, among the avant-garde, the classical past appeared as a “reopened future” where the loss and discrediting of its so-called tradition had unleashed new and unstable creative forces.⁶¹ With classical knowledge more dis-embedded from institutions that had long dominated its transmission, the range of reception became more multivocal, and the shapes of Celtic modernism reflect that diversity. With hybrid idioms notable for their appropriation, polyglot collage, retranslations and outright mistranslations of antiquity, Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid variously contested ideological reconfigurations of classics in their own time, giving voice to work no one “yet had ears to hear.”⁶²

Despite the growing ‘recession’ in classical education – for Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid – a fluent knowledge of classics still carried prestige, civic entitlement and compelling claims to a sense of cultural continuity and social stability. That reputation, however, was met variously: sometimes with admiration, sometimes with fear, skepticism or resistance. As a young poet in Dublin, Yeats felt that the classics might threaten the advent of a national literature in Ireland, for, since the Renaissance, imitation of Greece and Rome had often been implicated in the reputed loss of ‘native’ capacities for literary achievement. Many countries in Europe, he thought, had seen their own art and literature emerge stillborn in the presence of antiquity. The desire to study, to mimic classical form was too compelling, too powerful, he claimed, so much that when “learning turned [human minds] to Greece and Rome,”

⁵⁹ Arendt (2006) 94.

⁶⁰ Kiberd (1996) 292. See Conclusion, pp. 248–56.

⁶¹ Kiberd (1996) 292. Arendt (2006) 94.

⁶² Arendt (2006) 94.

the sanctity has dwindled from their own hills and valleys, which the legends and beliefs of fifty centuries had filled so full of it that a man could hardly plough his fields or follow his sheep upon the hillside without remembering some august story, or walking softly lest he had divine companions.⁶³

Instead of cultivating what Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) had called, a century before, the *Gedankenvorrat eines Volks* or *Schatzkammer*, the “treasure-chest” of the nation, foreign stories and forms were imported from Greece and Rome.⁶⁴ For this reason, classics was both feared and envied among those intent on reviving Celtic language and literature in the British Isles. Neoclassical imitation might thwart the flowering of indigenous genius, and no vernacular forged with foreign forms, whether classical or otherwise, could serve the literary aspirations of a new and emerging nation. A national literature had to be a native growth.⁶⁵ Yet it was without caution or wariness of classical examples that the Irish revolutionary Pádraic Pearse (1879–1916) once claimed for the modern ‘Gael’ great forerunners in antiquity, “the Greeks – the pioneers of intellectual progress in Europe.”⁶⁶ “What the Greek was to the ancient world,” Pearse declared, “the Gael will be to the modern; and in no point will the parallel prove more true than in the fervent and noble love of learning which distinguishes both races. The Gael, like the Greek, loves learning, and he loves it solely for its own sake.”⁶⁷ In a similar spirit, Douglas Hyde, the first president of the Gaelic League, claimed a Hellenic bloodline for Ireland, insisting in 1892 that the Irish were a living remnant of the civilization that “established itself in Greece,” a civilization then “making its last stand for independence in this island of Ireland.”⁶⁸ Likewise, George William Russell, known as *Æ* (1867–1935), held the emulation of Greek literature aloft, seeing the classics as a model for “building up an overwhelming ideal” of Irish nationality.⁶⁹ “Since the

⁶³ Yeats, “The Literary Movement in Ireland” (December 1899) in Yeats *CW9* (2004) 468.

⁶⁴ Herder (1985) 552–56. See also Herder (1993) 260. On Herder and the broad influence of German Romanticism in Ireland, see McCormack (1985) 219–28.

⁶⁵ See Stanford (1976) 219–20. See pp. 3–5 of this Introduction.

⁶⁶ Pearse, “The Intellectual Future of the Gael,” in Pearse (1898) 49.

⁶⁷ Pearse (1898) 56. Later, as plans for armed resistance against British rule began to develop, Pearse became bolder, asserting Irish superiority over ancient Greek, as in a December 1912 speech when he claimed “for Irish literature, at its best, these excellences: a clearer than Greek vision, a more generous than Greek humanity, a deeper than Greek spirituality. And I claim that Irish literature has never lost those excellences.” Pádraic H. Pearse, “Some Aspects of Irish Literature,” in Pearse (1924) 133.

⁶⁸ Hyde, “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland” (November 25, 1892) in Hyde (1986) 155.

⁶⁹ *Æ* (1899) 81.

Greek civilization,” he explained, “no European nation has had an intellectual literature which was genuinely national.”⁷⁰ A chance for just such a genuinely national literary culture remained alive in Ireland, however, a chance to expose the country “in clear and beautiful light, to create the Ireland in the heart”; this, he argued, was the “province of a national literature.”⁷¹ For Æ, for Hyde, for Pearse and for others sympathetic to Revival, an oppression far worse than neoclassical imitation then loomed over Ireland: Anglicization and the annihilation of all that still remained ‘authentically’ Gaelic. So, it was thought that if the abiding authority afforded the classics in contemporary society could be harnessed, if professional scholars and amateur classicists could be convinced to support the language movement, then Ireland’s Literary Revival would gain a powerful ally.⁷² To paraphrase the words of Joyce’s Buck Mulligan, if classicists “could only work together” with advocates for revival, then their receptions of antiquity “might do something for the island. Hellenise it.”⁷³

It was with that desire for cooperation that the Cork-born priest William Francis Barry (1849–1930) urged his contemporaries in 1902 to “snatch from the grave” the “musing, sparkling, tender soul of a nation.”⁷⁴ Revivalists, though, could not rely on the “dangerous fancy that original minds need no discipline and have had no ancestors.”⁷⁵ In their struggle they had to look to Greek antiquity, for no national genius had been “created on demand.”⁷⁶ “[C]ircumstances favourable to genius” could be prepared through educational reform and new creative endeavor, but no revival, no Irish literary culture would spring to “new life” without widespread commitment to the study of classical antiquity.⁷⁷ “[A]t the first hour of every revival in literature, in philosophy, in art, in civil polity, how can we fail to perceive,” he asked,

the Greeks, our everlasting schoolmasters, and Athens, the University of mankind? Under the magic of that great ancient literature, more than one nation during the last four hundred years has awakened to a knowledge of itself and what it could do ... However we explain it, the flower and fruit

⁷⁰ Æ (1899) 81.

⁷¹ Æ (1899) 83.

⁷² On the various factions within the Gaelic Revival and the ‘Irish’ Renaissance, see O’Leary (1994) 281–354.

⁷³ Joyce *Ulysses* (1986) 6 (1.157–58).

⁷⁴ Barry (1902) 322.

⁷⁵ Barry (1902) 324.

⁷⁶ Barry (1902) 323.

⁷⁷ Barry (1902) 323, 335.

season of our noblest productions in letters, has followed always upon the study of the classics, but especially of the Greeks.⁷⁸

For Barry, the development of Ireland's national genius was predicated on the desire to imitate a "Hellenic model," for he argued, "no European literature of the highest order" had emerged "except in dependence, near or remote, on the classics."⁷⁹ "[S]tudents, critics, translators, commentators" were called therefore to advance a "new birth of Greek studies" in Ireland, not simply further "school-exercises or competitive cramming" with the language.⁸⁰ "Our ambition is to come into living contact with a people so marvellously endowed," to see this "confused existence of ours as a whole" shaped on a Greek "pattern of beauty" by "[d]iscipline, choice, effort," all the so-called "stages of worthy mental training."⁸¹ When "the creative sap rises," Barry declared,

and the tree of life puts forth blossom or decks its branches with immortal fruit. Greek literature is studied, and will be studied yet more, in our schools, our universities. And it is surely desirable that, whether as a creative or a critical influence, it should be brought to bear on a movement that is fired with the ambition of equalling it in pure artistic value if not in renown. I wish to see Hellenic scholars bestow an Irish Homer, an Irish Herodotus, on our aspiring youth.⁸²

Yet despite the insistence that from "Greek we shall get no harm if our eyes are fixed unswervingly on its golden days," classicists and revivalists remained wary of making common cause.⁸³ Barry's "much-discussed" recommendations were warmly received by the Gaelic League, but they were welcomed only with the understanding that "Gaels" could not "neglect any deep native forces for foreign ones," that Ireland's "literary or other outcomes would, of course, be Irish and not quasi-Greek."⁸⁴ *An Claidheamh Soluis* (The Sword of Light), the Gaelic League weekly, wondered too whether Barry had presented too rosy a view of the Gael and the Greek, writing that

... we have a great deal of hard, rough, humble home-work to do before we are in the fine mood and temper in which Dr. Barry imagines us to be

⁷⁸ Barry (1902) 324.

⁷⁹ Barry (1902) 324–325.

⁸⁰ Barry (1902) 335, 325, 329.

⁸¹ Barry (1902) 329. See Chapter 1, pp. 55–61.

⁸² Barry (1902) 335.

⁸³ Barry (1902) 334.

⁸⁴ "London Notes," *An Claidheamh Soluis* 4.23 (August 16, 1902) 393.

already. There is very little in an Irish village or forlorn town of to-day to set one dreaming of Attica. Picture Plato in a Midland carriage on the way to Galway!⁸⁵

Some sympathetic to the Revival feared that deepening any alliance with classics would further commit Ireland to “a plagiarism that imitates but knows not how to strike out on a path untrodden.”⁸⁶ At the same time many across prominent Irish institutions of higher learning – professors, scholars and students alike – thought the push to resuscitate Irish Gaelic, could possibly diminish the quality of the established curriculum of liberal education.

Given the contested position which classics occupied within the language movement, it is no surprise that controversy surrounding classics’ relation to Celtic language spilled out into public debates – in 1899 and again in 1901–02 – when in those years a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into “the present condition” of educational practices in Ireland, and “to report as to what reforms, if any, are desirable in order to render that education adequate to the needs of the Irish People.”⁸⁷ In 1899 the Commission focused its attention largely on secondary education while in 1901 and 1902 the matter of the university curriculum was broadly examined. Prominent teachers, headmasters and academics were called to give testimony before the Commission in a series of extensive interviews. Notable among those that appeared in 1899 were Trinity College faculty, Louis Purser (1854–1932), professor of Latin, Robert Yelverton Tyrrell (1844–1914), professor of Greek, John Pentland Mahaffy (1839–1919), professor of Greek history, and Robert Atkinson (1839–1908), professor of comparative philology and the 1884 Todd Professor of Celtic Languages, as well as Douglas Hyde of the Gaelic League.⁸⁸ In spring 1902 Hyde was once again interviewed along with many others, including the Rev. Dr. George Salmon (1819–1904), provost of Trinity College, and Edward Gwynn (1868–1941), Todd Lecturer in the Royal

⁸⁵ “London Notes,” *An Claidheamb Soluis* 4.23 (August 16, 1902) 393. For a comprehensive account of the weekly *An Claidheamb Soluis* and its importance within the Gaelic language movement, see Uí Chollatáin (2004).

⁸⁶ Barry (1902) 334.

⁸⁷ Royal Commission on University Education in Ireland (1901) 2.

⁸⁸ In addition to being a prominent academic and controversialist, Mahaffy is also well known as the teacher of Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) who once called him the “one to whom I owe so much personally ... my first and my best teacher ... the scholar who showed me how to love Greek things.” Oscar Wilde, “To J. P. Mahaffy” (April ?, 1893) in Wilde (2000) 562. In April 1877 Wilde accompanied Mahaffy on a trip to Corfu, Mycenae and Athens. On Mahaffy’s character and scholarly achievements, see Stanford and McDowell (1971) as well as Dillon (1991) 244–46.

Irish Academy and a fellow of Trinity. Before both commissions, Hyde championed the cause of Irish and the interests of the language movement, arguing that requiring instruction in Irish was essential to the future health of the country. In his view Ireland needed to dispense with the current “cosmopolitan” curricular scheme and embrace a “national factor in Irish education.”⁸⁹ Without that, he argued, schools could not sufficiently serve the “Irish needs and Irish well-being” of their students.⁹⁰

We desire to see the whole scheme of Irish cosmopolitan education exactly reversed. If this country is to be saved, it is Irish needs which should, in our opinion, be the aim of Irish education in the future ... We believe it to be the steady neglect of the national factor in Irish education which is largely responsible for driving such multitudes of Irishmen into professions, the end of which is emigration. We have steadily refused to make the country interesting to them, and the consequence is, that they are glad to leave it.⁹¹

Lack of instruction in Irish, he explained, had stunted a common sense of national pride among all social classes in Ireland. As constituted, the present system of education had helped instead to “thoroughly divorce the upper classes from the lower. The lower are still largely penetrated with traditional love of country and national feelings and instincts,” but those of greater means were products of “un-Irish teaching” and “divorced from the life and genius of their own country, brought up *non vitae sed scholae*.”⁹² For that reason, “all who can afford it, with few exceptions, are sending their sons out of the country altogether to be educated.”⁹³ Such was “the export standard” of Irish schooling.⁹⁴ To keep the country from becoming “a sandbank thrown up in some strange sea, inhabited by a race of mongrels,” broad reform was needed – one which made instruction in Irish a clear priority.⁹⁵ For without its revival, no sense of “national consciousness, and pride of country, and love of country” could be forged for the coming generation.⁹⁶ Practically

⁸⁹ Douglas Hyde, “Thirty-Fourth Day, Tuesday, 10th June 1902,” in “Third Report of the Commissioners on University Education (Ireland).” *Reports From Commissioners, Inspectors, and Others: 1902*. 32 (1902) 313 (hereafter *Sessional Papers*). See also *Irish in University Education. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 29 [1902?]. On the diminished position of Irish in the national schools of Ireland, see Wolf (2014) 53–59; Doyle (2015) 118–20 as well as Coolahan (1981) 3–51, 223–26.

⁹⁰ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 313.

⁹¹ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 313.

⁹² *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 314, 313.

⁹³ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 314.

⁹⁴ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 313.

⁹⁵ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 314.

⁹⁶ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 313.

speaking, Hyde felt, this meant that Irish should maintain equal if not greater standing than Greek and Latin in both intermediate and university curricula. Irish was, he insisted, a classical language in its own right, an ancient tongue possessing “the oldest vernacular literature of any in Europe except Greece, to which she bears, in many respects, the closest comparison. And this literature is not like the great continental literatures, a mere reflex of the Roman, but is wholly indigenous and autochthonous.”⁹⁷ Irish, “though at present a lost language,” was “not a foreign language” to those born in Ireland.⁹⁸ Unlike Greek or Latin, it could be reacquired “with vigour and quickness,” having once been

the language, if not of the father, then of the grandfather, and if not of the grandfather, then, certainly, of the great-grandfather, of almost every boy examined before the Intermediate Board at the present day. The very cast of their features, the expression of their faces, their laryngeal peculiarities, their accent in speaking – all this is largely the product of the Irish language spoken for hundreds or thousands of years by all who went before them. The very English which they speak swarms with Irish idioms.⁹⁹

While “a long and tedious training” was needed “to make a Celt or a Teuton read himself into the spirit of classical literature, and into the spirit of the Greeks and Romans,” Irish demanded less “pain and loss of time.”¹⁰⁰ Though the contemporary student had “lost the Irish language altogether,” he might still “imbibe,” Hyde suggested, “the benefits of classical study from Irish literature in a way he could not do from any other, because every fibre of his being will pulsate and thrill, responsive to some chord in the Irish language.”¹⁰¹ The “comparative value” of Irish was therefore even “more important than Greek” because the “Irishman

⁹⁷ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 314.

⁹⁸ *The Irish Language and Irish Intermediate Education. III. Dr. Hyde's Evidence. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 6.

⁹⁹ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 6. In a 1912 pamphlet, *What Is the Use of Reviving Irish?*, Dermot Chenevix Trench (1881–1909) – Joyce's model for Haines in *Ulysses* – developed the racialist account of Irish biology and language further, insisting that the anatomical structure of the “Irish brain” and “Irish larynx” were organically connected and best-suited to the speaking of Irish Gaelic. Fearing a “mingling of races” and “the forcible extermination of a racial genius through the pressure of political and economic circumstances,” Trench provocatively asked whether his countrymen still wished “to live in an Ireland which reflects your racial type? If so, you will support the language which expresses the Irish nature and which will keep the nation true to itself in all that it sets its hand to accomplish.” Trench (1912) 27, 29, 32. On Trench and his contributions in debates over Irish, see Crowley (2005) 146–50.

¹⁰⁰ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 6.

¹⁰¹ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 6.

responds more readily to it.”¹⁰² Although the current structure of education had conspired to spread English further, a broad receptivity to Irish remained palpable, and the country’s most classical resource, if properly supported, Hyde thought, could reemerge as a catalyst of national reinvention.¹⁰³

That Irish Gaelic was a ‘classical’ language, that it therefore possessed an “equal educational value – or very nearly so” with Greek – did not win widespread approval among Dublin’s academics.¹⁰⁴ Hyde’s foremost critics emerged at Trinity College in Robert Atkinson and J. P. Mahaffy, who regarded rising Irish enthusiasm as “not only useless, but a mischievous obstacle to civilisation.”¹⁰⁵ When called before the Commission on Intermediate Education in January 1899, Mahaffy tried to settle the matter boldly: little to no educational value could be gained from the study of Irish.¹⁰⁶ The language might be, he quipped, “sometimes useful to a man fishing for salmon or shooting grouse in the West,” but as an object of formal study, Irish was not classics.¹⁰⁷ All the newfound fervor for this “out-of-the-way and troublesome language” was, Mahaffy complained, simply a consequence of a pervasive sentimentalism, one that would see

every miserable remnant of barbarism, every vanquished and half-extinct language which has lost its literary worth, and has become a hindrance to the commercial and political progress of the world ... coddled and pampered as if it were the most precious product of the human mind.¹⁰⁸

Irish was no precious product, and as Mahaffy saw it, no baseless comparisons could make it so. “Let me not be told that all this applies equally to the study of the dead classical languages.”¹⁰⁹ To discourage Irish was “to brave unpopularity” in Dublin where public pronouncements of its value were becoming more frequent and more extravagant.¹¹⁰ “One Prelate,” Mahaffy observed, had gone “so far as to say that of all the

¹⁰² *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 19, 20.

¹⁰³ The linguist Richard Henebry (1863–1916) put it succinctly when he said that “Old Irish must become the study of our boys in school just as Latin and Greek. It must be used as the key to our great wealth.” Henebry (1903) 857.

¹⁰⁴ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 20.

¹⁰⁵ Mahaffy (1896) 783. When asked before the Commission of 1899 if “Celtic” were “a subject that should be entered on at all,” Mahaffy called its study “a mischievous waste of time.” Intermediate Education (Ireland) Commission (1899) 33.

¹⁰⁶ See Diarmid Coffey’s account of Mahaffy’s appearance before the 1899 Commission in Coffey (1938) 66–78. See also Stanford and McDowell (1971) 104–26, and Mathews (2003) 35–45.

¹⁰⁷ Intermediate Education (Ireland) Commission (1899) 33.

¹⁰⁸ Mahaffy (1882) 465; Mahaffy (1896) 784.

¹⁰⁹ Mahaffy (1896) 786.

¹¹⁰ Mahaffy (1899) 216.

languages he knew (even including Greek) none was so powerful and expressive as his mother tongue. But for his exalted position, we might have ventured to ask him how many languages he really *knew*, how far Greek could be fairly included.”¹¹¹ At the third *Oireachtas* festival in June 1899, it was Michael Logue (1840–1924), archbishop of Armagh, who had praised Irish in this way, claiming that

for public speaking, and for poetry, there is not – not even excepting the Greek – any language on this planet of ours, as the American says, than [*sic*] can surpass the Irish, as it was known by our ancestors, for power and expression. I know some little things about a number of languages. I have a superficial knowledge of French, Italian, Latin, and Greek. I even learned Hebrew in my young days, though I don’t remember even a letter now. I assure you it is my firm conviction that the man who can speak Irish, classical Irish, and at the same time simple Irish that can be understood by the people, will produce a greater effect than Demosthenes would have produced upon his countrymen in the very zenith of his power.¹¹²

That a bishop would go so far, Mahaffy thought, with such “absurd laudations” demonstrated how deeply the “Celtic craze” had taken hold, a craze that “the cool and sceptical few” were called to resist.¹¹³ Otherwise, he argued,

The few thousands who were till recently ashamed of [Irish] as a mark of ignorance are now likely to dream that they have a nobler heritage than the millions in Ireland who know not a word of it and who have never even heard it spoken, and so we may possibly (though not probably) have a serious recrudescence of Irish speaking, which will have even worse effects than the maintenance and cultivation of Welsh in Wales.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Mahaffy (1899) 216.

¹¹² Logue, cited in Barrett (1899) 12. Logue often made this claim when defending Irish against the charges of Mahaffy and Atkinson. See, for example, “Cardinal Logue at Kilkenny,” *An Claidheambh Soluis* 1.5 (April 15, 1899) 75.

¹¹³ Mahaffy (1899) 216, 214. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church in Ireland had largely come to view the revival of Irish Gaelic favorably. A number of priests and bishops, most notably William Walsh (1841–1921), archbishop of Dublin, as well as Cardinal Logue were known supporters of the Gaelic League as well as of Home Rule. Nonetheless, when the National University was founded in 1908, the Catholic hierarchy found itself feuding with the Gaelic League over its opposition to making Irish compulsory for enrollment at the university. On the Catholic Church and advocacy for Irish, see Crowley (2000) 175–78 as well as Mathews (2003) 26–28 and Mannix (2012) 29–48.

¹¹⁴ Mahaffy (1899) 213–14. Mahaffy refers to the view that the Welsh language was “a decided impediment to the mental improvement of the people,” a “nuisance and an obstacle, both to the administration of the law, and to the cause of religion.” As outlined in the 1848 *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, Welsh was thought to have “no liter-

For Robert Atkinson, Irish was to be rejected on grounds both technical and moral. The language was still not “in a settled state,” and for that reason alone, it could not be effectively employed in teaching students.¹¹⁵ Though the amount of material published in Irish during the Revival had begun a movement to standardize the language, the presence of many dialects still suggested “a decline from what was perceived as the perfections of classical languages like Latin.”¹¹⁶ Better to use “Greek or Latin, or French,” Atkinson claimed, for there “you have a perfectly definite spelling, definite declensions, definite forms, a definite syntax, and so on.”¹¹⁷ Irish, by contrast, possessed too many linguistic variations: its *patois* were too “numerous” and “no standard of speech absolutely accepted by everybody” existed as yet.¹¹⁸ Thus it was “impossible for the child to get real educational training out of [Irish],” for the language possessed “extremely little literature” of instructional value.¹¹⁹ “If a boy learns his French, or learns his Latin,” he observed,

he has the whole world before him in choice of what to read. But I have been surprised in seeing even now, after so many years during which the beauties of Irish literature have been talked of, how little has been done that really could be usefully or properly brought before children.¹²⁰

Moreover, those old Irish stories that did exist were likely to pollute the innocence of youth, for “it would be difficult,” Atkinson declared, “to find a book in which there was not some passage so silly or so indecent as to give you a shock from which you would never recover during the rest of your life.”¹²¹ When pressed to explain, Atkinson contrasted the “crude realism” of Irish folktales with the bawdy comedies of Aristophanes, insisting that, unlike the Greek poet, Gaelic folklore had no “elevating ideal.”¹²² The saltiness of Aristophanes – what Plutarch described as the *θυμελικὸν καὶ βάνυσσον* (the vulgarity and ribaldry) of his comedies (*Moralia* 853b) – could, however, stir “positive pleasure” in students,

ature of any real value and utility,” and its deficiencies had left in Wales the “impress” of an “imperfect civilization.” Committee of Council on Education (1848) 319, 406, 401, 519. See also G. A. Williams (1985) 197–213, as well as Brooks (2003) 134.

¹¹⁵ *The Irish Language and Irish Intermediate Education, IV. Dr. Atkinson's Evidence. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 2.

¹¹⁶ Doyle (2015) 224, and Ó Conchubhair (2009) 194–96.

¹¹⁷ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 3.

¹¹⁸ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 2.

¹¹⁹ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 6.

¹²⁰ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 6.

¹²¹ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 14.

¹²² *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 14.

a *ktēma es aei* – a perpetual treasure; but if I read these Irish books, I see nothing ideal in them, and my astonishment is that through the whole range of Irish literature that I have read (and I have read an enormous range of it), the smallness of the element of idealism is most noticeable; and children, my lord, I contend, cannot live without ideals, and should not be brought up without them.¹²³

Against this charge, Douglas Hyde took up the matter of obscenity and classics and, citing his friend, the philologist Alfred Trübner Nutt (1856–1910), asked “what language” would the “unfortunate Irish child” then be “allowed to study? Greek? Why you can buy all Aristophanes for 3s., and the erotic poems of the Anthology for 1s. 6d. Latin? Martial and Juvenal can be had unexpurgated for a few shillings.”¹²⁴ Atkinson persisted, however: Irish was, by contrast with classics, excessively crude. The “filth” found in recent editions of both *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Gráinne: The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne* (1857) and *The Lay of Oisín in the Land of the Young* (1859) were “nearer to the sod ... lower than low.”¹²⁵ Even Douglas Hyde’s own work with folklore appeared “so low,” he thought, that one could not regard his Irish as “good enough for a *patois*. I should call it an *imbroglio*, *mélange*, an *omnium gatherum*.”¹²⁶ The language could not be accepted until “some man of commanding intelligence” – presumably someone other than Hyde – had emerged to standardize it “in such beautiful form that everybody has accepted it and assented to it, and followed it as a model.”¹²⁷

Hyde, for his part, was astounded by the “utterly reckless way” in which Atkinson and Mahaffy had thrown “plenty of dirt in the hope that

¹²³ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 7. Atkinson’s remarks built on those he made in his edition of the Middle Irish text, *The Yellow Book of Lecan* (1896). Enraging both Lady Augusta Gregory and Douglas Hyde, Atkinson asserted there that the “mass of material preserved” in *The Yellow Book* was “out of all proportion to its value as ‘literature.’” It contained “so many repetitions of certain tales” that one could say this “series of disconnected collectanea” was largely “mere metrical sawdust and technical scaffolding, so many pages taken up with genealogical fact and speculation, such an amount of problematical scriptural history taken usually from any source but the Bible itself, that the whole mass, when sifted, furnishes in reality but a very small quantity of what may be called imaginative literature.” Atkinson (1896) 4, 3.

¹²⁴ *The Irish Language and Irish Intermediate Education*, VI. Dr. Hyde’s Reply to Dr. Atkinson, *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 16 [1901?] 17.

¹²⁵ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 14, 6. See O’Grady (1857) as well as O’Looney (1859) 227–80. See also Chapter 1, pp. 69–70 for a discussion of O’Looney’s translation.

¹²⁶ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 13. Atkinson had long opposed Hyde’s attempts to make Irish more prominent in scholarly circles around Dublin. In March 1896, when Hyde had sought an appointment as Professor of Irish at Trinity College, Atkinson was reported to have persuaded the provost, George Salmon, that he was unsuitable, largely because he spoke “baboon Irish.” Dunleavy and Dunleavy (1991) 200–1.

¹²⁷ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 21.

some may stick.”¹²⁸ Most galling was the accusation Atkinson leveled against folklore itself, namely that all such stories were “at the bottom abominable.”¹²⁹ The professor, Hyde claimed, possessed no objectivity, nothing of the “deliberate opinion” one would expect from a scholar whose professional expertise was ancient languages.¹³⁰ The “wild combativeness and exaggeration” with which he had greeted even the suggestion that Irish folklore might prove valuable was evidence of political bias and personal antagonism.¹³¹ Irish was no more unsettled, Hyde claimed (citing Heinrich Zimmer [1851–1910], professor of Sanskrit and comparative linguistics at the University of Greifswald) than the “language of the Greek epics, of the Homeric poems.”¹³² Even the celebrated “literary language” of Homer had borne “the imprint of Ionic dialects, quite shot through with the peculiarities of the Aeolic dialect; and as far as forms go, old forms and new forms . . . confusedly mingled together.”¹³³ “Where is the ‘absolute standard of correctness’?” he exclaimed,

What would Atkinson, from his schoolmaster standpoint, call the epic literature of the Greeks? “Not good enough for a patois”; “an imbroglgio, mélange, an omnium gatherum”? From his point of view that would be the proper answer, and yet – as everyone sees – an absurdity!¹³⁴

The matter was simple: Atkinson feared that Irish, a tongue “which he does not understand,” could generate a greater sense of national pride, and its teaching might thereby be tantamount to supporting Home Rule.¹³⁵ Thus Atkinson had rushed out “with the words ‘filth’ and ‘indecent’ upon his lips. Is this political or is it racial,” Hyde exclaimed, “or is it both combined? Oh! politics, politics, how much you have to answer for in Irish life!”¹³⁶ Hyde, for his part, insisted that efforts to reinvigorate Irish had little to do with Home Rule and more to do with resuscitating “the principle of nationality, rightly understood.”¹³⁷ That principle, if

¹²⁸ Hyde (1899) 3.

¹²⁹ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 14 [1901?] 15. See also Douglas Hyde, *The Irish Language and Irish Intermediate Education*, VI. *Dr. Hyde’s Reply to Dr. Atkinson*. *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 16 [1901?] 13; and Hyde (1899) 3.

¹³⁰ Hyde (1899) 3.

¹³¹ Hyde (1899) 3.

¹³² “Letter to Dr. Douglas Hyde from Dr. H. Zimmer, Professor of Sanscrit and Celtic Languages, University of Greifswald” (April 4, 1899), printed in *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 16 [1901?] 33.

¹³³ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 16 [1901?] 33.

¹³⁴ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 16 [1901?] 33.

¹³⁵ Hyde (1899) 3.

¹³⁶ Hyde (1899) 3.

¹³⁷ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 5.

revived, could bring about a renewed “reverence for antiquity,” he insisted, a patriotism that could exist “altogether apart from politics.”¹³⁸

Yet where Hyde insisted there was no political provocation, Mahaffy saw ideological resentment and a radical disrespect for the imperial progress of English, for as P. J. Mathews observes, even though “Hyde insisted that the League was strictly non-political, the language controversy” placed advancement of Gaelic revival “in direct collision with the forces promoting English interests in Ireland.”¹³⁹ To Mahaffy, the “self-developed enthusiasts” of the Gaelic League (“whose trade is to shout”) hoped only to gain notoriety by ensnaring the prestige of classics and challenging the scholarly authority of Trinity.¹⁴⁰ “If the present controversy,” he told *The Daily Express*,

should lead to the education of a large number of persons in the classical language, with all its grammatical and philological niceties, no one would be better pleased than myself. But to be worth learning a language must possess a decent literature, or must at least be practically useful. Modern Irish has no literature worthy the name, and the folly of wasting the time of children who will have to work for their living on a language that is for all practical purposes dead is ridiculously obvious.¹⁴¹

Though it seemed obvious to Mahaffy that study of the language was a waste, he knew also that there was no hope “of mending, or even of moderating” the thinking of the Gaelic League, an organization too eager to “attribute sordid motives to their opponents in addition to charging them with lack of patriotism and with ignorance.”¹⁴² Hyde did believe that Mahaffy and Atkinson lacked patriotism, but as he saw it, the broad influence of Trinity College in Ireland was a more troublesome problem.¹⁴³ Though the school’s authority was “ever growing smaller and smaller, relatively to the whole mass of educated public opinion in Ireland,” Trinity

¹³⁸ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 5.

¹³⁹ Mathews (2003) 44.

¹⁴⁰ Mahaffy (1899) 216.

¹⁴¹ “Dr. Hyde and the Irish Language – Interview with Dr. Mahaffy,” *The Daily Express* (February 16, 1899) 5.

¹⁴² Mahaffy (1899) 216.

¹⁴³ The language controversies of 1899 and 1901–02 were nested in the debates over the university education of Irish Catholics – specifically over the establishment of a Catholic college in Dublin “equal in endowment and prestige to Trinity.” Led by the Catholic hierarchy, the campaign for such a college was strengthened by a “deepening hostility towards Trinity College” born from the perception that Trinity’s scholarly ethos and curriculum were too thoroughly Anglicized, Protestant and thus seemingly antithetical to the emerging reality of a nationalist and Catholic Ireland. Pařeta (1998–99) 16, 18. On the history of Trinity in this era, see Luce (1992) 117–34.

still remained the standard-bearer of Irish academia at the time.¹⁴⁴ Hyde was eager therefore to insist that

it is not from Trinity College or its pupils, but wholly outside of them, that all the vigorous movements of the intellectual life of the Ireland of to-day have arisen. The soil of its making has been regularly and persistently sterilized by what a Yankee journalist might call “The Great De-nationalizing Anti-Irish Company Unlimited, warrented [*sic*] one of the most perfect devitalisers in the world.”¹⁴⁵

By obstructing the revival of Irish, by not supporting efforts to expand instruction, Trinity had passed up another opportunity to influence Irish intellectual life. The college had set itself up as the “undying opponent of all things Irish,” he complained, a place where scholars conspired “to bury the oldest vernacular literature in Europe under a load of obloquy,” to “give people the idea that it was a leprous and unclean thing.”¹⁴⁶ Despite those efforts, however, the Irish language and the Gaelic League emerged from the dispute in a stronger position, aided by the negative attention that Mahaffy’s “patrician disdain” generated.¹⁴⁷ The Commission had ignored the warnings of Trinity scholars and allowed for the instruction of Irish “as an ordinary school language provided it did not hinder the teaching of other subjects.”¹⁴⁸

Fear, however, that the introduction of Irish would diminish what the Oxford classicist Alfred Denis Godley (1856–1925) later called the “old undisputed prerogative of a classical education” still persisted.¹⁴⁹ To cede a place to Irish would be, in the words of Mahaffy, a “retrograde step, a return to the dark ages – nay, even to the famous Tower of Babel in Hebrew legend”; its presence would generate further “provincial isolation” in Ireland by depressing student interest in learning the worldly tongues of Greek and Latin.¹⁵⁰ Douglas Hyde, however, insisted that there was no contest, no competition between the Celtic and the classical. On the contrary, he argued, the teaching of Irish would only encourage further study of antiquity, for to “gain a right outlook upon the art and culture of the world,” he explained,

¹⁴⁴ *A University Scandal. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 7 [1900?] 2.

¹⁴⁵ *A University Scandal. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 7 [1900?] 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 7 [1900?] 8; Hyde (1899) 3.

¹⁴⁷ Crowley (2005) 144.

¹⁴⁸ Crowley (2005) 143–44.

¹⁴⁹ Godley (1914) 81.

¹⁵⁰ Mahaffy (1899) 221, 222.

our minds must first be instinct with the spirit of appreciation for some art or some culture. The bulk of Irish minds (as the Gaelic League has, I think, conclusively proved) can only be emotionalised through their own ancestral culture; but once emotionalised in this way, they are open to many further impressions from without. A student who starts by learning Irish may end by learning Greek.¹⁵¹

By stressing Irish from a young age, students would possess greater confidence and greater “reverence for antiquity” and would thus, he thought, be likely to pursue learning Greek and Latin, no longer “ashamed of their names, ashamed of their past, of their national games, and of their national songs.”¹⁵² Despite Hyde’s pleading, Ireland’s elite, academic classes – as Yeats himself observed – had little interest in supporting the language movement or the broader aims of a culturally Celtic revival. Trinity College had for too long helped cultivate, he noted, a distinctive “atmosphere of cynicism” in educated Dublin, one that set all its interests “against all Irish enthusiasms in the first instance, and then, by perhaps slow degrees, against all the great intellectual passions. An academic class is always a little dead and deadening; and our political rancours may long have made our academic class even quicker in denial than its association with undeveloped minds.”¹⁵³ For Yeats, Mahaffy’s and Atkinson’s recalcitrance was but the latest instance of educated Irishmen opposing “without ideas” and “without charm” the larger work of civilization and imagination.¹⁵⁴ They had not so much as attacked “the often narrow enthusiasm of nationalism with the great intellectual passions of the world,” he observed, but instead taken the “easier way, that brings the death of imagination and at last the death of character.”¹⁵⁵ “Trinity College, Dublin, makes excellent scholars,” Yeats declared, “but it does not make men with any real love for ideal things or with any fine taste in the arts. One does not meet really cultivated Trinity College men as one meets really cultivated Oxford and Cambridge men.”¹⁵⁶ Mahaffy, for his part, grumbled that the contemporary ‘literary class’ of Irish writers and critics were themselves a cautionary tale – evidence enough, he thought, to resist extending the privileges of higher education any further: the

¹⁵¹ *Irish in University Education. Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 29 [1902?] 15.

¹⁵² *Gaelic League Pamphlet*, no. 13 [1901?] 5, 4.

¹⁵³ Yeats, “The Academic Class and the Agrarian Revolution,” *The Daily Express* (March 11, 1899) in Yeats *UP2* (1976) 151, 150. See also Yeats, “To George Russell (Æ), [6 March 1899],” in Yeats *CL2* (1997) 370–72.

¹⁵⁴ Yeats *UP2* (1976) 151.

¹⁵⁵ Yeats *UP2* (1976) 151.

¹⁵⁶ Yeats *UP2* (1976) 151.

existence of James Joyce alone with his “flair for latrine levity” was, he reputedly claimed, a “living argument in defence of my contention that it was a mistake to establish a separate university for the aborigines of this island – for the corner boys who spit into the Liffey.”¹⁵⁷

Although Trinity seemed out of step to Hyde and to Yeats, the doubts expressed by its faculty were not unusual. As Stanford observed, those who shared the skepticism of Mahaffy were convinced “that the *cursus honorum* of a rich empire offered wider scope for talents than that of a small independent island, no matter how illustrious. This conflict of principle among men who cherished the classical tradition but derived different ideals from it was always bound to occur.”¹⁵⁸ The language controversy, far from being a technical or literary debate over the “merits or demerits of the Irish language,” became enmeshed in a broad cultural struggle to define not only the contours of Irish liberal education but the very shape of the country’s national character as well.¹⁵⁹ Where Trinity College academics defended an aggressive, cosmopolitan vision of Irish education – a vision that regarded “imperialism, not only in politics, but in language” as ultimately advantageous to Ireland, advancing its position within the empire and the wider international community – a growing nationalist insurgency saw the education promoted by Trinity as antithetical to the “principle of nationality, rightly understood.”¹⁶⁰ No “revival upon cosmopolitan lines” could ever come about in the country: Irish education had instead to “be intellectually nationalised” for “home consumption.”¹⁶¹ As Mathews suggests, in some ways the “row over the Irish language marks the last flourish of a moribund colonial intelligentsia and, at the same time, the coming of age of a new generation of nationalist intellectuals.”¹⁶² At the heart of this ongoing struggle, attempts to redefine access, modes and perception of classical learning, to link its prestige and rigor with the formal study of Irish, proved a crucial point of dispute.¹⁶³ For Mahaffy and Atkinson, the classics remained indisputably essential to university education, an area of study whose significance could not be displaced by fashionable forms of political advocacy or mere antiquarian interests: for them, classical learning provided the unique

¹⁵⁷ As quoted in Griffin (1938) 23, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Stanford (1976) 220.

¹⁵⁹ Mathews (2003) 44. See Doyle (2015) 183–85.

¹⁶⁰ Mahaffy (1899) 222; *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 312.

¹⁶¹ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 312.

¹⁶² Mathews (2003) 64.

¹⁶³ On the evolution of Irish education and popular reading habits during the Literary Revival, see Murphy (2017).

means by which individuals could “recover ... the joys and beauties of life.”¹⁶⁴ “This was the aspect of human happiness,” Mahaffy wrote,

which is most perfectly represented, so far as the world has yet run, by the Greeks, and hence the careful and minute study of their life must always appeal to those who desire the aesthetic reformation of modern society. Once and again the Greeks have exercised this vast and beneficent influence; is it vain to hope that even still it is not exhausted, but potent to cure the ills of man?¹⁶⁵

Stressing the careful “minute study of their life,” Mahaffy prized dispassion in approaching the classics; he saw, moreover, in the entrenched institutions governing Irish classical education, not simply Unionist values to be preserved but a broader web of civilized connection between noble societies, a connection that put those educated in the classics in touch with the progressive achievements of all significant imperial civilizations, not only the Greek and the Roman but the British as well.¹⁶⁶ Though his was a compelling vision to some in Dublin, it was not persuasive among those sympathetic to the cause of Celtic revival; and as the prestige of Greek and Latin learning slowly eroded in university, the desire to see its forms of reception redeployed for immediate political and literary ends proved irresistible. Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League attempted to seize the moment, knowing that a “national factor” might be best introduced into the curriculum by setting Irish on equal footing with Greek and Latin.¹⁶⁷

Practically speaking, the fear that the revival of Irish might lead to further “provincial isolation” and a lessening of interest in classics was unfounded.¹⁶⁸ Though the position of classics continued to decline, no clear evidence specifically links growth in the study of Irish to a decline in Greek and Latin. Nevertheless, twenty years later, when the British prime minister, David Lloyd George (1863–1945), appointed a committee to report on the status of classical studies in Britain and Ireland, the committee did not steer away from that “topic which has excited much controversy – the Gaelic Revival and the study of Irish in schools and Universities.”¹⁶⁹ Noting that knowledge of Irish had been mandated in

¹⁶⁴ Mahaffy (1909) 29.

¹⁶⁵ Mahaffy (1909) 29–30.

¹⁶⁶ Mahaffy (1909) 30.

¹⁶⁷ *Sessional Papers* 32 (1902) 313.

¹⁶⁸ Mahaffy (1899) 222.

¹⁶⁹ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 232.

1909 for matriculation at the National University of Ireland (NUI) and that its teaching was then “practically universal in Catholic schools,” the report (known as the Crewe Report) suggested that it could “be readily understood how” mandating Irish “has handicapped the study of Greek, and in girls’ schools even that of Latin.”¹⁷⁰ The growth of Irish notwithstanding, there was little doubt “the pendulum” was “swinging strongly against classical studies” across Irish universities “though Trinity College inherits a classical tradition as strong as that of Oxford or Cambridge.”¹⁷¹ Compulsory Greek had been abolished for enrollment at Trinity after 1903, and the “effect of this change” was reported as “startling.”¹⁷² The study of Greek had dramatically receded, the number of undergraduate students being examined falling from fifty-two in 1902 to four in 1920. Latin, too, was no longer obligatory for entrance, though all students were still required to pass responsions, or ‘Little-go’, in the language. Elsewhere, the committee reported, in the “modern Universities” where there was “naturally less tradition of classical study,” the Catholic Church had “strongly operated to preserve classical studies” for the training of clergy.¹⁷³ “Greek studies, and therefore Classics,” were becoming, the report noted, “specialised as a branch of clerical study, a process which” would, however, as the committee alleged, “inevitably cause injury to humanistic studies as a whole.”¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, at the National University, students of Greek were reputedly “not diminishing in quality or quantity.”¹⁷⁵ This was helped in some part by the efforts of Rev. Henry Martyn Browne, SJ (1853–1941), professor of Greek and prior to his appointment at the National University, the founder of the Classical

¹⁷⁰ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 232. Pressured by the Gaelic League, the NUI university senate narrowly passed a resolution in 1909 to require Irish for matriculation. As Aidan Doyle has noted, the establishment of an Irish-language requirement at NUI split support for the Gaelic League among Catholic clergy. “The university battle was fought out between Catholic priests. Roughly speaking, the older generation of priests and bishops, and many teaching orders like the Jesuits which ran fee-paying schools, were opposed to Irish, or at best lukewarm about it. Younger priests, and the Christian Brothers’ teaching order which catered for the children of the lower middle classes, favoured Irish.” Doyle (2015) 183–85.

¹⁷¹ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 233.

¹⁷² Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 233.

¹⁷³ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 234, 232.

¹⁷⁴ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 234.

¹⁷⁵ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 234.

Association of Ireland (as well as a successor to Gerard Manley Hopkins [1844–89] at University College, Dublin).¹⁷⁶ Though well aware of classics' diminishing presence within the university curriculum, Browne had grown accustomed to hearing "colleagues of other faculties, in law, in philosophy, in modern languages, in English literature, in Irish studies" pay tribute to "the immense debt which they owe to Classical history and literature."¹⁷⁷ "[T]hey have frequently to borrow from Classics the most vital truths which they have to communicate," he insisted, and thus eyed "with concern any tendency to depress Greek and Roman studies in our common University."¹⁷⁸ With that in mind, Browne sought to have classics "adapt itself, at whatever cost, to modern methods and ideas," for though classical education often claimed, "according to the highest and most representative authority, to be an essentially democratic method of mental training ... suited for all classes of the nation," Browne felt that it still "depended largely on class interests" suffused with the "spirit of narrow and even exclusive conservatism."¹⁷⁹ If its study were to survive, and perhaps claim something of a "wider horizon than that of belated tradition," it had to be brought "into line with all that is best in modern education, and all that is sane and progressive in modern life."¹⁸⁰ "Modern life has many complexities," he declared,

in politics, social intercourse, education, art, literature, religion – to mention a few not unimportant things. What we maintain is that in none of the problems, none of the interests of life, can men afford to lose sight of the storehouse bequeathed to them by the ancients. Not in philosophy and history alone, not in language and literature alone, not in art and religion alone – but in the complexus of everything which differentiates man from the brute creation, the voice of antiquity must be heard, and by antiquity we mean chiefly our own mental and moral forbears, the Greeks and Romans.¹⁸¹

To place "the healthful development of Classical teaching on modern, efficient, and democratic lines," Browne encouraged an expansive view of the field, one that did not give "exaggerated prominence to linguistic study" but included other disciplines such as archaeology, music,

¹⁷⁶ Stanford (1976) 65–66.

¹⁷⁷ Browne (1917) 144.

¹⁷⁸ Browne (1917) 144.

¹⁷⁹ Browne (1917) 154, 172, 145.

¹⁸⁰ Browne (1917) 157, 144.

¹⁸¹ Browne (1917) 149–50.

numismatics and art history as well as language and literature.¹⁸² For each “person who learns to read and write Latin and Greek fluently,” he argued, “one hundred could be fairly well versed in Greek and Roman literature by means of good translations, and one thousand could be familiarized with many salient facts about ancient life, and even interested in some of the great monuments which have come down to us.”¹⁸³

Although Browne’s efforts to “revivify the Classical learning in the twentieth century,” to “democratize Classical study” in the “educational struggle for existence,” had some success in Dublin – most especially through the establishment of the Classical Museum at University College in 1910 – the decline of classical education continued in Ireland as elsewhere on the British Isles.¹⁸⁴ Neither Yeats nor Joyce, it seems, could fairly be said to have been the beneficiaries of a “great Revival of Classical Learning” in Ireland (though Henry Browne did, in fact, instruct Joyce in Latin at University College, Dublin).¹⁸⁵ On the contrary, although both writers received some formal training in classical languages as students at school, their creative engagements with antiquity were developed not from fluency but rather from the half-read or “wounded” stance of being what Joyce once called a “shy guest at the feast of the world’s culture.”¹⁸⁶ Joyce wrote this woundedness into the *Bildung* of Stephen Dedalus, who in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1916) despondently reflects over the “pages of his timeworn Horace,” thinking himself “so poor a Latinist.”¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless the pages of Dedalus’ edition still “never felt cold to the touch.” Just as Stephen was attracted to the “dusky flyleaf” and “dusky verses” of a Roman poet whose “fragrant” writings appeared still “as though they had lain all those years in myrtle and lavender and vervain,” Joyce himself was transfixed by the ancient promise and powerful allure of classics.¹⁸⁸ In a similar manner, though Yeats experienced the presence of classics in “useless longing ... through

¹⁸² Browne (1917) 184, 156.

¹⁸³ Browne (1917) 183.

¹⁸⁴ Browne (1917) 1, 3. Still the prime minister’s committee believed there was “good ground for believing that [classics] will not be allowed to disappear,” even though “the study of Classics in the country is somewhat depressed.” Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 234. On the founding of the Classical Museum, see Haywood (2003).

¹⁸⁵ Browne (1917) 1. Sullivan (1957) 158–63. See also Fathers of the Society of Jesus, comp. (1930) 194–203.

¹⁸⁶ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 206.

¹⁸⁷ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 206.

¹⁸⁸ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 206.

the poor mechanism of translation,” the magnetism of classical antiquity prevailed over him as over other writers of the Literary Revival.¹⁸⁹ Yet while advocates of Revival were attracted to the prestige associated with classical learning, many deliberately eschewed the well-known mythologies of ancient Greece and Rome in their work, believing these had become “worn out and unmanageable” having “ceased to be a living tradition.”¹⁹⁰ Instead, the “resolute purpose” of Revival was, as Yeats explained in 1895, to bring Ireland’s “literary tradition to perfection” by utilizing the “unexhausted and inexhaustible mythology” of Gaelic folklore.¹⁹¹ In so doing revivalists felt they could “accentuate” in their work “what is at once Celtic and excellent in their nature, that they may be at last tongues of fire uttering the evangel of the Celtic peoples.”¹⁹² Preference was given therefore to stories and adaptations involving Celtic figures such as Niamh, Oisín, and Cúchuliann over classical heroes and heroines, whether Odysseus, Aeneas, Helen or Achilles. Yet this devotion was predicated on the notion that knowledge of Gaelic legends could provide a unique path to understanding, as the philologists Alfred Nutt and Kuno Meyer (1858–1919) put it, “the beliefs out of which the beliefs of the Greeks and the other European races arose.”¹⁹³ Thus, in returning Irish literature to Celtic sources, writers saw themselves as legitimizing a new ‘vernacular classics’ for Ireland, linking ‘Anglo-Irish’ work genealogically with the sources of classical civilization. For Yeats, however, returning straightway to Irish legend was a complicated matter. With little knowledge of Irish, his earliest efforts to nationalize an Irish classics would be mediated not by direct translation from Gaelic texts but through the complex prism of re-stylizing and revising his English, sometimes through retranslation (or double translation) or through the absorption of recent English receptions of classics. Yeats’ belief that Ireland could, in fact, have “a national literature which would be written to a very great extent in English” was thought by some advocates of Gaelic revival to be a thoroughly “heretical idea ... that a country with a distinct history, distinct traditions, and distinct ideals can possess a national literature in another language ... let them not vex our ears by calling their writings Irish and national.”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, as discussed

¹⁸⁹ Yeats *CW3* (1999) 76. See pp. 7–8 in this Introduction.

¹⁹⁰ Yeats, “The Message of the Folk-lore” (August 1893) in Yeats *CW9* (2004) 210.

¹⁹¹ Yeats, “Irish National Literature, III” (September 1895) in Yeats *CW9* (2004) 287, 281.

¹⁹² Yeats *CW9* (2004) 287.

¹⁹³ Yeats, “Celtic Beliefs about the Soul” (September 1898) cited in Yeats *CW9* (2004) 416.

¹⁹⁴ Yeats, as quoted in “Notes,” *An Claidheamh Soluis* 1.13 (June 10, 1899) 200. For this reason, it was sometimes said that the “so-called Irish Literary movement” championed by Yeats was “a

throughout Chapter 1, Yeats pushed ahead, hoping to forge an ‘Irish Homer’ in a distinctively ‘hibernized’ form of un-English. However, while he ostensibly set out to blend Irish and English into a new hybrid idiom, an idiom that could persuasively translate a nationalized vision of the Irish past, his early attempts to elevate an ‘Irish Homer’ moved by the way of misdirection. Recent efforts by English-born poets, efforts that ‘dislocated’ conventional idioms of English with anglicized imitations of ancient Greek, had long attracted his interest, and their influence would prove critical. In this way Romantic and Victorian receptions of classical antiquity exerted more pressure on Yeats’ earliest distillation of a ‘Celtic’ style than any substantive fusion with Irish.

The tense, politicized space occupied by classics within the Literary Revival fomented further artistic engagements as well, some of which can be counted among the most prominent works of Irish modernism. These often became, stylistically speaking, more experimental and at the same time increasingly skeptical of attempts to nationalize an ‘Irish classics’ for broad public consumption. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book detail, at length, two divergent forms of resistance to this work of recentering the classics across the *oeuvre* of Yeats and Joyce – in, respectively, their encounters with Sophocles and with Homer. Yeats – frustrated with the management of the Abbey Theatre and incendiary forms of nationalist agitation – became wary of his early idealism. As he did so, Yeats also began to draw on allusions to ancient Greek literature with greater frequency, employing images of classical antiquity, often with the intention of interrogating the very failures he associated with the Revival’s once “heroic dream.”¹⁹⁵ “Ah, that Time could touch a form,” he lamented in 1910, “That could show what Homer’s age / Bred to be a hero’s wage.”¹⁹⁶ Despite his own effort, time, he felt, had not touched Irish literature in Homeric fashion. Even though a powerful vision of Homer’s Helen still appeared before him, her “nobleness made simple as a fire,” her “beauty like a tightened bow” was then “not natural in an age like this, / Being high and solitary and most stern.”¹⁹⁷ No such vision could instantiate what he once sought for Ireland: the striving for a classical ideal had only roiled Irish society with division and class warfare among

hindrance and not a help to a genuine revival.” “Notes,” *An Claidheamh Soluis* 1.13 (June 10, 1899) 200.

¹⁹⁵ Yeats, “A Woman Homer Sung,” in Yeats *VE* (1987) 255.

¹⁹⁶ Yeats, “Peace,” in Yeats *VE* (1987) 258.

¹⁹⁷ Yeats, “No Second Troy,” in Yeats *VE* (1987) 256, 257. See Chapter 2, pp. 88–91, Chapter 3, pp. 135–38, and the Conclusion, pp. 248–50.

“ignorant men.”¹⁹⁸ “Why,” he exclaimed, “what could she have done, being what she is? / Was there another Troy for her to burn?”¹⁹⁹ In this context of growing distrust Yeats turned his attention to Sophocles – to retranslating his Victorian shape even as he himself was intent on transforming his own poetic mask with “prose directness” and “hard light.”²⁰⁰

Though Joyce’s critique of revivalism did not draw out, by contrast, the same bitterness, he remained fascinated by the Revival’s penchant to variously misalign the ‘ancients’ (Homer, perhaps, above all) to suit present circumstances. Through his own deliberate mistranslations of classical parallels in both *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses*, he too misaligned the ancient and the modern to satirize nationalist appropriations of Greek antiquity. A notable feature of Joyce’s mistranslations, however, is the different approach he took to Latin and Greek. Latin, still heavy with an ecclesial odor of atonement and purgation – its discipline Joyce knew well from his time at Clongowes Wood College and Belvedere College – was not easily turned to greater expressions of artistic freedom and eccentricity.²⁰¹ In *Portrait’s* first chapter Father Arnall’s drilling of Latin declensions provides the setting for false accusation and the pandying of Stephen Dedalus, the “[I]azy, little schemer” who is “not writing like the others.”²⁰² As Leah Flack notes, the study of Latin in this episode

becomes an occasion for the enactment of discipline, control, and punishment as a corrective force against sexual transgression. Knowledge of Latin grammar theoretically offers the means for students to demonstrate submission and obedience to the authority of the priest/Latin teacher and the strictly policed heteronormative code he enforces.²⁰³

Yet, although Latin promised conformity and punishment, ancient Greek was altogether more enigmatic for Joyce – a force he would associate with Dedalus’ particular sense of freedom and destiny. On hearing its distant call, hearing his own name playfully retranslated, or mistranslated in Greek, Stephen Dedalus perceives not just the schoolboy ridicule of his

¹⁹⁸ Yeats *VE* (1987) 256.

¹⁹⁹ Yeats *VE* (1987) 257.

²⁰⁰ Pound (1914) 66, 67.

²⁰¹ The view that learning classical languages at school was socially coded to reinforce institutional conformity, and thereby curb outbursts of individual expression, was not a new phenomenon in Joyce’s novel but a trope that recurred across Victorian fiction, especially in the work of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. On this point, see Haynes (2013) 421–30.

²⁰² Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 70.

²⁰³ Flack (2020) 40.

classmates but his own “strange name” in a new light, “Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!”²⁰⁴ And it is in the eccentric uttering of this name – in its far-reaching idiosyncratic Greek – that Stephen begins to envision a life beyond the “heaps of dead language” in Dublin, beyond the nets of “nationality, language, religion” that bore the strong mark of the city’s most dominant tongues: English, Irish and Latin.²⁰⁵ The appearance of distorted Greek thus becomes in *Portrait* a “prophecy” whose inscrutable “wild spirit” pushes Dedalus further towards rejecting the “cerements” of the present – “the fear that he had walked in night and day, the incertitude that had ringed him round, the shame that had abased him within and without” – and so to rise “from the grave of boyhood” to “the call of life to his soul.”²⁰⁶ That that call comes not in Latin, not in Irish nor in English, but in Greek, is significant. It was

not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that called him to the pale service of the altar. An instant of wild flight had delivered him ... Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable.²⁰⁷

Though Joyce ‘grecified’ the unveiling of Dedalus’ ‘authentic’ self, he still remained wary of the melodrama with which he had packaged the “Hellenic ring” of Stephen’s name.²⁰⁸ To represent the presence of ancient Greek as though it were, or could be, an unmolested site of imaginative freedom, of individual ambition in Dublin, was, he knew, terribly naive, menaced as receptions of ancient Greece were by various competing, contemporary claims on its authority and prestige. Thus, in the opening moments of *Ulysses*, Joyce openly subverted the romance he had attached to Stephen’s ‘Greek’ name, further distorting his emerging vision of Homeric reception. Ruminating again over Stephen’s “absurd name,” Joyce overwrote its epiphanic character with the mocking jibes of Malachi ‘Buck’ Mulligan:

– The mockery of it! he said gaily. Your absurd name, an ancient Greek!
... Buck Mulligan’s gay voice went on.

²⁰⁴ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 195, 194.

²⁰⁵ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 205, 230.

²⁰⁶ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 195, 196, 195.

²⁰⁷ Joyce *Portrait* (1993) 195–96.

²⁰⁸ Joyce *Ulysses* (1986) 4 (1.42).

– My name is absurd too: Malachi Mulligan, two dactyls. But it has a Hellenic ring, hasn't it? Tripping and sunny like the buck himself. We must go to Athens. Will you come if I can get the aunt to fork out twenty quid?²⁰⁹

The 'authentic' call of destiny that Dedalus had once heard in Greek is rendered farcical by Mulligan, who joins the false assurance of its classical correspondence to the Hellenized absurdity of his own "Malachi Mulligan, two dactyls," a name whose trivial metrical equivalence with the dominant quantitative unit of Homeric verse possesses no claim on romance or artistic authenticity. Instead, Mulligan's pseudo-Hellenic name betrays a habit of forcibly borrowing allusions from Greek antiquity for clearly self-serving ends. Skeptical that claims to a Hellenic or classical value were little more than this, Joyce came to see in Greek not an untrammelled pathway to self-discovery, or national self-invention, but the specter of error, delusion and misinterpretation. Throughout *Ulysses* he therefore continually 'mistranslated' the Hellenic correspondences at work in the novel, juxtaposing stylized forgeries of 'authentic originals' in a comic palimpsest. Both the book's characters and its various styles are empowered and yet conditioned by the misaligned parallels Joyce drew from the literatures of Greece and Rome.

In the world beyond Ireland, those striving to find alternative forms of 'classical' value in Celtic language and civilization drew critical inspiration from the example set by Yeats and other advocates of Ireland's Literary Revival. Further modes of revival and renaissance in both Scotland and Wales used the Irish experience to make claims on Lallans, Highland Gaelic and Welsh as potential means for national self-determination as well as literary experimentation. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, support in Scotland for the revival of Gaelic languages was not so broad as it had been in Ireland. For that reason, the institutional structures associated with classical learning were never so dramatically challenged by movements for Celtic revival there. According to the "necessarily imperfect sketch" drawn from the Crewe Report, the study of classics occupied a less prominent position in Scotland, Latin and Greek having "never enjoyed anything that can be called a privileged position in Scotland, except, perhaps, for a short time in the nineteenth century."²¹⁰ That lack of privilege meant that "no great classical tradition such as exists in England" had

²⁰⁹ Joyce *Ulysses* (1986) 3–4 (1.34, 40–43).

²¹⁰ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 208.

yet been forged, and by 1892 Scottish universities had already begun to liberalize requirements in classics, making Greek and Latin “alternatives for graduation in Arts, instead of both being compulsory.”²¹¹ Thus Scotland’s most gifted students in classics, those able to “reach the Scholarship standard of Oxford and Cambridge,” were compelled to attend English universities rather than enroll in weaker programs closer to home.²¹² The transfer of these students had lamentably served to “accentuate class distinctions” in Scotland, a “great misfortune,” the committee warned, for “if classical education were to become associated with a particular social class,” it “would surely violate the best Scottish tradition.”²¹³ As the committee saw it, the learning of Latin and Greek possessed a “great and almost irreplaceable value” precisely because of its power to advance the spread of English across Scottish society: classical studies remained a critical “means of promoting the proper use of the English language both in speech and writing by all classes of the community.”²¹⁴

Though links in Scotland between nationalist agitation and classical learning appeared less palpable than in Ireland, advocates of Scottish Gaelic were both moved by the disputes that had embroiled Trinity College, Dublin, and inspired by the Gaelic League’s spirited defense of Irish as ‘classical’. Not long after the public controversy between Atkinson, Mahaffy and Hyde unfolded, members of the advocacy group *An Comunn Gàidhealach* (first established in 1891) began to restructure their promotion of Scottish Gaelic, modeling their “movement, like that of the Gaelic League, on a less academic and more popular basis.”²¹⁵ However, as the longtime supporter of Scottish Home Rule Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr (1869–1960) observed, the “difficulty in Scotland” lay in persuading “people that this is a serious movement,” for there was then “little or no vitality in her language movement, and even less conduct.”²¹⁶ Compared with the agitation for Gaelic in Ireland, there was “far too

²¹¹ The effect of this liberalization was reputedly “disastrous”: once there stood “a large number of pass men who, without being Greek scholars, had a competent knowledge of Greek. Students of this type now tend to take subjects which they believe to be easier.” This resulted in lessening the “general influence of Greek culture in University education.” Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 208, 219, 220.

²¹² Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 219.

²¹³ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 219, 222.

²¹⁴ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 11–12.

²¹⁵ “Notes,” *An Claidheamh Soluis* 1.31 (October 14, 1899) 488.

²¹⁶ Erskine (1904a) 202, 204.

prevalent a disposition,” he noted, “to regard the language movement as something that may be played with – as a hobby suitable for dull winter evenings, or as an excuse for ‘social gatherings’ at which tea and gossip (for the most part in English) may be indulged in.”²¹⁷ However, on seeing the recent controversy unfold in Dublin, watching as the “rank and file” Irish became “thoroughly persuaded” that their “agitation is a *political one*,” Erskine believed that Scotland could take its “thought from the Irish” and find the motivation necessary to “shake off the sloth and indifference of nigh a couple of centuries, and give our kinsmen across the Moyle measure for measure.”²¹⁸ Intent on drawing “the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland” together to “advance objects and aspirations held in common,” Erskine proposed the creation of a “great Gaelic-speaking Confederacy of Nations”: the “Gaels of Scotland and the Gaels of Ireland” were on the cusp, he argued,

of re-establishing the Gaelic tradition, of rejoining and carrying on the long-disconnected threads of our common story, of making the Gaelic cause the cause of Alba at large (as once it was), of replanting our flag upon the ruins of the Lowland policy, of marching shoulder to shoulder in serried and irresistible array towards the realisation of our great national ambition.²¹⁹

Echoing the case Douglas Hyde had made before the Commissions of 1899 and 1902, Erskine insisted on the “compulsory teaching of Gaelic” in all Scottish schools, for only by resuscitating and renewing “the old Scots tongue as the national language of the whole of Scotland,” he argued, could “the old artificial barrier between ‘Highlands’ and ‘Lowlands’” be erased.²²⁰ As Erskine saw it, the fragmented state of Scotland’s Celtic languages – the separation between Lallans and Highland Gaelic – remained a central obstacle to greater Scottish political unity. The vernacular spoken across the Lowlands had long since given up any claim to a Gaelic essence, and as such, Lallans had become a site of pervasive English incursion into Scottish culture, its reputedly literary tradition being overrun with the “national measures of the Saxon power.”²²¹ “Of old,” Lowlanders

²¹⁷ Erskine (1904a) 202.

²¹⁸ Erskine (1904a) 202, 205, 206.

²¹⁹ Erskine (1906) 11, 25.

²²⁰ Erskine (1908) 238.

²²¹ Erskine (1906) 20.

spoke the Gaelic Language; now their pride is in the purity of their English – particularly in a certain northeasterly town! In olden days, they fought *against* the Gall and the Sassenach to preserve their *own* independence. In modern days they fought *for* the Sassenach to put down nationalities struggling for *their* independence.²²²

Despite Erskine's belief that Scottish Gaelic was the country's rightful national language, his views were not widely embraced or accepted. His defense of the language was, in addition, not helped by his desire to align a Scottish Gaelic revival with the reconversion of Scotland from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism.²²³ "Nearly every great evil, religious, political, social and commercial, which Alba labours under," he once claimed,

owes its existence, or its continuance, to Protestantism ... Protestantism robbed Scotland of her independence. Protestantism introduced the English influence which is hostile to our language, manners and customs ... Scratch a Scots Protestant and you will find him little better than an Englishman; scratch an Englishman and you will soon find that with him Protestant ascendancy and Englishism mean the same thing – namely, Anglo-Saxon ascendancy.²²⁴

Although Erskine's joining of the Gaelic revival to "religious propaganda" was not broadly supported by those inclined to advance the cause of Scottish independence, many nationalists nonetheless saw the separation, the fragmentary condition of languages in Scotland, as a serious threat to any developing sense of nationhood and the establishment of an independent literature in Scotland.²²⁵ As Hugh MacDiarmid reiterated two decades later, Scotland's "sense of continuity and tradition" could be rediscovered by overcoming that separation of its languages, "by 'connecting up' again with our lost Gaelic culture. This is the background to which we must return," he declared, "if we are ever to establish a Scottish classical culture."²²⁶ For MacDiarmid, however, Scotland's

²²² C. M. P. (1908) 380.

²²³ Erskine placed at the front of the first issue of *Guth Na Bliadhna* an essay on "The Church and the Highlands," in which he reported that the "present position of the Church in Scotland ... should inspire a Catholic with hope," while adding that "Protestantism and all that it implies, in a civil as well as in a religious way, has been but an unprofitable and melancholy experiment." Erskine (1904b) 1, 4.

²²⁴ Erskine (1905b) 303–304.

²²⁵ Erskine (1905a) 105.

²²⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, "Scottish Gaelic Policy," *The Pictish Review* 1.2 (December 1927) in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 50.

diversity of language offered promise and peril, for to articulate the genius of the nation – its indisputably classical character he thought – one had to embrace the essential “diversity-in-unity” of Scotland’s languages, both Lallans and Scottish Gaelic.²²⁷ Repulsed by the “false conception of Scottish Gaelic character,” namely the “popular belief” that “the Highlander, a dreamer and a poet, a mystic and a romantic” was to be “contrasted with the shrewd, keen, pushing, practical Lowlander,” MacDiarmid saw his vision confirmed by the historian Anna A. W. Ramsay whose work *Challenge to the Highlander* (1933) had exposed the “strange unreality” of this critical distinction.²²⁸

Nothing could be more remote from the facts of everyday life, as it appeared in the pages of history. The Highlander had never produced any great poetry or any great art to speak of; and far from being given to dreams, he seemed to be entirely concerned with the more practical aspects of life; money and the ownership of land appeared to be his dominant passions. It has been pointed out, and with perfect truth, that almost every Highland feud took its rise originally from a quarrel about the possession of land. The Highlander excelled in practical work: he made a good colonist, pioneer, soldier, scientist, engineer. But for poetry, romance, idealism – one must go to the Lowlands.²²⁹

Thus it would be by synthetic experiment, by fusing together Highland Gaelic and Scots Vernacular, that Hugh MacDiarmid would attempt to recast this distinction and forge “a new classicism.”²³⁰ As he wrote in 1923, the coming of a renaissance in Scottish writing demanded more invention and experimentation, not nostalgia-driven forms of revival and preservation:

Our interest, therefore, should centre not so much in what has been done in the Doric as in what has not but may be done in it. No literature can rest on its laurels.

We lack the courage to be where we are,
We love too much to travel on old roads,
To triumph on old fields; we love too much
To consecrate the magic of dead things.²³¹

²²⁷ C. M. Grieve, “Introducing ‘Hugh M’Diarmid,’” *The Scottish Chapbook* (August 1922) in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 10.

²²⁸ MacDiarmid (1968) 306; Ramsay (1933) vii.

²²⁹ Ramsay (1933) vii–viii.

²³⁰ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74, 80.

²³¹ MacDiarmid, “A Theory of Scots Letters,” *The Scottish Chapbook* 1.7–9 (February–April 1923) in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 20.

Although the “false Highland-Lowland distinction” had often obstructed efforts to compel a greater sense of national unity, the crisis it presented enmeshed northern nationalism in the ‘problem’ of Scotland’s many languages, drawing the history of Scottish classical receptions together with MacDiarmid’s admiration for the European avant-garde.²³² Yet, by the early 1930s, as MacDiarmid became increasingly irritated with the lack of fervor he saw among more politically fashionable forms of Scottish nationalism, he began to turn from his heteroglossic ‘synthetic Scots’. Estranged from his country’s ‘popular mind’, he redirected his desire for a ‘new classicism’ to more ambitious heights, insisting on a polyglossic vision of poetry as world language.²³³ However, in so doing, MacDiarmid slowly bled his distinctive sense of Scottish classicism of its more substantive links with the literatures of Greece and Rome. Attracted by the “anthologizing of cultures and cultural fragments” prevalent among his modernist contemporaries, MacDiarmid made his idiom progressively more multilingual throughout the 1930s, seeking to articulate “the ever-expanding / And accelerating consciousness Březina has sung so nobly, / *Sdrucciola* – swift and utterly unEnglish / Songs like the transition from the *ùrlar* to the *crunluath*.”²³⁴ As he did so, his vision of reception evolved too, foregrounding a highly eccentric form of synthetic English, a communist ‘global classics’. Though MacDiarmid, self-preening and brash, often felt his new work was a vision of the ‘world literature’ to come, its critical fate proved far less persuasive. His work became ideologically idiosyncratic and lexically hermetic, his new “Doric” being for many an idiom without border or tribe – perhaps even “no dialect in particular.”²³⁵

Although it was believed that a revival of Irish Gaelic in Ireland might crowd out the study of classics – a notion that even the Prime Minister’s Committee on Classics reinforced in 1921 – the matter of “Celtic, in relation to Classical, Studies” as it existed in Wales was handled in an altogether different fashion.²³⁶ In Wales, the committee suggested, the involvement of classics in the development of modern Welsh literature

²³² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 51. On the Doric, see Chapter 5, p. 211n104.

²³³ On learnedness, classics, and the modernist aesthetic, see Wray (2019) 419–43.

²³⁴ Crawford (2000) 259. MacDiarmid, “The Kind of Poetry I Want,” in MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 1007. The italicized words in Scottish Gaelic are words for time signatures in pipe music.

²³⁵ MacDiarmid under the pseudonym, J. G. Outterstone Buglass, “Arne Garborg, Mr Joyce, and Mr M’Diarmid” (September 1924) in MacDiarmid *RTI* (1996) 237.

²³⁶ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 247.

had been “more vital,” for its “influence” had come at a time “of special moment and importance” for the country, a time when “Welsh scholars” had for “some years” been engaged in “a continuous movement towards the revival of a national literature.”²³⁷ During the final thirty years of the nineteenth century, education in Wales had undergone a dramatic reformation marked by a rising institutional interest in Welsh language and literature. This growth of interest in the ‘native’ ran parallel to the broad expansion of classical education both in secondary schools and at universities in Wales.²³⁸ As Ceri Davies has observed, the “network of ‘county’ schools” in Wales, officially systemized by the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889, were required to include in their curriculum “instruction in Latin, Greek, the Welsh and English language and literature” as well as other “modern languages, mathematics, natural and applied science.”²³⁹ The codification of curriculum and spread of new educational opportunity across Wales also began to transform regional university life. While the federated University of Wales was not founded by Royal Charter until 1893, its three constituent colleges had been established at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff between 1872 and 1881, and scholars of both Greek and Latin played a critical role early on in cementing the academic reputation of Welsh higher education – ensuring that the colleges of Wales would contribute to “the cultural life of their communities.”²⁴⁰ However, even as the establishment of the “University of Wales and the growth of intermediate schools appeared to augur well for the languages of antiquity,” the precise nature of the wider contributions that these institutions were making to Welsh-speaking communities was disputed.²⁴¹ Indeed, the value of the Welsh tongue itself still seemed highly contestable not only with respect to Greek and Latin but perhaps, most controversially, with respect to English. For many, both the county grammar schools and the newly established colleges in Wales were seen as further “instruments” of Anglicization directed against Welsh-speaking areas.²⁴² Modeled on their

²³⁷ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 248.

²³⁸ On the importance of classics for measuring “the tensions of a people” then beginning to “come to terms with the claims of two languages on their allegiance,” see Davies (2009) 35–47, as well as Davies (1995) 115–55.

²³⁹ Davies (1995) 116; The Welsh Intermediate Education Act (1889) can be accessed at: www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/acts/1889-welsh-intermediate-education-act.html.

²⁴⁰ Davies (1995) 117. On the role of classics in the early history of the University of Wales, see Ellis (1972) 31–41, as well as J. Gwynn Williams (1985) 130–32.

²⁴¹ J. Gwynn Williams (1985) 130.

²⁴² Davies (1995) 118.

institutional counterparts in England, what these schools were thought to offer was not the advancement of Welsh cultural interests but only a means rather – a worldly way – to further alienate the ‘native’ Welsh from their local language and civilization. “Doubtless,” Davies suggests,

many teachers of Latin, false imitators of the traditions of the English public schools, behaved in a contemptuous way towards Welsh. D. Tecwyn Lloyd drew a brilliant portrait of his Latin master in Bala in the 1920s, always ‘stubbornly English’, without a word of Welsh heard from his lips, although he was brought up a Welsh-speaker in Penllyn.²⁴³

Fearing that the reforms in Welsh education might sow only further division and a deepening resentment towards the native language, advocates of Welsh Home Rule – principally members of the *Cymru Fydd*, the Young Wales movement founded by T. E. Ellis (1859–99) in 1886, and later led by David Lloyd George – vowed to counter the “strong anti-national tendencies” present in Welsh schools.²⁴⁴ Although “astonishing strides” had been made on behalf of the native language and literature, its “educational interests” had yet to be pushed forward “to the highest possible degree.”²⁴⁵ Outlining a vision for Wales in the 1895 manifesto *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd*, Young Wales insisted that it was essential for the Welsh language to be “intelligently taught and made a medium of instruction in our schools.”²⁴⁶ No Welsh university ought, they argued, be “other than national in its character and policy,” for otherwise Wales would then have merely a “grotesque anomaly” for a university, a “weak imitation of Oxford, Cambridge, or London” copying “too closely” English curricula and failing to give “an honoured place” in its own matriculation syllabus to “Welsh ideals ... our language, literature and history.”²⁴⁷ Welsh, as they saw it, was not to be “regarded as a foreign language” but a required language like Latin: essential to the curriculum and not to be “placed amongst the optional subjects with Hebrew, Greek, French and German.”²⁴⁸ Encouragement of its study was bound to improve not only “education *in excelsis*,” but the fortunes of Welsh literature at large.²⁴⁹ For though the people of Wales had been “endowed with natural aptitude for writing and speaking,” though there had been

²⁴³ Davies (1995) 118.

²⁴⁴ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd, or The National Movement in Wales*, Carnarvon: Welsh National Press Company (1895) 23.

²⁴⁵ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 23, 19, 22.

²⁴⁶ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 22.

²⁴⁷ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 25.

²⁴⁸ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 27, 26.

²⁴⁹ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 28.

recently a “revival of artistic taste in Wales,” many of the country’s “best poets and preachers” remained at that time “men who have risen from the ranks of the people, and who might be described as almost entirely self-taught.”²⁵⁰

In 1921 the Prime Minister’s Committee on Classics also observed the growth of interest in Welsh literature and insisted that its revival seemed to show “every sign of further progress in the future.”²⁵¹ However, the committee also suggested that Welsh literature had yet to “attain its full development,” for new writing in the language had not explicitly learned, “like other western literature,” to “base itself largely on the Classics,” to learn what the committee called “the same lesson which England, France, and Italy studied at the Renaissance.”²⁵² Moreover, by the time the Crewe Report was issued, the state of classical studies in Wales had diminished by some degree, for “the present position of Latin in the Welsh educational system” was noted as “satisfactory” while the status of Greek seemed far worse, indeed even “precarious in the extreme.”²⁵³ Nevertheless, the committee felt that the Welsh people still possessed “greater aptitude and desire” for the study of ancient languages, a preparation made possible by their own “bardic tradition” and the “keen literary spirit” kept alive by the modern Eisteddfod.²⁵⁴

A Welshman bred in this tradition takes in language for its own sake a delight which is rare among other peoples, and is therefore, more likely to be alive to the attractions of the classical languages, and particularly Greek, with which his own has noteworthy similarities. Where the pupils are Welsh-speaking, we would take full advantage of this fact.²⁵⁵

Thus while the contemporary “co-existence in Wales of two-home languages,” English and Welsh, had resulted in curricular competition at intermediate schools and at university, with less time being given to the study of other languages, the committee’s report observed the benefits of

²⁵⁰ A Celt, *Cymru Fydd Gymru Rydd* 29.

²⁵¹ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 248.

²⁵² Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 248–49.

²⁵³ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 241.

²⁵⁴ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 244, 245.

²⁵⁵ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 245.

bilingualism: “where Welsh was taught ... an able pupil who already spoke both Welsh and English was at an advantage when he began Latin and particularly when he began Greek.”²⁵⁶ The native tongue, it seemed, offered suitable preparation from which one could begin instruction in the classics, so much so that the committee suggested it was best that “the Welsh boy ... not be taught to pronounce Greek after the traditional English fashion when his own Welsh instincts would in some respects bring him nearer to what we believe to be the original pronunciation.”²⁵⁷ Thus, despite the then “deplorable” condition of Greek in secondary schools, the committee remained convinced that the “genius of the Welsh people, its love of beauty and its keen sense of scholarship” were “pledges that the study of the Classics, if duly encouraged and supported, will permeate the whole course of its literature, and through this will enhance its contribution to the civilisation of western Europe.”²⁵⁸

The committee’s willingness to privilege the apparent revival of Welsh – a privilege their report denied to other Celtic language movements in both Ireland and Scotland – lay in what the committee saw as the “close connexion between the Welsh language and the languages of Greece and Rome.”²⁵⁹ For those sympathetic to Welsh nationalism and Home Rule, this “close connexion” was not merely a linguistic reality but a historical fact with contemporary political consequences: for even though no Romance language had ever achieved dominance on the British Isles, Welsh language and culture had taken on, it was thought, much of the broad and “many-sided influence” that the Romans had left during their ancient occupation of Britain from roughly AD 43 to 410.²⁶⁰ As the historian Owen Morgan Edwards (1858–1920) claimed, whatever the state of Welsh education in classics was, the “persistence of Rome” could still be felt in contemporary Wales, not simply “in its political thought” but “in its language, and in its literature” as well.²⁶¹ Nationalist enthusiasm for claiming a classical inheritance in Wales had roots in the Welsh language

²⁵⁶ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 241.

²⁵⁷ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 245.

²⁵⁸ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 242, 249.

²⁵⁹ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 249.

²⁶⁰ Committee to Inquire into the Position of Classics in the Educational System of the United Kingdom (1921) 249, 235.

²⁶¹ Edwards (1901) 24, 26.

movements of the nineteenth century, movements that drew strength not only from the Victorian expansion of classical education in Wales but from the “explosive rise of nonconformity” as well.²⁶² These forces helped precipitate a world wherein the Methodist educator Rev. Lewis Edwards (1809–87) would insist that contemporary writers of Welsh “demonstrate the possibilities of doing in Welsh what English translators of the classics had been doing since the days of Dryden and Pope.”²⁶³ Welsh nationalists of the 1920s – principally Saunders Lewis, Lewis Valentine (1893–1986) and H. R. Jones (1894–1930) – were eager, however, to exploit classics to even greater political advantage, and upon establishing *Plaid Cymru* at the Eisteddfod of 1925, they seized on the alleged likeness of the Roman and the Welsh to shape a new right-wing, agrarian vision of Welsh-Wales ideology. Believing the country’s languages, literature and culture had to be kept from becoming “provincial and unimportant,” Saunders Lewis set the Roman colonization of Wales as the historical turning point in a movement for Welsh self-determination and greater national recognition.²⁶⁴ As the nationalist historian A. W. Wade-Evans (1875–1964) later put it, there was no “uncertainty” as to “when Welsh national life begins”: the people of Wales first understood themselves to be Welsh when as “*flii Romanorum*, sons of the Romans, of the stock of Troy,” they “tumbled to it in their Roman surroundings.”²⁶⁵ For Lewis the reputedly ‘classical presence’ that remained in Wales – its essential *Romanitas* – could be used not just to encourage greater study of the ‘native’ at schools and universities but as an explicitly conservative ideological weapon; it could defend Wales’ “traditional social life” against the encroachments and economic debasement brought on by the “extension of English ... everywhere.”²⁶⁶ Welsh remained worthy of preservation and promotion, as it alone was, he once defiantly declared, “the direct heir in the British Isles of the literary discipline of classical Greece and Rome.”²⁶⁷ Within this strident political, linguistic and historical fabric, David Jones’ polyglot experiments – specifically those that emerged in the 1952 poem *The Anthemata* – began to take shape. In Chapter 4 of this book I examine the nature of these experiments within the wider reception of *Romanitas*

²⁶² Morgan (1971) 156.

²⁶³ Davies (2009) 41. See also Davies (1995) 111–14.

²⁶⁴ Lewis (1930) 4.

²⁶⁵ Wade-Evans (1950) 1.

²⁶⁶ Lewis, “The Caernarfon Court Speech (13th October 1936),” in Lewis (1973) 115; Lewis (1939) 10. For further discussion of Lewis (1939), see Chapter 4, pp. 164–67.

²⁶⁷ Lewis (1973) 115.

in Wales at this time. Although David Jones felt at times a certain sympathy for the nationalism espoused by Saunders Lewis and *Plaid Cymru*, he struggled to define in his work the *ingenium* left by Rome in Wales. No literature or politics bent on achieving greater linguistic or cultural purity could be authenticated by classical invocation, he felt, for the persistence of Romanity had not provoked a purity – a “predecessor culture” worthy of preservation in Wales – but instead a profound cultural hybridity born from complex networks of linguistic exchange across time.²⁶⁸ Rather than build from a foundation of Welsh-Wales purism, Jones envisioned a stratigraphic *lingua macaronica* for his work, one that cross-fertilized his English with polyglot intromissions from Wales’ *immensa tessitura*, a “vast fabric” of foreign cultural deposits drawn from across its history.²⁶⁹ Drawing on recent historiographical work on Roman Britain, Jones represented *Romanitas* as a transformative force, one whose metamorphosis had transcended, not eradicated, the “purely ‘natural’ bonds” of race, language and religion.²⁷⁰

Across Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as the impulse to employ receptions of classical antiquity became a means to promote nationalist interests and the revival of Gaelic and Brythonic language, the field of contemporaneous literature composed in English in these countries was sown with seeds of foreign linguistic and cultural interference. These seeds sometimes flowered creatively, the allying of the Celtic and the classical being used to revolt against the “ascendancy” of English in Irish and British literature – most notably in, among others, the work of Yeats, Joyce, Jones and MacDiarmid.²⁷¹ Yet, though these authors emerged from a fraught context in which allusions to the ancients carried a powerful political charge and many-sided reception, their writing did not take on political manipulations of classical antiquity in a naive or conventional fashion. At only seventeen years of age, James Joyce had already intimated the contested space that classics then occupied in the literature and politics of the period. Thinking it time to stop paying homage to rigid presentations of the classical, Joyce boldly struck out against the pervasive orthodoxy of contemporary Irish literati when discussing modern drama at University College, Dublin, in January 1900. He insisted then that the “conditions of the Attic stage,” that “syllabus of

²⁶⁸ On the allure of “predecessor culture,” see MacIntyre (2007) 36–50.

²⁶⁹ “*Unimmensa tessitura*,” a term taken from Joyce’s “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” (1907) in Joyce *CWJ* (1989) 165. See Chapter 2, pp. 91–97.

²⁷⁰ Cochrane (1940) 73.

²⁷¹ See MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 61–80. See Chapter 5, pp. 198–215.

greenroom proprieties and cautions” carried down from one generation to the next in Europe, were in fact no longer useful for the present, having been “foolishly set up as the canons of dramatic art, in all lands.”²⁷² Since the formal establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre in early 1899, Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn had been encouraging the emulation of Attic drama, hoping to show that modern Dublin was “not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented” but in fact “the home of an ancient idealism.”²⁷³ Yet Joyce questioned their approach, insisting that, while “the Greeks handed down a code of laws,” further generations had “with purblind wisdom” falsely advanced these ‘ideal’ ancient conventions “to the dignity of inspired pronouncements.”²⁷⁴ “It may be a vulgarism, but it is literal truth to say,” he argued, “that Greek drama is played out. For good or bad it has done its work, which, if wrought in gold, was not upon lasting pillars.”²⁷⁵ The reputedly uncritical reception of the Greeks prevalent on the Dublin literary scene roused Joyce’s wit, and slowly he turned his antipathy for that enthusiasm towards creative endeavor. That antipathy abounded in the self-consciously stylized pell-mell of the *Odyssey* enacted throughout *Ulysses* (1922), where the “continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” openly mocked the classical correspondences Joyce had experienced in the writings of Yeats and other advocates of Revival;²⁷⁶ and as he and Yeats began, so others followed. David Jones and Hugh MacDiarmid possessed nothing close to fluency in ancient Greek, Latin, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic, but both – in part by looking back to the language politics and stylistic achievements of the Irish Literary Revival – began to envision their own ways of bringing the foreign pressures of a ‘classical imaginary’ into further expressions of Celtic modernism in Wales and Scotland.

²⁷² Joyce, “Drama and Life” (1900) in Joyce *CWJF* (1989) 39.

²⁷³ Gregory (1913) 9.

²⁷⁴ Joyce *CWJF* (1989) 39.

²⁷⁵ Joyce *CWJF* (1989) 39.

²⁷⁶ Eliot (1923) 483.