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, "*Samhain*: 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 *CL1* (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 Claidheamh 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 assembles of Tara, Emania, Carman, and Tailtenn, were to the men of Ireland." "The Oireachtas," *An Claidheamh 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); Liebregts (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 Aneirin 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 Liebregts (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 Liebregts (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.