

Abstract

This chapter provides a contextualized overview of the contents of the book *Classics and Irish Politics: 1916–2016*. Rather than summarizing each chapter in order of appearance and according to the subsections of the volume, the introduction draws alternative thematic connections across the different chapters. Strands of interpretation include: the different political implications of Irish authors identifying with Greece, Rome, or indeed Carthage; the imperial contexts of neoclassical architecture; pivotal figures such as Patrick Pearse, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Seamus Heaney; the significance of the Irish Literary Revival and the Irish language; classical reception vs. the classical tradition as a theoretical framework; the Classics in Irish education.

Keywords

classical reception; Irish politics; Irish Literary Revival; Irish language; Patrick Pearse; W. B. Yeats; James Joyce; Seamus Heaney

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Classics and Irish Politics:

Introduction

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Much work has been done in recent years on the tensions associated with the exploitation of classical models in postcolonial societies, where the classical, normatively associated with imperial powers, is reappropriated and repurposed for an indigenous nationalist agenda.¹ Ireland very rarely features in such discussions;² and what has not been clearly articulated in scholarship to date is that Ireland is a unique case as the only postcolonial culture with native pre-colonial expertise in classical languages and literature dating back to the sixth century.³ Classical sources, then, are indigenous to Ireland in a way that does not apply to other colonized nations. Moreover, as a divided island, part of which still belongs to the United Kingdom, Ireland retains a particularly complex relationship with Britain—one that in recent years achieved unprecedented cordiality in

¹ E.g. Goff (2005), Hardwick and Gillespie (2007), Bradley (2010), Hall and Vasunia (2010), Stephens and Vasunia (2010), Vasunia (2013), Parker (2017).

² Wilmer (2007) and Allen (2010) are rare exceptions. The former suggests a continuity of colonial preoccupations in his analysis of Seamus Heaney's 2004 *The Burial at Thebes*, a version of Sophocles' *Antigone*. The latter underlines the vernacular classicism of twentieth-century Irish authors, including Heaney, in relation to legacies of colonization. Hardwick (2002), (2003: 102–7), (2005: 110–11) also references Heaney within broader postcolonial contexts.

³ Stanford (1976) charts the classical tradition in Ireland dating back to Columbanus.

the reciprocal visits of their heads of state, but which latterly has experienced renewed strain following the United Kingdom's 2016 referendum vote to terminate its membership of the European Union (a 56-per-cent majority in the United Kingdom's province of Northern Ireland had voted to remain in the EU). At the time of writing, the issue of the Irish border continued to impede the UK government's implementation of Brexit. Against a backdrop of political stalemate and the stalling of Northern Ireland's devolved political institutions, fears of a renewed escalation of political violence had intensified, with republican paramilitaries threatening any border infrastructure as a 'legitimate target'.⁴

As it happens, the year of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom coincided with the centenary anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland. The rebellion of Irish nationalists against British imperial forces in 1916 became almost instantly mythologized in Irish political memory as a turning point in the nation's development towards the independent Irish Republic that it is today.⁵ The 1916

⁴ In an interview with Channel 4 News on 16 October 2019 a masked spokesman for the New IRA stated that any border infrastructure and personnel would be considered legitimate targets for attack by the organization. The interview followed a number of paramilitary attacks by the New IRA, including an attack which resulted in the death of 29-year-old Lyra McKee. A journalist and gay rights activist from Belfast who wrote on the lasting impact of political violence in Northern Ireland, McKee was shot dead on 19 April 2019 while reporting on a riot in the Cleggan area of Derry (violence had escalated following police raids on the homes of dissident republicans ahead of parades commemorating the 1916 Rising). The New IRA acknowledged responsibility for her death.

⁵ The equivalent iconic historical event for Ulster unionists is the 1916 battle of the Somme, with commemorations celebrating the heroism of the Ulstermen who fought and sacrificed their lives for Britain during World War I. Illuminating analyses of the memorialization of both the 1916 Rising and the

Rising has been the most heavily commemorated of the many centenaries marked by the Irish government's official 'Decade of Centenaries' programme. Launched in 2012 by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the programme aims to commemorate landmark historical events from the centenary of the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912, which proposed self-governance for Ireland, to one hundred years of Irish independence since 1922.⁶ It is within this interrogation of Irish political history that the present collection seeks to position itself in revealing how models from Greek and Roman antiquity have permeated and mediated Irish political discourse over the last century.

Many scholars have illuminated how classical sources have functioned as *literary* points of inspiration for the titans of twentieth-century Irish literature across the genres of poetry, playwriting, and the novel.⁷ With the exception of literature alluding to the Northern Irish Troubles, however, little attention has been paid to the political implications specific to Irish engagement with

battle of the Somme, across the political divides in Ireland, have been published in Grayson and McGarry (2016).

⁶ A timeline of events commemorated, along with detailed information, can be found on the programme's official website: <https://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/> (accessed 5 December 2019).

⁷ The bibliography is vast. References here are confined to book-length studies. On classical influences in Irish poetry see, e.g., Arkins (1990), Liebrechts (1993), Impens (2018), Harrison, Macintosh, and Eastman (2019). On Greek tragedy and Irish drama see, e.g., Macintosh (1994), Younger (2001), M. McDonald and Walton (2002), Arkins (2010a), Wallace (2015). On James Joyce's debt to classical literature see, e.g., Schork (1997) and (1998), and Arkins (1999). Arkins (2005) examines Greek and Roman themes in a broad survey of modern Irish literature.

classical models.⁸ This collection aims to reframe our understanding of classical influences in the last one hundred years of Irish culture along sociopolitical lines and from fresh perspectives. Important studies of earlier periods have shown how Irish exiles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during periods of colonial conquest justified by a particular reading of the Classics, sought to make Ireland ‘Roman’ by expressing Irish cultural and Catholic identity through Latin as the medium of contemporary European intellectual exchange.⁹ Many less affluent Irish people were versed in the classical languages, too, as Laurie O’Higgins has shown in an extraordinary study of the dissemination of classical learning in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland.¹⁰ Shifting the focus to the twentieth century and beyond, our volume aims to continue in the vein of reflecting on the deep complexities of Ireland’s relationship with classical Greece and Rome. Now a breakaway colony of an empire that identified strongly with a Roman ‘SPQR mentality’ (Ch. 2), Ireland could read Latin literature and Roman culture as a cipher for imperialism and elitism, and it is perhaps no surprise that Irish authors of the past hundred years have tended to identify more commonly with classical Greece, which fended off would-be colonizers from Persia, than with ancient Rome.

⁸ Classical influences on Northern Irish literature are given political texture in the discussions of, e.g., Roche (1988: 221–9), M. McDonald (1996), Teevan (1998), Denard (2000), P. McDonald (2000), Paulin (2002), Vendler (2002), Arkins (2009), Heaney (2009), Cieniuch (2010), Pelletier (2012), Hardwick (2016: 292–302). In a different context, Pogorzelski (2016), who proposes a political reading of Joyce’s *Ulysses* alongside Virgil’s *Aeneid* as a mediating source of inspiration on nationalism and imperialism, is a rare example of a politically oriented analysis of Irish intertextuality with classical sources.

⁹ See the essays collected in Harris and Sidwell (2009).

¹⁰ O’Higgins (2017).

Yet this is only part of the story. As the studies of earlier periods have shown, Ireland's Roman Catholicism was a pathway to an alternative discourse of 'Roman' identity: distinct from historically Protestant colonizers, who had repeatedly legislated punitively against the perceived threat of Irish Catholicism, a Roman (Catholic) identity could also be construed as *anti-imperial*. In the twentieth century, this confluence of Catholicism and anti-colonial sentiment continued and contributed to the legacy of classical learning in Ireland. Members of the Irish clergy were instrumental in disseminating classical texts through Irish in the years after independence, and one such cleric, Patrick Dinneen, marshals the Roman poet Virgil to the Irish nationalist cause in a most arresting fashion, as Fiachra Mac Góráin documents (Ch. 7). At the same time, a fuller account of twentieth-century Irish Hellenism would point out that it is heir to European literary movements such as the Romanticism embraced by W. B. Yeats and the Modernism which characterizes the work of James Joyce, and that the English had their fair share of such Hellenism, too. Classical material has thus given twentieth-century Irish authors a distinctly European voice,¹¹ but also access to a third space, so to speak, in which to communicate between the antagonistic (yet internally complex) positions of 'Gaelic' or 'English', a space that is indigenous because of its pre-colonial roots, yet also available to other traditions. On a narrow 'nativist' view of Irish culture, of the kind espoused by Daniel Corkery, this proposition would not be accepted, and the present volume acknowledges that significant figures on the Irish political and intellectual stage, such as Patrick Pearse and Thomas McDonagh, struggled under pressures both internal and external in promoting Gaelic literature above the classical literature which they greatly admired (Ch. 3 and Ch. 4).¹² Yet

¹¹ See Impens (2018: 11–43 and *passim*).

¹² For consistency of language and spelling, the English Patrick Pearse is used throughout this volume rather than the Irish Pádraig Mac Piarais or the hybrid Pádraig Pearse.

the volume also demonstrates that, in spite of certain academic and nationalist debates, classical models have been remarkably flexible and inclusive media for the expression of Ireland's social and political complexities over the course of the past century.

Taking this complex backdrop into consideration, our collection considers the intellectual struggle among Irish revolutionaries and nationalists in prioritizing Gaelic over classical material (or vice versa) during the turbulent years leading up to independence (Section I); it scrutinizes how Irish language publications impacted the politicized dissemination of classical texts and ideas (Section II); it examines how politically-rooted scholarship in the fields of Classics and Celtic Studies hovered at the margins of influential literary works (Section III); it excavates the recourse of Irish writers and public figures to classical models in underlining political inequalities regarding gender, sexuality, and class (Section IV); it makes new observations on the well-known tendency of Northern Irish authors to adapt classical literature for reflection on political violence (Section V); it looks to the influence of classical architecture and material culture in Ireland as media through which colonialism can be asserted or rejected (Section VI); finally, a concluding Epilogue offers an analysis on the themes of contiguity, affinity, and chance that bind the essays together. The arrangement of essays along thematic lines aims to highlight some of the principal ways in which the polyvalent legacy of classical material in Ireland can be traced, without making any claim to being definitive or exhaustive. There are no subdivisions, for instance, separating Greek material from Roman material, or tracing explicitly how classical reception in Ireland has been coopted for challenging elites, or focusing on the differences between translation and literary adaptation. Nevertheless, these topics do not go unobserved in the volume and our introduction here aims to highlight significant aspects of individual contributions that speak to each other across the different sections.

The analysis of material culture is an important feature in a collection which otherwise focuses primarily on literature. Classically influenced architecture was a central part of the British imperial project, as Phiroze Vasunia has discussed, for instance, in relation to colonial India.¹³ Unlike those aspects of Ireland's classical heritage which precede its colonial experience, Irish neoclassical art and architecture are not pre-colonial, and in this respect Ireland resembles other postcolonial nations. The classically influenced equestrian statue of William III, for instance, was unveiled in Dublin's College Green in 1701. Modelled on the statue of Marcus Aurelius from the Capitoline Hill in Rome, this William III—clad in Roman armour and crowned with a laurel wreath—was a conspicuous symbol of Protestant Ireland and imperialism. As Judith Hill has observed, the statue was 'of a different order from anything else in its vicinity', and 'conveyed a more aggressive image than the Roman original' in a manner aimed, she argues, at 'making the figure appear more classical' through a deeper sense of gravitas.¹⁴ For over two centuries the statue was a site both for celebration by an increasingly sectarian Protestantism and for nationalist dissent expressed through its vandalism. It was finally toppled and decapitated (with the head stolen) in 1929. Similarly, the dramatic equestrian statue of George II in Roman dress, erected in Dublin's St Stephen's Green in 1758, became a target for nationalists. It was bombed twice, first in 1928 causing minor damage, and then more conclusively in 1937, leading to its removal.¹⁵ The best-known example of a

¹³ Vasunia (2013: 157–92).

¹⁴ Hill (1998: 42–3).

¹⁵ The equestrian statue of George I, also modelled on the Roman Marcus Aurelius and erected on Essex (now Grattan) Bridge in Dublin in 1722, the most easterly of the River Liffey's bridges, was less conspicuous. Removed in 1753 when the bridge was condemned, the statue was later erected in the

classically inspired imperial landmark to be destroyed by Irish nationalists was Nelson's column, constructed in imitation of Roman models and unveiled in central Dublin in 1809 to celebrate Nelson's victory at Trafalgar four years earlier. From its inception the monument generated opposition from nationalists and finally met its end when it was bombed by the IRA in 1966 on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising (illustrated in the photograph on the cover of this book). Many more neoclassical structures and buildings became sites for the expression of political rebellion during the twentieth century throughout Ireland, although the largest concentration of such activity was in Dublin where imperial building projects had been intimately connected with the creation of an impressive colonial outpost.¹⁶

Architecture associated with political supremacism can, however, be reframed within new narratives. Such is the case, for instance, with South Africa's Freedom Park in Pretoria: 'a new memorial ... [e]ncompassing all battles for human rights in South Africa, its message trumps British imperialism at the Union Buildings and Afrikaner power at the [Vootrekker] Monument.'¹⁷ Colonial buildings, divested of their imperial insignia, have been reanimated with national significance in Ireland. Both The Customs House and The Four Courts, which were significantly damaged in the early 1920s, were rebuilt and remain significant landmarks in Dublin. The most exceptional example of a politically revived neoclassical building, however, is Dublin's General Post Office (GPO). Originally an imperial building, it is now a symbol, if not *the* symbol, of Irish independence as headquarters of the 1916 nationalist fighters and the site of their accompanying

precincts of the Mansion House, and was eventually sold, in 1937, to the Barber Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Birmingham. See Hill (1998: 44–6 and 48–51) on the statue of George II.

¹⁶ See Hill (1998: 41–83).

¹⁷ Rankin and Schneider (2017: 209).

proclamation of independence. As Suzanne O'Neill demonstrates, however, the legacy of Dublin's GPO stands in stark contrast to the Northern Irish parliament buildings at Stormont (Ch. 19).

Erected after independence was granted to twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties, Stormont was constructed as a neoclassical bastion of unionism for the six counties of Northern Ireland under the leadership of Sir James Craig, one of whose idiosyncratic stipulations was that the entire project be completed in English Portland stone imported at great expense while the local Irish granite quarries at Newry lay idle. The intimidating appropriation of classical architecture at Stormont, constructed in 'imperial' stone sourced from the seat of power, as O'Neill documents, means that the location remains a physically unwelcoming landscape for nationalist politicians.

Within the newly independent Irish Free State, and in the subsequent Republic of Ireland, architectural classicism could be coopted for new purposes, as Judith Hill shows in her discussion of commemorative monuments commissioned and completed after Irish independence (Ch. 18). Despite the tradition of Celtic revivalism and a general nationalist antipathy to classicism as an imperial aesthetic, it remained possible to transcend political divisions through classically inspired monuments such as the National War Memorial, dedicated to those who died in World War I, and the Cenotaph (first temporary and then permanent) erected in memory of Irish nationalists Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith, and, later, Kevin O'Higgins. As Hill's chapter reveals, architectural classicism lent itself to timeless commemoration and non-partisan reconciliation in a manner that was aesthetically connected to the existing urban landscape of Dublin. In fact, sculptural classicism did have a nationalist legacy also in Ireland. The nationalist hero Daniel O'Connell, who campaigned tirelessly for Catholic emancipation in the first half of the nineteenth century, had been represented as a Roman orator in a celebrated marble statue by John Hogan which has resided in Dublin's City Hall since the 1840s; other neoclassical monuments to O'Connell were erected in Limerick and Ennis, while John Henry Foley's O'Connell, unveiled in 1882, remains a central

monument in Dublin's contemporary landscape at the head of O'Connell Street in the heart of the city. The figure of O'Connell is set on a large drum carved with representations of his labours, below which again are seated four winged victories.¹⁸ Another example is Oliver Sheppard's critically acclaimed bronze statue *The Death of Cúchulain*, placed in the GPO in 1935 as a memorial to 1916. Sculpted in the classical tradition of the heroic male nude, the figure marries the aesthetics of classicism with Celtic mythology, thus instantiating a tension evident also in the works of Patrick Pearse (cf. Ch. 3), with whom Sheppard had been associated.

An aesthetic link between the classical and the national was asserted still more emphatically through the design of new coinage for the Irish Free State, as Christine Morris shows (Ch. 20). Signifiers of the newly independent nation, the Irish coins first minted in 1928 were radical in avoiding the representation of figureheads and establishing instead an iconography of Irish fauna. Three of the animals depicted on the Irish coins—the horse, the bull, and the hare—were directly inspired by coins from the ancient Greek world. As Morris underlines in her examination of the 'biography' of this originally controversial though subsequently much-loved 'barnyard set', the cultural alignment of Ireland with classical Greece was a politicized move. Replacing a British coinage that had featured the monarch's head, Latin inscriptions, the crown atop the Irish harp, and other symbols inspired by imperial Rome, the new set freed the harp from the colonial crown on the obverse of all coins, used Irish text and scripts for the legend, and rejected Roman imperial models in favour of an agrarian aestheticism rooted in ancient Greece.

The fact that W. B. Yeats, in his role as Senator, was Chairman of the Coinage Committee established by the 1926 Coinage Act, as Morris points out, is directly related to the committee's decision to appropriate Greek models for the new national coinage. As a poet, it is well known that

¹⁸ On the classically inspired O'Connell statues and monuments, see Hill (1998: 89–97).

Yeats frequently aligned nationalist Ireland with classical Greece.¹⁹ After Irish independence, as Chris Morash demonstrates (Ch. 11), the gravitas of Sophocles allowed Yeats to avoid censorship at the hands of the new Committee on Evil Literature created in 1926. In a clear act of censor-baiting, Yeats staged his version of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, toning down the most gratuitous aspects of the play's incest so that a ban on the production would seem ridiculous. Accessing the play through the translation of Irish classical scholar Richard Claverhouse Jebb, Yeats also incorporated references that would resonate with his audience, alluding for instance to the Great Famine of 1845–9. The resounding success of the play thoroughly thwarted its potential censors. However, Yeats's collision with conservatism also continued under the Catholic hierarchy of the Irish Free State, traced here by Morash in his analysis of *A Vision*, where the poet's engagement with classical Greek philosophy informed his conception of cyclical transformations in relation to the broader political landscape of Europe between World Wars I and II. Morash notes that Plotinus features significantly among Yeats's highly selective readings from classical literature. It would seem, then, to be no accident that Yeats was an admirer of the nationalist Stephen MacKenna, whose monumental and highly acclaimed English translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* was completed in 1930,

¹⁹ In one example among many, observed by Macintosh (1994: 14), Yeats links the 1916 rebels to the Greeks at the battle of Salamis in his poem 'The Statues', implying a symbolic victory of (Irish/Greek) civilization over (British/Persian) imperial barbarism. Arkins (1990) and Liebrechts (1993) give detailed surveys of Yeats's engagement with classical material.

with the dedication ‘Do chum glóire Dé agus onóra na h-Éireann’ (‘Composed for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland’).²⁰

Beyond the newly independent Ireland, Yeats’s *King Oedipus* has had an extraordinary reception history, as Fiona Macintosh has documented elsewhere, and continues to inspire new performances to this day.²¹ Similarly, Yeats’s personal insistence on Greek models for Irish coinage has had an unexpectedly far-reaching influence on international coin design, which Morris traces from 1930s Greece and Fiji to 1970s Tonga (Ch. 20). As Morris also discusses, Seamus Heaney marked the demise of the Irish ‘barnyard set’ when Ireland entered the Eurozone in 2002 with his poem ‘A Keen for Coins’, a text subsequently immortalized in sculptural form by artist Carolyn Mulholland (Ch. 20). Like Yeats, Heaney was an Irish poet of global renown who frequently reworked classical literature and mythology for political expression. The Greeks are a significant presence, particularly in Heaney’s reworkings of Greek tragedy: *The Cure at Troy* is a version of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, ‘Mycenae Lookout’ was inspired by Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, and *The Burial at Thebes* is a version of Sophocles’ *Antigone* (on which see Ch. 17). It is the Roman Virgil, however, who stands out as Heaney’s primary classical inspiration.²² An author studied in Heaney’s boyhood Latin classes, Virgil secured a place in the Irish poet’s oeuvre with the posthumous publication of

²⁰ Yeats (1966a: 230). Cf. Stanford (1976: 97) and Arkins (1990: 36) for Yeats’ familiarity with MacKenna’s translation of Plotinus. The phrasing of McKenna’s dedication is identical to the inscription on the Cenotaph for Collins, Griffith, and O’Higgins; cf. Hill n. 107 (Ch. 18).

²¹ Macintosh (2008). We may add Wayne Jordan’s script for *Oedipus*, produced at the Abbey Theatre in 2015, which was heavily influenced by Yeats.

²² Impens (2017) traces Heaney’s engagement with Virgil throughout his career.

his exquisite translation of *Aeneid* 6, in which the Trojan hero Aeneas visits the underworld and encounters the dead.²³

Heaney was not the only nationalist Irish intellectual to find inspiration in Virgil. As noted above, the distinguished scholar of Irish and classical languages, Fr Patrick Dinneen, published a number of works on Virgil in the Irish language from the 1920s onwards. Fiachra Mac Góráin demonstrates how Dinneen's optic and strategies of appropriation suggest a native Irish ownership of the material, in particular through the translation of Latin names into Irish forms and through a complex interweaving of Irish culture with classical antiquity (Ch. 7). Dinneen saw himself as a latter-day Virgil, similarly dispossessed of his home but engaged in the creation of a national literature, and calling his fellow citizens back to the land, as he saw Virgil doing in the *Georgics*, after periods of strife. Here we might usefully compare the observations of Peter Fallon, whose own English translation of the *Georgics* was first published in 2004. For Fallon, who comes from an agrarian background, the hard work and peace to be found in farming during a period of civil war, as advocated in Virgil's *Georgics*, echoes strongly with the Irish experience.²⁴ Seamus Heaney, meanwhile, had looked to Virgil's *Eclogues* to reflect on displacement and the brutality of land

²³ Specifically, Heaney had studied *Aeneid* 9 at school, but his interest in *Aeneid* 6 had been piqued at this early age by his Latin teacher Fr Michael McGlinchey (cf. Heaney (2016: vii)). The young Heaney's annotations on J. W. Mackail's translation of the *Aeneid* (Books 7–12) are discussed by Hall (2019). For an appreciation of the translation see Harrison (2019: 252–61); see further n. 28 below.

²⁴ Fallon (2006: xxxiv); see also the insightful analysis by O'Hogan (2018: 406–11). Differently, the translation of the *Georgics* by Anglo-Irish poet Cecil Day-Lewis, first published in 1940, speaks to post-war sentiment in Britain, to which the Laois-born poet had since transferred his allegiance: see Thomas (2001).

confiscations, as well as the potential of land to generate renewal in poems such as ‘Bann Valley Eclogue’, ‘Virgil: Eclogue IX’, and ‘Glanmore Eclogue’ in his 2001 collection *Electric Light*.²⁵

Nevertheless, there remains a tension, to some extent acknowledged by Dinneen, between Irish nationalism and a favourable view of the Roman Empire. Dinneen attempts to reconcile this tension through a positive representation of the spread of Christianity and civilization under the Roman Empire, reading Anchises’ exhortation ‘to spare the vanquished and conquer the proud’ (*parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*) in a famous passage at the end of *Aeneid* 6 (851–3) as a benign form of imperialism (Ch. 7). Heaney takes a different approach in dealing with the imperialist context of Virgil’s poetic production. In a surviving fragment of the opening paragraph for an afterword to his *Aeneid VI*, Heaney had called it ‘the best of books and the worst of books. Best because of its mythopoeic visions, the twilit fetch of its language, the pathos of the many encounters it allows the living Aeneas with his familiar dead. Worst because of its imperial certitude, its celebration of Rome’s manifest destiny and the catalogue of Roman heroes ...’.²⁶ Heaney refers here to the culminating section of *Aeneid* 6, where the shade of Anchises reveals to his son Aeneas

²⁵ On ‘Bann Valley Eclogue’ see M. Tyler (2005: 50–60), Harrison (2008), Twiddy (2012); on ‘Virgil: Eclogue IX’ see O’Hogan (2018: 402–6); on ‘Glanmore Eclogue’ see M. Tyler (2005: 68–73); on the relationship between Heaney’s eclogues and those of Virgil more generally see Putnam (2010) and Impens (2018: 70–4), and see O’Donoghue (2019) for Heaney’s debt to Yeats in his eclogues. Virgil’s own focus in the *Eclogues* on political turmoil, land redistribution, and the tensions between the disenfranchised and those in power can undermine colonial overtones in the poems’ Irish reception, as Mac Góráin (2013) has demonstrated in his analysis of a 1701 Dublin eclogue. Written by a Dublin woman to welcome the new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the eclogue’s attempt at unequivocal praise does not obscure profound political ironies.

²⁶ Heaney (2016: 95).

a procession of future descendants destined to found and rule over Rome. In his opening translator's note Heaney references the 'grim determination' required to translate this portion of *Aeneid* 6, putting on record his view that 'the roll call of generals and imperial heroes, the allusions to variously famous or obscure historical victories and defeats, make this part of the poem something of a test for reader and translator alike'.²⁷ Colin Burrow finds this section of Heaney's book 'marred by plain weariness', an indication that this 'prophecy of Roman heroes ... was always at odds with Heaney's deliberately off-centre and counter-imperial view of the *Aeneid*'.²⁸ Heaney had evoked motifs from *Aeneid* 6 in his earlier poems: the spirits of the dead, victims of the Troubles, appear in 'Station Island' from his eponymous 1984 collection; the death of Heaney's own father in 1986 finds echoes in the exchange between Aeneas and his father's ghost evoked through the 1991 collection *Seeing Things*; the twelve-part poem 'Route 110', from the 2010 collection *Human Chain*, was Heaney's most extensive engagement of *Aeneid* 6 prior to his translation.²⁹ The manner, as Burrow puts it, 'might be called a postcolonial parallax, in which a master text of a dominant civilization is deliberately transformed from the ostentatiously low perspective of an unheroic life'.³⁰

Earlier allusions to *Aeneid* 6 in Heaney's poetry notably avoid engagement with its concluding 'imperial' portion. Eavan Boland is another Irish poet whose reworking of *Aeneid* 6 is highly

²⁷ Heaney (2016: viii).

²⁸ Burrow (2016: 14).

²⁹ Burrow (2016: 13) sketches out how *Aeneid* 6 manifested itself in Heaney's work throughout his career.

For more detailed discussion of Virgil-reception in these poems see Putnam (2012), Impens (2018: 56–60, 70–8), Falconer (2019), McDonald (2019), Riley (2019).

³⁰ Burrow (2016: 13).

selective and who, like Heaney, came to Virgil through Latin classes in a Catholic school.³¹ In undertaking a translation of the entire book, however, Heaney was forced to confront the ‘imperial certitude’ of the Roman heroes which he had evaded up to that point. While Burrow finds this to be the least successful passage in Heaney’s translation, we might yet connect this paradoxical funeral procession of ancestors (from the perspective of the reader) who are yet to be born (as focalized through Aeneas) to the broader Irish patterns of encountering the past, of thinking about death, and—especially in Northern Ireland—of reading politicized funeral rituals through the lens of classical mythology. Torrance argues that Heaney’s *The Burial at Thebes* is one in a series of intense post-ceasefire interrogations of the Antigone myth in the context of the treatment of corpses in Northern Ireland, alongside adaptations by Stacey Gregg, Owen McCafferty, and Gerard Humphreys, in a tradition that dates back to the political and ideological collision between historian and journalist Conor Cruise O’Brien and playwright Tom Paulin at the height of the Troubles (Ch. 17). Building on the work of Fiona Macintosh, who has pointed out in a general sense how Sophocles’ *Antigone* resonates with Irish authors because funeral rituals tend not to be hidden from public view in Ireland,³² Torrance draws a distinction between Northern Ireland and the Republic: the legacy of the Troubles, the continuation of horrific instances of conflict-related violence (even after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998), a highly charged culture of politicized public and processional display, and the contested treatment of corpses in Northern Ireland (the disappeared, paramilitary funerals, bodies left out in the street) all help to explain why there have been so many Northern Irish Antigones during an ostensible period of peace.

³¹ Impens (2018: 38–9) notes how Boland’s evocation of *Aeneid* 6 contrasts the vivacity of Virgil with the dull context of religious schooling.

³² Macintosh (2011).

In her analysis of Michael Longley's 'Ceasefire', which has a significant reception history in other conflict zones, Maureen Alden also stresses the continued presence of brutal violence and its toll on Northern Ireland (Ch. 16). Alden resituates this famous poem both within the language of Homeric decorum (by which it was inspired) and in relation to real-life casualties of the Troubles. Like the old Trojan king Priam in *Iliad* 24, some parents bereaved in the Troubles wanted to meet with their children's murderers. Some of them showed forgiveness, but this ethic is in fact alien to the Iliadic model of Longley's poem. In Homer, Priam's act of courage in confronting Achilles, the murderer of his son, and his request for the return of his son's body, is the moral denouement of the *Iliad*, all the more so for the reader who knows that the war will shortly resume and claim the lives of Priam and Achilles themselves. A ceasefire, indeed, is not the end of the conflict, and when Longley's 'Ceasefire' is read alongside its companion poem 'All of these people' it becomes clear that the poet perceives the true opposite of warfare not to be peace (which is merely the absence of war), but civilization (the very impossibility of war).

Longley's ecumenical response to the Troubles is expressed through his encounters with many other classical sources, not least Roman love elegy. Donncha O'Rourke shows that this genre draws its pertinence to Ireland from its own genesis in the context of civil war, and from its eroticized optic on violence, human relations, and reconciliation (Ch. 15). As O'Rourke argues, Longley's recasting of Roman elegy against the backdrop of civil warfare in Northern Ireland has its roots in W. B. Yeats's appropriation of Propertius in the context of 1916, an Irish elegiac continuum that brings to light both the constant presence and changing shape of classical reception in the century since the Easter Rising. For both poets, this tradition is mediated by their modernist confrère Ezra Pound, who had read Propertius as an anti-imperialist in the context of World War I. Pound was a close associate of Yeats, and it was during their tour of Sicily in 1925 that the latter found inspiration for the new Irish coinage in the numismatics of the independent states of Magna Graecia

(cf. Ch. 20). If Yeats's response to Propertius takes a similarly partisan and anti-imperial approach, albeit one also bound up in his personal affairs, Longley rather differently exploits the lyrical form of elegy in his anti-war appropriation of epic, drawing on Tibullus and Sulpicia, as well as on his 'soul mate' Propertius, in an erotic, gendered, and rustic exposé of cycles of violence in public and domestic space. In this way, Longley's poetry seems to offer a common ground between opposing traditions and to hope in a more pacific model of the elegiac woman than is found in Yeats's revolutionary muse.

In his famous poem 'No Second Troy', first published in 1916, Yeats had implicitly cast his muse Maud Gonne (MacBride) as the Greek Helen. By 1920, Maud Gonne has recast herself as the long-suffering Trojan queen Hecuba by starring in that role for a performance of Euripides' *Trojan Women* produced by the Dublin Drama League. As Torrance discusses, the production had an obvious political topicality in dealing with colonial aggression (Ch. 13). Yet the reception of this performance, and subsequent Irish adaptations of the *Trojan Women* tragedy, have highlighted instead women's lack of political agency. The topicality of the 1920 production is lost on its reviewer, who is enamoured with Helen's seductive character and expresses disappointment that the other female performers did not pour forth more passion 'in red-hot sentences'. This kind of conservatism, which objectifies women and denies them political agency, resurfaces in Brendan Kennelly's 1993 *Trojan Women*, where Hecuba and the other Greek women circle Helen in a shocking slut-shaming scene. Kennelly exposes the collusion of Irish women in sexist oppression for which men escape responsibility. In 2015, Marina Carr can present a sexually liberated Hecuba as the title character of her adaptation of the Trojan women's story (*Hecuba*). Torrance argues, however, that using sexuality to survive captivity is a largely illusory form of agency, particularly in a play where Carr has deprived Hecuba of her traditionally murderous revenge. Hecuba is humanized because of this, but all three of the Irish plays discussed connect female sexuality with

disenfranchisement in various ways, a pointed message in light of the 2016 'Waking the Feminists' movement which underlined female disempowerment in the Irish theatre industry.

Recourse to classical sources for championing issues of sexual and gendered rights in Ireland has more commonly been associated with the gay community, dating back to Oscar Wilde's attempt, in his speech from the dock during his 1895 trial for gross indecency, to aestheticize and justify his homosexuality through the classical Greek ideal of male friendship. Eibhear Walshe traces the pervasive influence of Wilde on Irish authors, showing how he was perceived as a patriotic dissident against England by Joyce, for example, and as a champion and liberator for other gay writers (Ch. 12). Despite the conservatism of the Republic of Ireland, where homosexuality was not decriminalized until 1993, Wilde continued to make his cultural presence felt in twentieth-century Irish culture. The writings of Brendan Behan, for instance, whose biography bears strong parallels to Wilde's, are permeated by Wilde's Hellenism. With liberalization and decriminalization, Wilde could be fully embraced as gay and Irish, a symbol of Irish modernity and postcolonialism. Jamie O'Neill's 2001 novel on homoerotic love in 1916, *At Swim Two Boys*, presents Wilde as an icon and symbol of patriotic rebellion, and Classics as a gay-friendly subject that Catholic hierarchies sought to 'sanitize'. Controversy continues nevertheless in the association of Hellenism with paedophilia, as witnessed in the contentious debates surrounding Irish-language poet Cathal Ó Searcaigh and senator David Norris. One elusive figure in this story is Patrick Pearse, leader of the 1916 Rising, whose sexuality has been the subject of significant speculation. Pearse never mentions Wilde but must have been influenced by him, Walshe argues, in the presentation of male martyrdom in his plays and in the parallels he draws between ancient Greek and Irish masculinity.

The audible silence of Pearse on Wilde's Hellenism is similar to the unacknowledged influence of classical oratory on Pearse's public speeches traced by Brian McGing (Ch. 3). In particular,

Pearse's funeral speech for O'Donovan Rossa in 1915 bears comparison to Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides through the intermediary of Lincoln's Gettysburg address with which Pearse was familiar. As McGing shows, there is a tension between Pearse's commitment to the Gaelic and Catholic movement, which had eclipsed the classicism of earlier political rhetoric and popular culture in Ireland, and his obvious interest in classical culture throughout his essays. Thomas MacDonagh, another of the 1916 leaders, is comparable in ostensibly placing a higher value on Irish traditions over classical ones while, at the same time, being deeply influenced by classical literature. As Eoghan Moloney demonstrates in some detail, and with the support of archival material, MacDonagh's literary output is classically inflected in spite of his ties to the nativist movement (Ch. 4). The dominant nationalist narrative, which has romanticized the rebel leaders, has also tended to bury the significance of classical models. These were not, in fact, entirely overshadowed by native Irish literature for figures like MacDonagh, who was open to a wide range of cultural influences. That being said, MacDonagh did find classical culture distant, and his poem 'Barbara' constructs his daughter as unacquainted with Greece and Rome. MacDonagh himself, however, was not able to follow through on this paradigm, producing a surprising number of versions, both published and unpublished, of poems by Catullus informed by his own personal experience. Catullus seems to have enabled MacDonagh to find the consonance between past and present that was central to his theory of literary reception.

Thomas MacDonagh, like Patrick Dinneen, had been an important figure in the Irish Literary Revival, though they promoted different approaches. While MacDonagh advocated a distinctive form of Irish literature in the English language, Dinneen proposed the development of a national literature through Irish. Dinneen himself contributed to the translation of Greek and Latin texts and textbooks into Irish under the auspices of An Gúm's broader translation scheme in the early years of the Irish state. Síle Ní Mhurchú compiles details of individuals involved and of the works they

translated, including Mairghr ad N   imhthigh (Margaret Heavey), Cormac   Cadhlaigh, Maognas   Domhnaill, Domhnall   Mathghamhna, P draic Ua Duinn n (i.e. Patrick Dinneen), and Peadar Ua Laoghaire, but focuses on two especially prolific contributors to the scheme: P draig de Br n and George Thomson (Ch. 5). The language politics of nativists versus progressives played into the place of translation in the scheme. P draig de Br n, like the nativists, saw Irish as untouched by the Renaissance, but he also saw this as a deficiency to be remedied rather than a virtue *tout court*. For this reason, de Br n championed Irish translations of classical literature, and in the 1920s and 1930s he himself produced beautiful renditions of Greek tragedies and of Plutarch’s *Lives* in the Corca Dhuibhne dialect of the Dingle peninsula in Co. Kerry. By the 1930s, however, de Br n had become involved in a bitter public debate about the value of translating foreign works into Irish. His formidable opponent Daniel Corkery seemed to win public opinion, and this may well account for the fact that de Br n’s translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not published as planned.³³ George Thomson, on the other hand, had a somewhat different agenda in promoting access to the study of Classics as a discipline through Irish. He, too, however, although highly productive, also faced challenges and, ultimately, failures in bringing some of his work to publication.

George Thomson is the best known of all the scholars who sought to advance Classics through Irish. A Cambridge-educated professor of Greek, a Marxist philosopher, and active member of the Communist Party, Thomson had also mastered the Irish language through his long-standing connection with the inhabitants of the Blasket Islands. His experience of pre-capitalist society and of the tradition of oral poetry on the Blasket Islands deeply affected his conception of archaic and

³³ De Br n’s Irish translation of the *Odyssey* was eventually published in 1990. His *Iliad* has yet to be published.

classical Greek culture.³⁴ Among the intellectuals influenced by Thomson's work is Kevin O'Nolan (brother of the Brian O'Nolan discussed by O'Hogan in Ch. 8), who taught Classics at University College Dublin during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, and whose research focused on issues of oral poetry and the bardic tradition.³⁵ At the same time, the work of earlier Celtic comparatists, including John Millington Synge, also left its mark on Irish intellectuals, as Arabella Currie discusses in relation to the Aran Islands (Ch. 9). The story of Thomson's accession in 1931 to the Greek post at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), however, has been unduly romanticized, as Pádraic Moran exposes (Ch. 6). Thomson's celebrity, moreover, has obscured the extraordinary work of his colleague Margaret Heavey, who was appointed at the same time. Both Thomson and Heavey produced their own teaching materials in Irish, some of which were subsequently published, though others remain in the NUIG archives. Thomson attempted to launch a programme of public engagement lectures, but was hampered by the church and other authorities. Citing various frustrations, including the challenges he had faced with the government's publications office, he resigned after three years. Heavey, on the other hand, continued to teach Classics through Irish at NUIG until the 1970s, and was by all accounts a talented and inspiring mentor. Declining numbers of students meant that teaching Classics through Irish was phased out at the institution during the 1970s. This fact is linked both to the failure of a broadscale Irish language revival, which meant that the teaching programme for Classics through Irish could only ever have a niche student base, and to the decline of interest in Greek and Latin after the 1960s following the promotion of scientific and vocational subjects as more promising career pathways.

³⁴ Seaford (2014).

³⁵ See K. O'Nolan (1968), (1969), (1970), (1973).

The decline in teaching Greek and Latin at Irish schools and universities led W. B. Stanford to conclude his book *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*, published in 1976, on a note of alarm. The downward trend in numbers of students with training in classical languages has continued into the twenty-first century. In Irish universities, as elsewhere, Classics departments have adapted to a new kind of student body, offering both *ab initio* intensive language courses along with newly designed courses in classical civilization for students without Greek and Latin. Queen's University Belfast closed the doors of its Classics Department amid fierce controversy, with its final undergraduate student intake of 2002 becoming its last cohort of graduating classicists in 2005. The closure was announced at a time when the department was ranked fifth in the United Kingdom for teaching standards; it was vociferously but unsuccessfully opposed.³⁶ Ancient historians were incorporated into what is now the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, and the classical languages programme was wound down. In spite of this terrible loss, the new Belfast Summer School in Latin and Classical Greek, founded in 2015 by Helen McVeigh, has been growing steadily, while the Classical Association of Northern Ireland continues to organize public events and outreach sessions for schools. The enormous influence of classical literature on contemporary Northern Irish writers remains evident (Chs. 15, 16, and 17), amply fulfilling a prophecy in which Stanford hoped in the final sentence of *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*: 'if future geniuses of the stature of ... Joyce are moved to create brilliant masterpieces from their personal vision of ancient Greece and Rome, then the classical tradition will prove again ... its power to inspire as well as to instruct.'³⁷

³⁶ For an overview of the debate see Unsworth (2002).

³⁷ Stanford (1976: 249).

No doubt Stanford would have welcomed the enlarging of this group in the decades following the publication of his book, but the theoretical framework which informs our collection here, namely reception studies, stands in contradistinction to Stanford's 'classical tradition' approach, which assumes that ancient culture can be accessed and appreciated primarily through an implicitly elite education system.³⁸ Placing a high emphasis on the value of certain kinds of education, investigations into the classical tradition can tend to undervalue diversity.³⁹ Symptomatic of this is the complete omission from *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* of any mention of classical language instruction through Irish, despite its three chapters devoted to education, with one specifically discussing universities and learned societies and tracing pertinent events down to 1970.⁴⁰ The material discussed by Ní Mhurchú and Moran, then, helps to revivify experiences that have been marginalized if not erased from the mainstream narrative (Ch. 5 and Ch. 6), and complements the extraordinary new work of Laurie O'Higgins in tracing the Irish-language material relevant to the education of the poor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland.⁴¹

This is not to say that Stanford's magisterial work has become redundant. His *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* remains the only attempt at a broadscale historical overview of Irish classicism. The erudition of its author is evident on every page, and its scope is impressive, giving due attention to literature in Irish from the medieval period to the eighteenth century, as well as to art and architecture.⁴² Stanford's instinct is inclusive, then, but he remains constrained by the boundaries of

³⁸ Cf. Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2014: 5).

³⁹ Cf. Hardwick (2003: 2–3).

⁴⁰ Stanford (1976: 1–72, 45–72 on universities and learned societies).

⁴¹ O'Higgins (2017).

⁴² Stanford (1976: 73–89 on literature in Irish, 113–30 on art and architecture).

the discipline. This tension is felt, for example, in Stanford's conclusions on old, middle, and eighteenth-century Irish-language versions of classical tales: 'Gaelic nonchalance may seem irresponsible, even outrageous, to modern classical readers taught to venerate the ancient authors as supreme in their class ... But what should be recognized ... is that here we have a new literary fusion which is both scholarly and creative.' Even as Stanford nobly attempts to defend 'the Irish genius' in his final sentence, he concludes that, in these works, 'the conventional categories are broken down and new modes, *sometimes monstrous or barbaric by conventional standards*, come to birth'.⁴³ The language Stanford uses regrettably perpetuates the crypto-colonial notion of an acceptable stylistic norm against which the Irish example is viewed as barbaric, in spite of his efforts to push forward his own view of the Irish achievement. The weight of the classical tradition, with all its implications, is too heavy a burden for the Irish case.

Reception studies, on the other hand, emphasizes the interactive relationship between the source culture and the receiving culture with a focus on the cultural processes that shape these relationships.⁴⁴ It frees us from the constraints of assuming a singular normative view of classicism. When approached through the lens of reception studies, the meaning behind an engagement with classical models becomes dependent on cultural-historical processes, as our collection seeks to underline. Edith Hall, a pioneer in the field of reception studies, offers a composite interpretation of Sinn Féin viewed from the dual perspectives of Robert Mitchell Henry, Professor of Latin at Queen's University Belfast and author of *The Evolution of Sinn Féin* (1920), and James Joyce's Sinn Féiner 'Citizen' (Cyclops) Cusack in *Ulysses* Episode 12 (Ch. 10). Hall contextualizes Henry's

⁴³ Stanford (1976: 87, emphasis added). It is notable that Stanford's phrasing here is reminiscent of the monstrous artistic hybrids criticized (with tongue in cheek) by Horace at *Ars Poetica* 1–23.

⁴⁴ Hardwick (2003: 5).

nationalism alongside that of two other contemporary Irish Classicists. The first, Eric Roberston Dodds, also from Northern Ireland, would become a celebrated Oxford Classicist, but was almost expelled (or ‘sent down’) from that university as a student for his vocal support of the 1916 Rising. The second, Benjamin Farrington, a Marxist scholar of Classics from Cork, brought his revolutionary ideas to South Africa before moving to Britain in the 1930s. Within this nexus of associations between classicism and Irish nationalism, Hall reveals through original archival research that Henry was on the ground in 1916 as a member of the Irish Volunteers. What has not been appreciated to date, moreover, is the connection between Henry’s expertise in Roman historiography and his composition of *The Evolution of Sinn Féin*. Although it includes little overt classical reference, there is a biting Tacitean style in its representation of human failings related to colonial oppression, which effectively inverts the parallelism of Britain and Rome as imperial powers and generates thereby a critique of British colonialism.

Like Henry, Joyce espoused an ideal for an Ireland belonging to all its people, regardless of ethnic origin. This is evident, for instance, in his satires of a narrow-minded nationalism and of the British Empire in Episode 12 of *Ulysses*. These lively pages include a crew of Gaelic scholars and, Hall argues, a parody of the controversial figure Kuno Meyer. Originally celebrated for his expertise in Celtic philology and literature, his support for Germany at the outbreak of World War I lost him many former admirers. It was Meyer, however, who had produced the first English translation of the medieval ‘Irish *Odyssey*’, the *Merugud Uilix Maicc Leirtis* (‘Wanderings of Ulysses son of Laertes’), in 1886. Meyer’s translation, suggests Hall, cannot have failed to influence the young James Joyce, who must have been aware of this medieval tale. As an indigenous Irish *Odyssey*, it bears comparison to—and may well have inspired—the whole project of Joyce’s own *Ulysses*.

An awareness of Irish medieval culture and its intersection with classical literature is not uncommon in Irish society. One rather more unusual index of this, presented by Cillian O'Hogan (Ch. 8), is the 'Cruiskeen Lawn' column published in the *Irish Times* several days a week between 1940 and 1966. Written by Brian O'Nolan under the pseudonym Myles na gCopaleen, the columns commented on current affairs, often in a humorous manner injected with the personal experiences of the fictional 'Myles'. As O'Hogan demonstrates, the columns occupy a marginal position in which allusion to medieval and classical culture plays a significant role, not least in witnessing changing attitudes to classical learning in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. O'Nolan himself was a liminal figure operating between intelligentsia and mob, modern and postmodern, Irish and English, classical and medieval. This ephemeral publication, which affectionately entered the Irish popular imagination, became gradually more politicized. 'Myles' puts the Irish language on an equal footing with Greek and Latin, and sometimes critiques Greek and Latin to the advantage of Irish, in response to the perceived tension between Irish and classical learning that is also a recurrent theme in this collection. Positioning himself on the margins of the 'nativist' debate in Celtic studies, 'Myles' code-switches between Latin and Irish, makes pointed use of the Gaelic typeface, and creates glosses on other items in the leader page through typographic markers reminiscent of medieval scribal practice. Rather like Dinneen (cf. Ch. 7), but in a more public arena, 'Myles' uses his oeuvre (and here also his allusions to medieval culture) to downplay English and to suggest that Irish is learned not at the expense of Greek and Latin, but rather as a language intrinsically connected with its classical Indo-European cousins.

The immense popularity of the 'Cruiskeen Lawn' columns is attested by the longevity of their run, which concluded only with O'Nolan's death in 1966. The fit of scholarship and cultural understanding, however, is not always so snug. Such is the case with the reception history of the Fir Bolg, a legendary people of Ireland who sought refuge in Greece, were enslaved there, rebelled and

returned to Ireland, where they were driven west to the Aran Islands by invaders. Arabella Currie examines the complex scholarly and cultural appropriations of the Fir Bolg, whose origin was subject to heated debate and was mixed up more broadly with identity politics in Ireland (Ch. 9). The monumental forts attributed to the Fir Bolg on the Aran Islands encouraged parallels with Greek archaeological remains, thereby forging a Greek-Aran kinship. At the same time, the topos of the inhospitable rockface, common to island writing, contributed to a discourse of abjection, while notions of racial purity linked the Fir Bolg to the Greeks as reputedly dark-haired (regardless of scientific evidence to the contrary). Contrasting two main approaches to the Fir Bolg, Currie sees them either as abject and downtrodden, or as revolutionary, their abject status reclaimed as a means of resistance. A notable voice in this debate was nationalist historian and politician Eoin MacNeill, who rejected negative mid-seventeenth-century descriptions of the Fir Bolg as motivated by a colonial agenda. The loudest voices, however, promoted the abjection rather than the revolutionary potential of the Fir Bolg. Currie explains why this occurs by locating the Fir Bolg within the genre of Aran island writing. Primitivism uses antiquity in these writings not so much as a dialectical challenge but rather as an enshrinement into pastness. The antiquarian approach deadens the past/present confrontation, with the result that the Fir Bolg culture has always already run its course. Seeing the Fir Bolg not as historical but outside of time exempts those who control the discourse from moral responsibility, enables the packaging of the Fir Bolg for tourist consumption, and makes them apolitical. The Fir Bolg are fought for, not with, and so are never participants in history. All this stands in contrast to political engagement on the Aran Islands themselves. The islander and lifelong republican Bridget Dirrane, for instance, recalled in her memoir how she had served tea to Patrick Pearse and other rebel leaders. One glaring silence on the Fir Bolg, Currie argues, may nevertheless serve to activate their revolutionary potential. John Millington Synge, whose work was very much influenced by Greek literature, and who wrote extensively about the

Aran Islands, makes virtually no mention of the Fir Bolg—except, as Currie uncovers, in his unpublished notes and drafts, which by contrast are full of speculation about them. In what may be a deliberate evasion, then, Synge’s account of the Aran Islands was prescient in resisting the atemporality of the Fir Bolg to create a space in which they might become resurgent under erasure.

It emerges, then, that the ways in which ancient Greece and Rome have been interrogated in relation to Irish identity in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first are multiple and manifold, and that these interrogations are often rooted in earlier periods of Irish history. In this connection, one pertinent classical location remains to be mentioned—Carthage. This ancient Phoenician state located in North Africa had a long history of hostilities with the Greek colonies in Sicily and later with the Roman Republic, falling decisively to Rome in 146 BCE. Famous for its mythological founder queen Dido who, according to Virgil’s account in *Aeneid* 4, falls in love with Aeneas and commits suicide on his departure, Carthage was identified with Ireland in the eighteenth century in a most remarkable fashion. In 1772, Charles Vallancey published his treatise *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language: Being a Collation of the Irish with the Punic Language*. The work presented a detailed case arguing for a fundamentally close relationship between the Irish and Punic (i.e. Phoenician) languages, claiming that Phoenicians had colonized Ireland in archaic prehistory and called it Thule, a name that survives in ancient sources as an unidentified location.⁴⁵ Siobhán McElduff takes us on an alternative path in tracing the shifting associations between Ireland and Carthage that ultimately lie behind Frank McGuinness’s 1988 play *Carthaginians* (Ch. 14). In excavating the popular eighteenth-century Irish ballad tradition, McElduff highlights how the persona of Dido figures prominently in different guises and in marked contrast to a palpable silence on the Trojan/Roman Aeneas. McGuinness’s Dido is a gay Northern Irish man, a fluid figure in a

⁴⁵ See Roling (2018) for further discussion.

way that would have been controversial in 1980s Irish culture (cf. Ch. 12). *Carthaginians*, like the ballad tradition, substitutes high culture with lower-class concerns. As McElduff draws out, the play's quiz motif levels all kinds of knowledge, highbrow and lowbrow, while McGuinness's Dido becomes a symbol of resilience in contrast to the despairing Dido of Virgil. McGuinness's Dido is the author of *The Burning BalACLava*, the play-within-the-play that presents a travesty of the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972, when British forces shot twenty-eight unarmed civilians, killing fourteen, during a protest against internment. *The Burning BalACLava* sees the characters of the play re-enacting their own oppression or the roles of their oppressors. Here, as throughout *Carthaginians*, the persecution of the downtrodden working class is a constant theme. A pyramid of rubbish constructed during the course of the play symbolizes a non-heroic paradigm according to which empire is relativized and history trivialized. In the end, it is by rejecting imperial models that these working-class characters survive. Survival is similarly a concern in Stacey Gregg's 2006 play *Ismene*, where the refusal to engage in paramilitary violence is what alone can allow working-class Northern Irish characters to survive (cf. Ch. 17).

Gregg and McGuinness both domesticate the 'high culture' of antiquity in their dramas. As Declan Kiberd shows, Joyce's *Ulysses* is likewise a domestication of epic reframed through a non-elitist optic (Ch. 2). T. S. Eliot, in his imperialist view of what constitutes a classic work of literature, could not comprehend that Joyce's *Ulysses*, far from imposing order, was about exposing disorder. Hall notes that Joyce had studied Latin along with Modern Languages and Logic at University College Dublin (Ch. 10), and Kiberd traces the complex and paradoxical associations of Latin in Ireland (Ch. 2). The instruction of Latin was in many ways coordinate with an imperial mentality which significantly downplayed the atrocities of empire in its implied parallels between Rome and Britain. Translation exercises from L. A. Wilding's *Latin Course for Schools*, for instance, emphasized how conquered natives were won over by 'justice and kindness', as Kiberd

discusses. One might adduce further examples of imperialist self-satisfaction from the widely used *Latin Prose Composition for the Middle Forms of Schools* by M. A. North and Rev. A. E. Hillard, first published in 1895, and translated into Irish by Maighnús Ó Dómhnaill in 1937 (cf. Appendix C). Exercise 107 presents Irish rebels in league with the French being decisively scattered by cavalry sent out from Cork. Yet more prescient and, in retrospect, ironic is Exercise 163 in which a group of unrepentant Irishmen is brought to trial on the charge of stirring up revolution. As the exercise has it, ‘They asserted that they had done nothing contrary to the law of nations, since the English were oppressing their land, and they themselves were only trying to free her from an unjust dominion.’ The conclusion of the exercise was rather less prescient, however, in imagining that their ‘words displeased many who were present; but since the prisoners were young, and had never before been accused of any crime, they were spared’.⁴⁶ Here in the classroom the magnanimity of the British Empire is demonstrated in the face of Irishmen who are ‘not easy to govern’, but whose insurgent nationalism might be tamed into past Latinity in the copybook exercise.

From the opposite perspective, the educational materials produced in Ireland after independence could, for their part, insinuate a domesticating and, on occasion, allegorical reading of Roman imperialism. The aforementioned appropriation of Virgil’s experience by Dinneen, discussed by Mac Góráin (Ch. 7), expands to a wider parallel between the Irish and the Gauls as Celtic nations who suffered at the hands of imperialist invaders. Appendix C (to Chapters 5 and 6) records no fewer than eleven Irish translations or editions of different parts of Caesar’s *commentarii* on the Gallic wars. The tenor of these can be appreciated also from James J. Carey’s two-volume English-language commentary on *De Bello Gallico* I and II, which went to multiple reprints and was a staple for those studying Latin for the Certificate Examinations of the Department of

⁴⁶ North and Hillard (1904 [1895]: 84 and 126).

Education between the 1940s and 1980s.⁴⁷ The introduction highlights various parallels between Gaul and ‘Ireland before the Conquest’ on the levels of social and political organization, religion and mythology, trade and commerce (e.g. ‘the Latin *caballus* = “saddle horse” is clearly an adaptation of the Celtic word, of which the Modern Irish form is *capall*’),⁴⁸ and language, literature, and education. Carey necessarily points out to his students that ‘[w]hat has been said about the Gauls in the preceding section is true in the main of the race which inhabited Britain in Caesar’s time’, but following as it does an intervening assessment of the literary agenda of *De Bello Gallico*, which turns on the principle that ‘[t]o justify their actions, conquerors in all ages have endeavoured to discredit the conquered’, the phrase ‘in Caesar’s time’ ensures that the section on The Britons leaves the overarching parallel with the Irish intact.⁴⁹

Perhaps it was Carey’s edition, or one like it, that Irish novelist and critic Liam Mac Cóil remembers studying at school. His essay on the status of the Irish language within an increasingly globalized world begins with a reference to Latin as an imperial language, and to the well-known opening phrase of Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*, *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres* (*BGall.* 1.1 ‘Gaul is a whole divided into three parts’).⁵⁰ Mac Cóil finds a useful metaphor for identifying the place of Irish among world languages in the concept of sending out scouts, a mainstay of Caesar’s narrative, but openly acknowledges having been ‘on the side of the brave, great-hearted Celts’

⁴⁷ Carey (1961 [1945]). The introduction is reprinted at pp. vi–xxiv in both volumes.

⁴⁸ Carey switches into the *cló Gaelach* (Irish typeface) for printing the Irish word (‘capall’), a practice adopted also by Brian O’Nolan in his contemporaneous ‘Cruiskeen Lawn’ columns, as discussed by O’Hogan (Ch. 8).

⁴⁹ Quotations from Carey (1961 [1945]: xvii, xix).

⁵⁰ Mac Cóil (2003: 127).

during his days as a schoolboy, drawing clear distinctions between imperial and non-imperial languages throughout his discussion.⁵¹

A further element in this challenge to imperialism on the level of language comes in connection with use of Latin by the Catholic Church in Ireland after the Penal Laws, as Kiberd points out. The Catholic Church ensured the survival of Latin in an alternative framework that could be packaged as nationalist. The Irish clergy played a significant role in producing intellectually rigorous scholarship, translations, and textbooks for Irish speakers to study classical literature in both Greek and Latin. Patrick Dinneen (Ch. 7) and Pádraig de Brún (Ch. 5) were among the most prolific, but there were many other men of the cloth involved in the production of these materials, from John MacHale in the nineteenth century to numerous twentieth-century clerics: Art Mac Giolla Eoin, Cathal Mac Giobúin, Liam Mac Philibín, Micheál Ó Baoighill, Pádraic Ó Laoi, Peadar Ua Laoghaire, Seán Mac Craith, Seán Ó Catháin (see Appendix C to Chapters 5 and 6). Seamus Heaney's warmly remembered Latin teacher, who introduced him to Virgil, was a Catholic priest.

We return, then, to the point with which we opened our introduction, namely that Irish engagement with classical models raises a unique set of (post)colonial tensions. Unequivocally colonial within the British imperial project, classical languages and literature, particularly in the Latin and Roman tradition, could nevertheless be appropriated as indigenous by Irish nationalists through the centuries-old native Irish legacy of expertise and scholarship in the field. As a result, figures like Patrick Dinneen and Seamus Heaney could find ways to articulate nationalist concerns through Virgil, who in other contexts of British colonialism is identified as 'the poet of empire'.⁵² Dinneen (Ch. 7), alongside de Brún (Ch. 5), championed classical literature at a time when Irish

⁵¹ Mac Cóil (2003: *passim*, quotation at 127).

⁵² Vasunia (2013: 241).

intellectuals were divided in their opinions on the value of non-Irish and non-Celtic material. Leaders of the 1916 rebellion, including Patrick Pearse (Ch. 3) and Thomas MacDonagh (Ch. 4), were clearly conflicted on the issue, at once prioritizing native Irish models while at the same time being deeply influenced by classical modes of expression. Like Dinneen and de Brún, Pearse and MacDonagh were liberal, intellectually speaking, and these men realized that embracing classical literature, and indeed European literature more broadly, did not threaten the legitimacy of indigenous Irish literature.

We have seen how the opposition de Brún faced at the hands of Daniel Corkery led to the discontinuance of de Brún's publications of Greek texts in Irish. As Kiberd relates (Ch. 2), Corkery argued that importing the classical paradigm stifled national individualism when (on Corkery's view) Irish culture had been, and should remain, untainted by such foreign intrusions. On the other hand, professors at Trinity College Dublin, like John Pentland Mahaffy (Professor of Ancient History) and Robert Atkinson (Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology), worked hard to undermine the development of Irish as a university subject. Their opposition to modern Irish was based on the notion that the language was disorganized, lacking standardized spelling, and that its literature was not worth studying. Kiberd highlights some ironies in this debate: Corkery's fetishization of tradition in fact worked to downplay individual talent; and when Irish did become a school subject, it suffered the fate of being codified like a classical language, although (as Kiberd points out) this codification might also be traced to the artificiality inherent in the classicizing form of bardic poetry stretching back to the collapse of Gaelic bardic culture in the 1600s.⁵³ After

⁵³ The *Rudimenta Grammaticae Hibernicae* (c.1600), composed by Bonaventura O'Hussey (c.1570–1614), who had trained as a bard before joining the Franciscan order, was 'written in Latin and based on the

collapse new forms emerge—a pattern that holds also for the collapse of colonial culture in the twentieth century. One example of this, discussed in Kiberd’s chapter, is Howard Brenton’s 1981 play *The Romans in Britain*, which turns on a direct parallelism between the Roman conquest of Britain and the British military presence in Northern Ireland. The radical point being made is that the British, like the Irish, are intrinsically Celtic, and the play works persistently to undermine the dichotomy between the British and the Irish as enemies, even as the British soldiers, who mostly insist on tracing their lineage to King Arthur, fail to comprehend the self-contradictory nature of their country’s colonial vision.

We have endeavoured, in this introduction, to avoid replicating the sequence of the sections and chapters of the volume, which we hope speaks for itself, in order to highlight alternative points of contact between chapters and to draw attention to issues, themes, and individuals that speak across the different subsections. We are aware that this collection merely scratches the surface of a vast reception history, but hope nevertheless that it will prove to be a valuable stepping stone for future research in this area. The recent allocation of a large grant from the European Research Council to support the project ‘Classical Influences and Irish Culture’ (2019–24), which will investigate the sociopolitical implications of Irish engagement with classical models from the medieval period to the present day across different fields (including literature in Irish and in English, history, philosophy, gender studies, material culture), is a promising development.⁵⁴

structures of Latin grammar’ (O’Higgins (2017: 26)). On pre-revival codification of the Irish language see further Wolf (2012).

⁵⁴ For further information on this project see <http://cllc.au.dk/> (accessed 5 December 2019).