Those swans, remember: Graeco-Celtic relations in the work of J.M. Synge

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Abstract

The Celts, as a distinct and culturally-unified people, are a social construction as much as an historical reality, endowing Celtic antiquity with a certain availability of outline, and a certain scope. When the Celtic world began to be scrutinised in the eighteenth century, its borders could, therefore, be filled with concepts drawn from other antiquities. Classical antiquity, and particularly its Greek variety, was a vital coordinate in this navigation of the past. This thesis explores the history of these Graeco-Celtic negotiations. Using Reinhart Koselleck's theory of asymmetric counterconcepts, it calculates the precise angles of the relation between Greek and Celt in antiquarianism, comparative mythology and folklore, Classics and Celtic Studies, from the early eighteenth and to the late nineteenth centuries.

The thesis then puts forward one particular writer as an original and unique interpreter of the tradition of Graeco-Celtic relations, the Irish playwright J.M. Synge. Through archival research, it demonstrates quite how deeply Synge was immersed in this scholarly tradition; in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, he followed a deliberate path of reading in antiquarianism, Classics, Celtic Studies, comparative linguistics, mythology and folklore. It then argues that Synge transformed such Graeco-Celtic scholarship into a formidable authorial strategy, in his prose account of his travels on the Aran Islands and his famous, controversial plays. By identifying this strategy, it reveals how Synge's work exploits the continued presence and power of antiquity.

Most studies of the reception of Greek antiquity in Irish literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries assume a straightforward, inherent connection between Ireland and Greece. This thesis complicates that connection by identifying the powerful history of Graeco-Celtic relations and, particularly, its transformation at the hands of J.M. Synge. This will allow for scrutiny of what actually happens at the crux between Greece and Ireland in literary texts.

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Bibliography

Editions and Abbreviations

1. In-text references to the works of J.M. Synge are to the following editions (the abbreviations used for citations are shown in square brackets).

J.M. Synge, *Collected Works* in four volumes, general editor Robin Skelton, (London, Oxford University Press, 1962-68; repr. Gerrards Cross, Colin Smithe Ltd., 1982).

Vol. I: Poems, ed. Robin Skelton (1962; repr. 1982).

Vol. II: Prose, ed. Alan Price (1966; repr. 1982)[=*Prose*].

Vol. III: Plays Book I, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (1968; repr. 1982) [=*Plays I]*.

Vol. IV: Plays Book II, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (1968; repr. 1982) [=*Plays II*].

The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge: Vol. I 1871-1907, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Oxford, 1983) [=*Letters I*].

The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge. Vol. II 1907-1909 (ed.), Ann Saddlemyer (Oxford, 1984) [=*Letters II*].

2. All references to the Synge Manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, follow the itemisation and foliation of the collection as set out in Nicholas Grene, *The Synge Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin*: *A Catalogue Prepared on the Occasion of the Synge Centenary Exhibition 1971* (Dublin, 1971).

3. References to classical authors are made to the text used in the most recent Loeb Classical Library edition, with the exception of Solinus (ed. Mommsen, 1895) and Pomponius Mela (ed. Silberman, 1988). All translations my own. Abbreviations of the names and works of ancient authors follow the practice of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edn, Oxford, 2014).

4. All citations from European vernaculars are taken directly from the texts. There is no attempt to update archaisms.

Introduction

Those swans, remember…
linked the dark Aegean to the Moyle…
past Tara's grass and the wrecked Trojan spoil.
John Hewitt[1]

1. Jigsaw puzzles

Hubert Butler was born in Kilkenny in Ireland in 1900. He died there in 1991. A member of the 'Anglo-Irish nationalist' class, he was an outspoken essayist who had studied Classics at Oxford, travelled through Europe and Asia, married the sister of Tyrone Guthrie, and returned to Ireland in 1941, to live out his days in his ancestral home, Maidenhall.[2] He there resurrected the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, because, as he put it, 'the past was not so dead that it could not strike sparks out of the present.'[3]

Butler's first book was not published until he was seventy-two. When it eventually appeared, it made great use of this striking of sparks between past and present. It is called *Ten Thousand Saints: A Study in Irish & European Origins* and presents an elaborate genealogical background to 'Celtic Christianity.'[4] According to Butler, the early Irish saints, 'though key figures in the unravelling of our past,' were not real historical persons, but rather symbols which had been 'superimposed with great care over something more ancient, beautiful and interesting than themselves.'[5] Using his method of 'pun-craft' or 'pun-biography,' Butler dug beneath the names and stories of these ten thousand Celtic saints and found that they were memories of 'the

[1] John Hewitt, 'Those swans remember: a poem' (1956), in *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt*, ed. Frank Ormsby (Belfast, 1992), 48.
[2] R.F. Foster, 'Introduction', in Hubert Butler, *The Sub-Prefect should have held his tongue and other essays,* ed. R.F. Foster (London, 1990), xi-xii.
[3] Hubert Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints: A Study in Irish & European Origins* (2nd edn, Dublin, 2011), xxv.
[4] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 9.
[5] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, xxv, 12.

dying art of ancestor-making.'[6] They were manifestations of the same impulse that led to the heroes, gods and demons of Irish mythology. The saints, as he explained in a later essay, 'were tribal ancestors Christianized'.[7]

In the preface to the first edition of *Ten Thousand Saints*, Butler gives an analogy for his 'antiquated methods'. 'Perhaps,' he says, 'a jigsaw puzzle addict would understand me best. Spilling on the table a mass of queerly shaped pieces, he assumes they form a picture. It is an enormous puzzle and the reproduction on the lid and many of the pieces are missing.'[8] This addict works in near darkness and against great odds, but that unknowing is part of the point of his effort. 'Sometimes,' Butler writes, 'he groups the pieces by colour, sometimes by shape; he never stops guessing, because every recorded failure, by elimination, brings success a little nearer…He has only one rule. Go on guessing!'[9] Butler's work is an attempt to put together just such an 'enormous puzzle', despite the missing pieces, and slot together the fragments of the Celtic world. 'The jigsaw addict', Butler describes, 'sits alone at his vast table, shifting the pieces round and round'.[10]

For the jigsaw puzzle addict like Butler, Celtic antiquity gave many opportunities for the creative joining of one piece of antiquity to another. This is because, as has been increasingly stressed in the last two decades, the Celts, as a distinct and culturally-unified people, are a social construction as much as an historical reality. 'The concept of "The Celts"', as Joep Leerssen puts it, 'is…a *construct*'.[11] This does not mean 'that the term is valueless or wrong', but rather, and more interestingly, 'that its appearance is a product of discursive and cognitive activity, that

[6] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 12.
[7] Hubert Butler, 'Influenza in Aran' (1987), in Butler, *The Sub-Prefect should have held his tongue*, 151. For a good account of the argument and reception of *Ten Thousand Saints*, see Robert Tobin, *The Minority Voice: Hubert Butler and Southern Irish Protestantism, 1900-1991* (Oxford, 2012), 206-214.
[8] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, xxv.
[9] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, xxv.
[10] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, xxvii.
[11] Joep Leerssen, 'Celticism', in Terence Brown ed., *Celticism* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996), 2.

its emergence can be historically (roughly) dated and that it carries the imprint of a number of connotations and ideological presuppositions.'[12]

These 'Celts' came into being at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when antiquarians borrowed the Graeco-Roman ethnological labels of Κελτοί, Γᾶλάται, *Celtae* and *Galli*, which referred only vaguely to people living to the north and west of the Alps, and combined them with Edward Lhuyd's observation from 1707, that the languages of France, Britain and Ireland bore distinct similarities. This combination bolstered the conclusion that 'the Celts' must have been a firmly-delineated race, all speaking the same language and sharing the same culture.[13] Then, nineteenth-century archaeological excavations in Europe, as Barry Cunliffe explains, unearthed an apparent '"Celtic" assemblage and…a "Celtic" art', particularly at Halstatt and La Tène.[14] These fuelled the eighteenth-century fire and led to the popular and still-pervasive image of the northern Celts, 'sword-bearers and all the rest of it.'[15]

The image, though, is based on a confusion of archaeological and linguistic similarities. As Colin Renfrew explains, to refer to a Celtic language and to a Celtic coin, for example, or a Celtic shield is 'to speak of matters which are not equivalent'.[16] It should be stressed, immediately, that this idea of the 'Celtic' as a largely imaginative rather than historical conception is neither a comment on modern Celtic Studies or Celtic linguistics (the Celtic languages, for example, *are* a unified family), nor a reference to the use of 'Celtic' as a mark of identity by modern groups. However, several scholars have, indeed, with increasing frequency, turned their attention to the vagueness involved in the *historical* construction of the Celt, in the eighteenth and

[12] Leerssen, 'Celticism', 2.
[13] For classical sources on the Celts, see Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: the Construction of a Myth* (Basingstoke, 1992), 165-184; and David Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World* (London, 1996).
[14] Barry Cunliffe, 'In the Fabulous Celtic Twilight', in Larissa Bonfante ed., *The Barbarians of Ancient Europe: Realities and Interactions* (Cambridge, 2011), 191.
[15] Dirk Brandherm, 'Westward Ho? Sword-Bearers and All the Rest of it…', in John T. Koch and Barry Cunliffe eds., *Celtic from the West 2: Rethinking the Bronze Age and the Arrival of Indo-European in Atlantic Europe* (Oxford, 2013), 147.
[16] Colin Renfrew, 'Early Celtic in the West: The Indo-European Context', in Koch and Cunliffe eds., *Celtic from the West*, 208.

nineteenth centuries. They have pointed to its entanglement in confusion, and in what Cunliffe identifies as a 'straightjacket of circular argument.'[17] The ambiguity of the term Celtic was even the subject of a major exhibition at the British Museum in 2015: 'this scope', its catalogue declared, 'is a problem'.[18]

As Eoin MacNeill, the politician, historian and hero of Hubert Butler explained in 1921, the Celtic world, therefore, offered itself in many respects as an 'immense space of antiquity.'[19] The 'lack of clarity' about the Celts gave them a certain availability or scope for those many thinkers – antiquarians, linguists and mythologists – who, in Butler's terms, were 'conscious of a vacuum, which had somehow to be filled.'[20] It appeared as a box full of pieces, waiting to be scattered on a table and re-arranged by a willing and determined maker of patterns.[21]

2. Celtic and Greek connections

Butler's ten thousand saints were identical, he claimed, not only to the figures of Irish pagan traditions but also, and still more controversially, to the heroes and gods of the mythology of ancient Greece. Their trappings and their deeds dimly recalled the same prehistoric movement of tribes, waves of invasion and settlement that are, for Butler, recorded in Greek mythology. 'The towering fabric of genealogical make believe,' Butler argued, 'which led to epic poetry in Greece, led in Ireland to the most elaborate and abundant hagiography that any country possesses.'[22] Therefore, as Butler puts it, 'if we were to read the ancient notation correctly, we should one day learn of the

[17] Cunliffe, 'In the Fabulous Celtic Twilight', 191.
[18] Ian Leins, *Celts: art and identity* (London, 2015), 4.
[19] Eoin MacNeill, *Celtic Ireland* (new edn, Dublin, 1981), 36.
[20] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 7.
[21] For further accounts of the process of the construction of the 'Celt,' see Simon James, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London, 1999), 43-66; Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1999), 185-200; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'How are you finding it here?', *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no. 21 (28 Oct., 1999), 30-31; and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Celts', in Michael Lapidge et al. eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2014), 92.
[22] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 34.

wanderings and minglings of all the great tribes of Europe and how every parish in Ireland and many in Britain and in Europe were settled.'[23]

'Why', Hubert Butler asks, 'did the Irish keep saying that they were related to the Greeks?'[24] His own answer to this ancient idea is in the form of a common ancestor, either Grec, 'the ancestor of the Grecraige of Connacht', as well as of the 'pre-Hellenic Graeci from the Adriatic coast', or alternatively a figure remembered among the Irish as Mil, or as 'Miletus, son of Apollo' among the Greeks.[25] By posing such a question and answering it in such a way, Butler positions ancient Ireland in a wider network of antiquity, an intricate pattern of ancestors, connection and memory that stretches across Europe, from Ireland to Greece, Connacht to Miletus. In order to ground his theory of the Celtic saints, in other words, or to fill the immense space of the Celtic world, he links the Irish saints to the Greeks. He argues that both 'belong to a single pattern…moored to history and to each other by long chains'. 'If one chain snaps,' he warns, 'they all snap.'[26]

For Butler, the Greeks and the Celts were all part of the same puzzle, moored to each other by the same network of chains. A piece of the Celtic world could be recovered, therefore, when seen in the light of its corresponding piece of Greek antiquity; its outline could be completed when placed next to the outline of its Greek equivalent. This results in a system that is distinctly labyrinthine, vertiginous and kaleidoscopic, and that should, most importantly, be acknowledged as part of a long history of such Celtic-Greek geometries.[27] This thesis will study the history of jigsaw puzzle addicts like Butler, who plotted the position of the ancient Celtic world in the wider map of antiquity through the coordinates of ancient Greece. It will track the

[23] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 12
[24] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 171.
[25] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 175.
[26] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 5.
[27] Cf. Butler on the saints of Celtic Christianity being 'as bodiless as algebraic or geometrical symbols', *Ten Thousand Saints*, 83. Or, at 185, 'as algebraic symbols, simple and multiple, to be used in the demonstration of the relationship of tribes.'

history of the attempt to work out the difficult angles between the Celtic and the Greek.[28]

Butler is a useful guide to begin with, as his work provides a sample of the broad characteristics of this Graeco-Celtic tradition (though it is by no means uniform). Like Butler's *Ten Thousand Saints*, attempts to understand Graeco-Celtic relations will be seen, by and large, to belong to a mode of thought characterised by expansiveness, by the drive to make connections, to move from the individual (for Butler, the Irish saint) to the group (the Irish-Greek tribe), to go behind and around the classical in time or space – to join Celtic antiquity not to fifth-century but archaic Greece, for example, or not to Athens but to Thrace – to favour outlying rather than canonical antiquities and to draw on outlying rather than canonical texts: versions, anthologies and oral traditions. Methodologically, these attempts draw on a vast range of secondary sources; in particular, they include both classical and Celtic scholarship and move enlighteningly between them. They display the same labyrinthine quality that is evident in Butler's system, with web-like tendrils or constellations linking the Celtic and the Greek. As John Hewitt writes, in the poem that is used as the epigraph to this chapter and to the study as a whole, 'the symbols jostle for their breathing space'.[29]

By and large, and again as in Butler's system, 'none of it…is true in the ordinary way'.[30] The significance of this 'pattern of imagination'[31] is less scientific and more poetic. In its search for connections between the Celtic and the Greek, it pays attention to the substrata of individual words, less like a systematic philologist and more like a poet attuned to the surface echoes of language. Like Butler's theory of pun-craft – an 'ancient genealogical practice,' by which 'entire life stories were built out of tribal puns'[32] – it puts great faith in the ability of words to capture and carry

[28] It is vital to note that this thesis has been precluded, necessarily, from an examination of texts in the Irish language. Such a study would be extremely worthwhile but could not be undertaken here.
[29] Hewitt, 'Those swans remember', 45.
[30] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 40.
[31] A phrase borrowed from Joep Leerssen's invaluable study, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), 4.
[32] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 19.

memory. 'Pun language,' according to Butler, is '...the precursor of poetry.'[33] It follows, therefore, that it can be best studied as literature, rather than scholarship (though again this is not universally true), and that comment on its processes and results should not be seen as comment on more scientific or rigorous studies of the Celtic past.

Hubert Butler also functions in this Introduction as a useful reminder of the necessity of taking note of thinkers outside the mainstream, who may be wrong but who may also be significant. Many of those who turned their hand to understanding Graeco-Celtic relations were, as Butler himself acknowledges, somewhat out-dated, unorthodox, often motivated by less than academic concerns, and blind to the rules of scientific philology and history.[34] But, as Butler insists, when writing of the antiquarian Marcus Keane (who will be studied in Chapter Three), they 'had the merit of a clumsy boot shoved in a doorway'.[35] Or, as Maurice Olender says of his subjects, 'the best way to understand them is no doubt to take them seriously'.[36]

3. Asymmetric counterconcepts

A helpful way to introduce these ideas further is provided by Reinhart Koselleck's theory of asymmetric counterconcepts. In his influential study of 'the difference between history and its "conceptualization"', first published in 1979, Koselleck argued that 'especial care' must be employed when 'investigating what are not simply individual concepts but pairs of concepts whose world-historical effectiveness cannot be doubted.'[37] Koselleck's examples include Christian and heathen, human and nonhuman, as pairs of terms whose conceptualisation hinges on the conceptualisation

[33] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 36. He has an interesting analysis of Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* as just such an 'ancient punster', at 21-22.
[34] For Butler's own divergence from 'the philological or textual orthodoxy,' see Alan Harrison, 'Introduction', in Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, xix.
[35] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 8.
[36] Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 17.
[37] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time,* trans. Keith Tribe (New York, 2005), 157-158.

of the other – when one rises in value, for example, it is rising *against* the value of the other. 'These are epistemological categories', Koselleck explains, 'whose substantial content (determined through historical experience) can serve to asymmetrically load both linguistic fields.'[38] Each is to some extent an empty space, waiting to be filled by the content of the other. This thesis proposes that the history of the notion of the Celtic as it has been formed in relation to the Greek is, in formal terms, the history of the asymmetric counterconcepts of Greek and Celt.

To track the history of these jigsaw puzzle addicts, therefore, requires paying attention not only to shifts in the shape of Celtic antiquity, but also to shifts in the shape of ancient Greece, as it was received in scholarship, antiquarianism and literature. This study must acknowledge that when one morphs, the other necessarily morphs too. Koselleck's formulation is also a salutary reminder that the interrelated development of the notion of Greek and Celtic antiquity necessarily involved asymmetry (just in case the above, on the characterisation of Butler's jigsaw puzzle addict, was in danger of being far too romanticised). A statement about Greek in relation to Celt always involved the assessment of relative value, whether moral, aesthetic, or scholarly.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Koselleck's formulation also rules out the suggestion of any singular or dominant direction of movement, the assumption that the concept 'Celtic' follows the lead of the concept 'Greek.' Rather, it must remain open to the idea that the shape of Greek antiquity has been formed just as much in reaction to the shape of Celtic, as the other way around. If Koselleck's terms are accepted, then it must be allowed that classical reception has responded, in frequent and important ways, to the reception of the Celt. This is despite the reluctance of some scholars (as will be examined in Chapter Two) to tarnish classical splendour with a Celtic brush. John Beazley, for instance, reputedly warned the archaeologist and art

[38] Koselleck, *Futures past*, 191.

historian Paul Jacobsthal, when he was offered the position of Reader of Celtic Studies at Oxford, to steer well clear of the 'chair of barbarian studies.'[39]

As Jane Harrison looked back at the development of Classics as a discipline over the nineteenth century, she declared that 'the curtain was rung up on a whole new Ægean – nay, more….a whole unknown Mediterranean'.[40] This study aims to demonstrate that the navigation of this new Mediterranean both allowed for, and depended on, a navigation of a whole 'new Atlantic' also.

4. Chapter outlines

i. Chapter One: Greeks, Celts and antiquarians

The first chapter will examine how attempts in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to piece together the fragments of the newly-discovered Celtic world necessarily involved a negotiation between the Celtic and the Greek. It will consider how antiquarians dealt with the classical characterisation of these Celts as barbaric, positing instead a world of pre-eminent bards and philosophical druids. The chapter will suggest that this alternative was, nevertheless, consistently defined through its relation to the Greek (Macpherson's Ossian as a second and superior Homer, for example). It will then investigate how the Indo-European hypothesis, later in the century, reshaped the relation of Celtic and Greek, pulling both towards the east.

ii. Chapter Two: The backlash against the Celts

The second chapter will stand as a brief supplement to the first. It will examine the reaction against this growing interest in the Celts, and their rising significance to the

[39] Sally Crawford, 'The mysterious "Bund": Classics, Refugee Scholars and Oxford in WWII.' Paper delivered at the 'Reception and Scholarship' seminar, the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (9 Nov., 2015), Oxford.
[40] Jane Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 194, no. 387 (1901), 221.

picture of ancient Europe, by focusing on the work of two antiquarians, Edward Ledwich and John Pinkerton. Both display, in direct opposition to the thinkers studied in Chapter One, a reluctance for the Mediterranean classical ideal to be influenced by the Atlantic Celts. The chapter will argue that such anti-Celtic resistance was bound to a specific attitude about the Greeks.

iii. Chapter Three: Revenant antiquarians and Ireland's material remains

Chapter Three will move further into the nineteenth century and investigate how antiquarians in Ireland responded to the increasingly professionalized discipline of archaeology. Chapters One and Two will have revealed the great power of similarities between the Greek and the Celt in attempts at reconstruction – similarities of language, religion and literature – and Chapter Three will probe how archaeological discoveries enhanced this existing methodology, by encouraging a form of visual comparatism. It will examine how three Irish antiquarians, Henry O'Brien, William Betham and Marcus Keane, could argue for a substantial kinship between the Greek and the Celt, by extrapolating from surface similarities between Greek and Celtic material remains.

iv. Chapter Four: Graeco-Celtic comparative mythology and folklore

Chapter Four will examine how the rise of the comparative method in the mid-nineteenth century influenced the shape of Graeco-Celtic relations. The new methodologies of comparative mythology and comparative folklore instituted a vital hermeneutic incentive behind the linking of the Celtic and the Greek. They *required* that the two traditions be seen in parallel, in order for the lost Indo-European whole to stand any chance of reconstruction. They also, it will be seen, played into the 'asymmetry' of Greek and Celt. By focusing on the work of the comparative scholars Alfred Nutt and William Ridgeway, the chapter will argue that, by and large,

comparison did not prove equivalence. Rather, it provided a common ground on which the relative value of Greek and Celt could be determined once and for all.

The chapter will also investigate how such asymmetry in the balance of these counterconcepts began to matter for the Irish Literary Revival, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, when Ireland was formulating its possible identities as an independent nation, both in relation to Britain and, most of all, to the wider world. It will suggests that these relative angles were calculated alongside the angle between the Celtic and the Greek, by examining how Douglas Hyde, a pioneer of the Revival, made use of comparative mythological scholarship.

v. Chapter Five: French Celticism and Irish nationalism: Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville

To understand what happened in Ireland in these terms, it is necessary to look also to France. It was here that Celtic Studies began really to form itself into an independent discipline, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although it seems remote, perhaps, from the concerns of Irish cultural nationalism, the links between French Celticism and the Irish Revival have begun to be explored in much interesting work.[41] Chapter Five will argue that what is vital to remember is the extent to which French Celticism involved a negotiation of Celtic France's relationship to the classical world, focusing on the work of the Celtic scholar, Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville.[42]

It will then turn to the importance of this scholarship to the Revival's project of identity creation for Ireland, examining d'Arbois' influence on W.B. Yeats, as he sought

[41] See especially Sinéad Garrigan Mattar's indispensable study of the use of evolutionary science by Yeats, Augusta Gregory and J.M. Synge, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford, 2004).

[42] Note that although modern scholars consistently refer to the French scholar as Jubainville or de Jubainville, he called himself, and is called by most of those who knew him, d'Arbois. According to an obituary, the 'fly in his pot of ointment' was being called '"de Jubainville" or even worse…Jubainville' by scholars 'from these islands'. See Alfred Nutt, 'H. d'Arbois de Jubainville', *The Athenaeum* (5 Mar., 1910), 277.

to systematise the relationship of Greek and Irish symbols, folklore and mythology, and so 'bring Ireland from under the ruins'.[43]

vi. Chapter Six: Graeco-Celtic comparatism, the Aran Islands and J.M. Synge

Chapter Six will introduce the final piece of the puzzle, the Irish playwright John Millington Synge. Synge's is a unique, valuable and influential contribution to the history of Graeco-Celtic negotiations. A consideration of his work in this light will greatly aid the study, not only of Synge himself, but also of the notions of Greek and Celt, the reception of classical antiquity in Ireland, and classical reception more widely.

Synge's focus early on in his career was distinctly scholarly. He displayed a keen interest in the kind of scholarship and thinking that is explored in this study, determinedly reading his way through relevant works of antiquarianism, linguistics, comparative mythology and folklore, occultism and historical novels. He then, of course, became one of the most important literary figures of the Revival and indeed of Irish, and world, theatre. He was also a close associate of Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, studying under him in Paris. Most importantly of all, he did not abandon this comparative bent when he became a writer. Rather, he transformed it into literature.

The first text of Synge's to be examined in terms of Graeco-Celtic scholarship will be his 1907 work, *The Aran Islands*, a prose account of his travels on these remote islands off the west coast of Ireland. Chapter Six will contextualise Synge's work by examining other Aran Island accounts (contemporary, for the most part, with Synge's visits, together with some from the later twentieth century). It will argue that these exhibit a consistent tendency to characterise, judge and marginalise the islands by means of identifying them with ancient Greece. It will then lay out Synge's own engagement with Graeco-Celtic relations, at the time of his first visit to Aran.

[43] W.B. Yeats, 'Plans and Methods' (1900), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume Two: Reviews, Articles and Other Miscellaneous Prose, 1897-1939*, eds. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London and New York, 1976), 204.

vii. Chapter Seven: Synge's Aran Islands

This chapter will conduct a close analysis of Synge's Aran account. Through a comparison of the published text with earlier draft versions, it will reveal Synge's surprising strategy of excising explicit connections between the islands and ancient Greece, in stark contrast to the Aran literature studied in the previous chapter as well as his own habits of comparative reading. It will then examine what he puts in their place. It will argue that Synge devises a striking authorial technique in this text, crucially informed by his interest in comparative scholarship, as well as his own theories of the role of the reader in the construction of meaning.

viii. Chapter Eight: Synge's Graeco-Celtic tragedy

Chapter Eight will move on from Synge's prose work, examining how he puts Graeco-Celtic relations to use in his plays. The chapter will focus on his early play *Riders to the Sea*, which is also set on the Aran Islands. It will first outline the controversies which have surrounded the relationship between Synge's theatre and ancient Greece, before putting forward a different reading of this relation, one which pays attention to Synge's comparative technique in *The Aran Islands*, his interest in Graeco-Celtic scholarship, and his engagement with the power of shock and recognition in art.

ix. Conclusion: *The Playboy of the Western World*

The concluding chapter will point to how the yields of this study might be used to illuminate the relationship of Synge's most famous play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, with Greek antiquity. This relationship – the angle between Celtic and Greek in *The Playboy* – has so far been viewed only in terms of how Synge adopts and adapts Sophocles' *Oedipus.* Revealing Synge's engagement with Graeco-Celtic relations, however, allows for a complication and refinement of that angle, as the chapter will

propose. It will then close with an Epilogue, summarising the principal discoveries of the study as a whole, and suggesting how Synge's work shines a particular and valuable light on its path.

x. Note on terminology

The word 'Celtic' has been used by the subjects of this thesis with an array of different, sometimes conflicting significations; as indicated above, its ability to blur boundaries and mean different things to different people is one of its chief attributes. This makes precise delineation not only difficult, but also unhelpful. Particularly in the context of the Revival, the use of 'Celtic' and 'Irish' (and 'Gaelic') as identity markers comes with important distinctions, which vary according to the context and content of the statement. The line of influence between Celtic Studies and the Revival, for example, resulted in an overlap between 'Irish' and 'Celtic' as designations. Rather than attempting to determine the precise modification of each term, (an entire subject in itself), this thesis will follow, for its own terminology, the lead of the subject under scrutiny. Their weight and signification will, therefore, contain a certain flexibility, and be determined by the particular context.

5. Current scholarship

There is a certain frustrating simplicity in the current study of the Irish reception of Greece in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (one of the most favoured subjects of classical reception).[44] On the one hand, there is an overwhelming focus on the

[44] For very interesting studies of the Irish reception of Classics *before* the twentieth century, see for example W.B. Stanford, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (Dublin, 1976); Michael Clarke, 'An Irish Achilles and a Greek Cú Chulainn', in Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin eds., *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales* (Maynooth, 2009), 238-251; Ralph O'Connor ed., *Classical Literature and Learning in Medieval*

adaptation of Greek tragedies, and particularly Sophocles' *Antigone*, from the 1980s onwards.[45] On the other, and more importantly, studies of the Irish context consistently assume a straightforward, inherent, and frequently romanticised, connection between the Irish and the Greek. With invaluable exceptions, such studies tend to ignore the difficult, changing interrelation of Greek and Celtic in intellectual, scholarly and cultural history. They posit instead a mysterious link between the Irish and the Greek, an innate, undisclosed relation that functions more on the level of temperament than of history or intellectual negotiation. They are therefore left to hang in somewhat of a vacuum, taking Greek-Irish relations at their word. This can be seen, for example, in the principal study of the Irish reception of Greek tragedy to date, *Amid Our Troubles.* 'The Irish', declares its editor, Marianne McDonald, 'opt for the Greeks'.[46]

This thesis will argue that there is more to it than this. By recognising for the first time the long history of Graeco-Celtic relations, and the status of Greek and Celt as instances of Koselleck's counterconcepts, it will allow for the acknowledgement of a

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Irish Narrative (Cambridge, 2014); and J.V. Luce et al. eds., *The Lure of Greece: Irish Involvement in Greek Culture, Literature, History and Politics* (Dublin, 2007).

[45] See for example, Christopher Murray, 'Three Irish Antigones,' in Jacqueline Genet and Richard Allen Cave eds., *Perspectives of Irish Drama and Theatre* (Gerrards Cross, 1991), 115-129; and Christina Hunt Mahony, 'Reinscribing the Classics, Ancient and Modern: The Sharp Diagonal of Adaptation', in Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford, 2016), 654-670.

[46] Marianne McDonald, 'The Irish and Greek Tragedy', in Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton eds., *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy* (London, 2002), 38. This assumption that it is somehow automatic or 'appropriate' for Irish playwrights to turn to Greece is evident also in, for example, Kelly Younger, *Irish Adaptations of Greek Tragedies: Dionysus in Ireland* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter, 2001), 1-18; and Brian Arkins, *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy* (Dublin, 2009), 17-28. The invaluable exceptions to this superficiality include: Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (2nd edn, London, 1993); Fiona Macintosh, *Dying Acts: Death in Ancient Greek and Irish Tragic Drama* (Cork, 1994); Peter McDonald, 'The Greeks in Ireland: Irish Poets and Greek Tragedy', *Translation and Literature*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1995), 183-203; Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London, 2000), especially at xi-xiii, 474-480; Declan Kiberd, 'Introduction', in McDonald and Walton eds., *Amid Our Troubles*, vii-xiii; Simon Perris, 'Dionysus the Leprechaun: Genre, Identity, and Parody in Derek Mahon's "Bacchae"', *Arion, Third Series*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2008), 53-82; Nicholas Allen, 'Synge, reading and archipelago', in Brian Cliff and Nicholas Grene eds., *Synge and Edwardian Ireland* (Oxford, 2012), 159-171; and Mark Phelan, 'From Troubles to Post-Conflict Theatre in Northern Ireland', in Grene and Morash eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, 375-6.

more complicated angle between Ireland and Greece, for a scrutiny of what actually happens at the crux between Greece and Ireland in literary texts.

It is no coincidence that there is, at the same time, a certain superficiality to the study of Synge himself as a playwright influenced by Classics, as will be argued and detailed in Chapter Eight. The majority of such analyses focus on plot, on whether the grieving mother in *Riders to the Sea*, for example, is a version of Hecuba or the father-killing Christy in *Playboy of the Western World* is a version of Oedipus. This superficiality has led to a frustration among some critics, a desire to sweep away these possible plot parallels. It arises from the dominance of Yeats's version of Irish-Greek relations on the stage, and the role he cultivated for Synge within that world. What it overlooks, however, is the possibility that the way Synge engages with the presence of Greece in Ireland, the 'sparks' that ancient Greece may strike out of present Ireland, to use Butler's terms, is far more structural than this allows. It learns from the pattern of alignment worked out over the centuries that preceded him.

From a modernist perspective, or from the perspective of the study of the Irish Revival, Synge is at the beginning of something: a theatrical tradition that would influence, among others, Samuel Beckett – theatre that, in the words of Yeats, 'has edge…that is salt in the mouth…that is rough to the hand…that stings into life the sense of tragedy'.[47] From the perspective of the history of Graeco-Celtic puzzling, however, he is, on the contrary, a conduit, a catalyst or a hinge. While Butler functions in this Introduction as a broad likeness of what is to come in this study, Synge acts in its second half as a concentration of what precedes him. He absorbs the long tradition of Graeco-Celtic thought and refracts it, twisting it in a new direction and turning centuries of Graeco-Celtic connections into a ground-breaking art. He formulates a methodology for the recognition of ancient in modern, Greek in Irish, which the final three chapters of this study will explore.

'The past,' wrote Hubert Butler in an essay of 1987, 'is a mosaic of tiny pieces, a fragment of a larger picture'.[48] The arrangement of Greek and Celtic in this mosaic is

[47] W.B. Yeats, 'J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time' (1911), in *Essays and Introductions* (London and Basingstoke, 1961), 326-327.
[48] Hubert Butler, 'Aunt Harriet' (1987), in *The Sub-Prefect should have held his tongue*, 60.

intricate. By unearthing the history behind the counterconcepts of Greek and Celt, and the asymmetry involved, this thesis aims therefore to deepen the current view of the Graeco-Celtic connection. Butler looks back over his shoulder at a complicated tradition, a shuffling and reshuffling of the fragments of the mosaic or the pieces of the puzzle, but this complexity is not now acknowledged. The network of Greek and Celtic relations is shut down into a simple, easy movement between the two. It can be opened out again, as Hubert Butler hoped to do, by looking at the work of J.M. Synge.

Chapter One

Greeks, Celts and antiquarians

1. Introduction

Greece – a land which presents so many and so striking analogies to that of the Gael
Douglas Hyde[1]

What the Greek was to the ancient world, the Gael will be to the modern
Patrick Pearse[2]

The difference of Greek and Gael is no fiction.
Thomas MacDonagh[3]

Before the turn to the Celtic, seventeenth-century investigations into Ireland's ancient history were largely concerned with medieval recensions of oral traditions, concerning the country's origins. These origin myths tied Ireland firmly to Greek antiquity, as well as biblical narratives, in order to reap the fruits of an 'antique respectability'.[4] Often nominated as 'the Irish Herodotus,' it was Geoffrey Keating who first used these traditions in a narrative history, and was 'most responsible for bringing the origin legends of the Gaelic Irish into common currency.'[5] His *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, or *History of Ireland*, of the 1620s was also, according to Joep Leerssen, 'probably the last

[1] Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland From Earliest Times To the Present Day*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (new edn, London, 1980), 58.
[2] Patrick Pearse, 'The Intellectual Future of the Gael' (1897), in *Collected Works of Pádraic H. Pearse* (Dublin, Cork and Belfast, 1917), 231.
[3] Thomas MacDonagh, 'Ancient Irish Poetry', *The Irish Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Apr., 1911), 85.
[4] Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World*, 27. NB also the role of propagandist accounts of Ireland, such as Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, designed to legitimise or defend English domination.
[5] Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c.1750-1800* (Cork, 2004), 17.

important book in European literature' to make its mark without the help of the printing press.[6]

'Perfect', declares Keating – who 'loved romance and a stirring tale' – 'is the sound information which [Ireland's] antiquaries possess on the transactions of their ancestors from the beginning of eras, one after another.'[7] These ancient transactions involved extensive contact with Greece. 'For every invasion that came into Ireland after the deluge,' he argues, 'except only the race of Gaedheal and the children of Neimheadh, it is from Greece they came'.[8] Keating's principal source here, which he effectively summarises, is the *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, or *The Book of Invasions*, an eleventh-century compilation of tracts dating from the eighth century onwards. According to the *Lebor Gabála*, the first settlers of Ireland, the race of Partholon, come from Sicily via Greece, and the second, the race of Nemed, from Scythia. The two groups then break off and live in Greece, before returning to Ireland as the race of the Fir Bolg and the race of the Túatha Dé Danann. There was then a third wave, the Milesians, who came from Greece via Egypt and Spain.[9]

'Understand, O reader,' writes Keating of these Túatha Dé Danann, 'that Boeotia and the city of Athens…are in the district of Greece which is called Achaia: and that it is there they learned their magic and their arts until they became skilled in every trick of sorcery.'[10] Ireland's classical relations did not always, however, license such a powerful narrative. Keating had also to contend with those classical sources which, particularly with the memory of the Celtic sack of Rome in the fourth century BC and the invasion of Greece in the third, paint the Celts in the standard colours of the bloodthirsty barbarian. 'There are some ancient authors', Keating argues, 'who lay

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[6] Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish & Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the idea of Irish nationality, its development and literary expression prior to the nineteenth century* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1986), 316.
[7] Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran Son of Ferbal to the Land of the Living. With an Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth*, two vols (London, 1895-1897), i. 116; Geoffrey Keating, *The History of Ireland. Volume One*, ed. and trans. David Comyn (London, 1902), 105.
[8] Keating, *History*, 235.
[9] R.A. Stewart Macalister ed. and trans., *Lebor Gabála Érenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, five vols (Dublin, 1932-1956), ii. 9ff. See Keating, *History*, 155-197.
[10] Keating, *History*, 203.

lying charges against the Irish'.[11] He refutes Strabo, for example, for stating 'in his fourth book that the Irish are a man-eating people' (Str. 4.5.4), Solinus, who 'says…that the Irishman is wont, when his enemy is slain by him, to bathe himself in the blood' (Sol. 22.3-4), and Pomponius Mela, because he 'says these words, speaking of the Irish, "a people ignorant of all the virtues"' (Mela 3.53).[12]

Already with Keating in the seventeenth century, therefore, and the medieval traditions with which he deals, the loaded and conflicting implications of Ireland's relation to Greece begin to emerge, before the Celtic world has become a subject of attention. These thorny relations have long lives. In 1778, Sylvester O'Halloran, an antiquarian and surgeon in Limerick (and the model for Maria Edgeworth's antiquarian in *The Absentee*) argued that Irish history had been 'not only greatly neglected, but grossly misrepresented in modern times', despite being 'the only one, of all the nations of Europe…transmitted to us pure and uninterrupted, from the remotest antiquity to this day'.[13] He laid the cause of this misrepresentation at the feet of the same three authors as Keating, blaming their 'horrible pictures of the manners and customs of the Irish nation'.[14] 'Strabo tells us,' wrote O'Halloran, 'that the Irish were the most abominable and detestable of people. That they devoured human flesh, even that of their parents; committed incest &c.' 'Amongst the Latins,' he continued, 'Mela and Solinus are equally severe'.[15]

Sylvester O'Halloran also continued to employ the origin myths which were set down and ordered by Keating and others in the seventeenth century. On the basis of the tradition that both the Fir Bolg and the Túatha Dé Danann spent time in Greece, he explained that 'Irish hospitality…so celebrated as to become proverbial' is due to an historic period of contact with the Cretans, whose hospitality he says was similarly

[11] Keating, *History,* 9.
[12] Keating, *History*, 9-11.
[13] Sylvester O'Halloran, *A General History of Ireland, from the earliest account to the close of the twelfth century, collected from the most Authentic Records*, two vols (London, 1778) i. v.
[14] O'Halloran, *General History*, i. xxx.
[15] O'Halloran, *General History*, i. 78. The classic trope of cannibalism is also applied to the Celts in e.g. Diod. 5.32.3 (and for the possibility that this refers specifically to Ireland, see Philip Freeman, *Ireland and the Classical World* (Austin, 2001), 35-36). For other claims of Celtic wildness and rage, see e.g. Plb. 2.35.3-4 and Liv. 5.37.4.

renowned. 'It is unnecessary to remind our readers that HERE our ancestors principally resided during their stay in Greece.'[16]

These ideas would continue to arise, and the same sources would continue to reappear, right into the twentieth century and the Irish Literary Revival. However, lying between Keating's account of the Greek origin of the Irish and the twentieth-century Revivalist perception of a possible connection between Greece and Ireland, there is the long history of Celtic constructions. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how antiquarians began, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to position these new-sprung Celts in the contemporary, changing narratives of the ancient Greek world, and vice versa.[17]

2. Celtic barbarians?

> *The remnant passed with him into Ireland, where the Barbarians highly honoured him, for his cunning in all languages, who also greatly perfected and beautified the Irish tongue, taught them letters, sought up their antiquities, practiced their youth in martially feates, after his Greek and Ægyptian manner.*
>
> Edmund Campion[18]

> *Dr. Daniel Clarke found a Druidical circle on the top of mount Gargarus, the ancient Ida, where the Gods of Homer assembled at the siege of Troy.*
>
> Godfrey Higgins[19]

[16] O'Halloran, *General History*, i. 69. He also uses another prominent seventeenth-century historian, Roderic O'Flaherty, in his acceptance of the idea that Ireland was the island named Ogygia by Homer in the *Odyssey*, at i. 51-52.

[17] For a helpful overview of antiquarianism in general, see Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986), 13-23.

[18] Edmund Campion, *A Historie of Ireland* (1571), quoted in Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, 2008), 46.

[19] Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis, an attempt to draw aside the veil of The Saitic Isis; or, an Inquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions*, two vols (London, 1836), i. 229.

a. Celtic-Greek bards: Ossian and Homer

In 1703, the Abbé Paul-Yvez Pezron, a Cistercian from Brittany, wished to make up for Samuel Bochart's failure to include the Celts in his influential genealogy of nations, the *Geographia Sacra*, and to establish Gomer, son of Japhet, as '*le premier & véritable Père des peuples Gaulois*'.[20] Having noticed linguistic similarities between Welsh and Breton, the Abbé Pezron was among the earliest of scholars to argue for an ancient community of people called the Celts. As Prys Morgan says, he 'wrote a gripping story.'[21]

A great deal under the influence of the Abbé Pezron, the eighteenth century then saw the explosion of British and Irish Celticism (Stuart Piggott actually dates the rise in interest in the Celts to David Jones' 1706 translation of Pezron's work).[22] This was a preoccupation with druids and bards, 'the forest glade, the shaded grove,' and an 'Ancient Druid Rocky Shore.'[23] It was 'a fashion for the Celts which amounted at times to a mania', and was deeply imbued with the primitivism, romanticism, Orientalism and Gothicism that grew in that century, and continued with them into the nineteenth.[24]

Alongside tracing Celtic ancestry to Noah, Pezron traced it to what he saw as the Titans of Greek and Roman mythology, euhemerizing Jupiter and Saturn as Celtic kings. He argued that the Celts, '*ces Peuples célèbres, bien des siècles avant que de porter ce nom, s'étoient…donné* [sic] *celui de* Titans*, pendant qu'ils occupoient les*

[20] Paul-Yves Pezron, 'Preface', in *Antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes, autrement appellez Gaulois* (Paris, 1703), n.p.
[21] Prys Morgan, 'From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (repr. Cambridge, 2013), 67.
[22] Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London, 1968), 152. See also Colin Kidd on Pezron's importance to British Celticism, *British Identities,* 66-70.
[23] Piggott, *The Druids,* 142, 173 (quoting William Blake's *Jerusalem*).
[24] Morgan, 'From a Death to a View', 67. See also Kidd, *British Identities*, 250-286; O'Halloran, *Golden Ages,* 41-70.

provinces de la petite Asie, & toutes celles de la Grèce, & des environs.'[25] He thus solved '*le mystère, que les anciens Grecs, non plus que les Latins, n'ont pu decouvrir*' – the original identity of their gods – and positioned the Celtic and Greek worlds alongside each other.[26] The Titans, Pezron argued, were ancestors also of the Spartans, Cretans and other Greeks. They also spoke a Celtic language: '*ils n'ont point eu d'autre Langue, que celle des Celtes*'.[27]

However, Pezron explains, an abiding inclination to trust the authority of the Greeks, twinned with respect for their artistic and civic achievements, has disinclined subsequent generations from acknowledging that the Greeks may have owed something to barbaric roots:

> *les Loix, les Sciences, les beaux Arts, joints à l'éloquence & à la politesse des Grecs, les ont mis si avant dans l'esprit de la plûpart des autres Nations, qu'elles ne cessent de les admirer…Comme donc les idées qu'on a formées de ces peuples, & qu'on a formées avec raison, sont grandes & avantageuses; l'on ne voudra jamais croire, que leurs premiers commencemens, au moins ceux qui nous sont connus par l'histoire, viennent des peuples barbares*.[28]

The debt of the Greek and Latin languages to the Celtic '*Barbares du Nord*,' which Pezron has revealed, and the resulting diminution of Greek autonomy, will, he predicts, be challenged by his contemporaries, '*puisque nous sommes dans un siècle, où le témoignage d'un Grec fait plus d'impression sur l'esprit de plusieurs, que les meilleures raisons*'.[29]

The idea that the boosting of the Celtic up the antique ladder also requires the reassessment of an attitude towards the Greek, the interaction between the Celts as barbarians and the Greeks as civilised, the necessity for changing these categories once a new understanding has been reached of Celtic antiquity, and the alignment of the Celtic with some element of the Greek – here, the chief gods of Greek tradition – will all reappear as the century wears on. They will become the hallmarks of Greek and

[25] Pezron, 'Preface', n.p.
[26] Pezron, *Antiquité de la nation*, 65.
[27] Pezron, 'Preface', n.p.
[28] Pezron, *Antiquité de la nation*, 135-136.
[29] Pezron, *Antiquité de la nation*, 111-112.

Celtic as counterconcepts, necessarily imbued with asymmetry. Most importantly, their fertile yet unstable relationship is at the heart of that other great fueller of Celtic enthusiasm in the eighteenth century, alongside the work of the Abbé Pezron, James Macpherson's Ossian.

The enormous, European-wide impact of Macpherson's 'translations' of oral poems, purported to have been gathered in the Highlands and composed, originally, by a blind bard in the third-century, is well-known.[30] Through this 'Celtic' discovery, Macpherson, like Pezron, set out to unsettle the foundations of classicism. 'Without derogating from the fame of Greece and Rome,' he argued in his 'Dissertation concerning the Poems of Ossian', 'we may consider antiquity beyond the pale of their empire worthy of some attention.'[31] He managed it too. Immediately after his announcement of this immaculate, primitive bard, Homer and Ossian came to be linked indispensably to one another. In a crucial manifestation of Koselleck's counterconcepts, the characterisation of Homer altered the characterisation of Ossian, and vice versa. It is worth looking into this in some detail.[32]

First of all, the fallout from this solemn and sublime barbarian engendered several debates over 'the relative excellence of Homer and Ossian'. In their perceived comparability as primitive epic poets, Homer was frequently thought to be crude when read in the light of the good manners of the Celtic heroes, or, conversely, to fall short in 'barbaric' and 'savage' qualities.[33] This Homeric-slanted reception was the immediate result not only of Macpherson's polemic demands in the 'Dissertation', but

[30] For Ossian's impact, see for example, Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1988), 163-178; and Howard Gaskill, 'Introduction: "Genuine poetry…like gold', in Howard Gaskill ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London, 2004), 21-39. For Macpherson's engagement with genuine Gaelic poetry, see Derick S. Thomson, *The Gaelic Sources of Macpherson's Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1952).
[31] James Macpherson, 'A Dissertation concerning the Poems of Ossian' (1773), in Howard Gaskill ed., *The Poems of Ossian and related works* (Edinburgh, 1996), 205.
[32] It is important to note that another great influence on eighteenth-century Celticism, William Mason's *Caractacus* (Covent Garden, 1776), based on Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Tacitus, also had a dual Greek-Celtic nature. This has been explored by Fiona Macintosh and Edith Hall, in their *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660-1914* (Oxford, 2005), 183-214.
[33] Rudolf Tombo, *Ossian in Germany: Bibliography, General Survey, Ossian's Influence upon Klopstock and the Bards* (New York, 1901), 72.

also, and more subtly, his striking paratextual technique of including quotations from Homer in the footnotes. As Rudolf Tombo points out, he had used Homer as a source for his translations, and these borrowings were not, as Fiona Stafford puts it, 'merely stylistic'.[34] Yet rather than concealing that fact, he asked the reader to navigate Ossian and Homer intertextually, as if to flag up his indebtedness to the Greek tradition.

As well as being one of the causes of the immediate accusations of forgery (and Macpherson omitted some of these notes in later editions),[35] these invitations to comparison provided the promise of great movement and parallelism between the Celtic and the Greek.[36] Furthermore, appended to most editions of Macpherson's poems was Hugh Blair's 'Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian', which is largely structured around comparisons between 'the Greek and the Celtic bard.'[37] Here, as a later editor of Macpherson declared, 'the palm of heroic poesy was indirectly transferred from the Greek, to the Celtic'.[38] 'Both poets are eminently sublime', judged Blair, 'but…Homer's sublimity is accompanied with more impetuosity and fire; Ossian's with more of a solemn and awful grandeur. Homer hurries you along; Ossian elevates, and fixes you in astonishment.'[39]

It is no coincidence that the European shockwaves of the Ossian phenomenon were most resoundingly felt in Germany, in the context of the 'Homeric Question' and the shaping of Classics (as it was to become) as a discipline. According to the English editors of F.A. Wolf's epoch-making *Prolegomena to Homer*, 'the only way to keep Homer interesting and to make classical studies look useful in their own right was to claim that up-to-date, comparative research established Homer in the enviable

[34] Tombo, *Ossian in Germany*, 92-94; Stafford, *The Sublime Savage*, 137. It is worth noting that Macpherson published his own translation of the *Iliad* in 1773.
[35] J.S. Smart, *James Macpherson: An Episode in Literature* (London, 1905), 173-174.
[36] See for example, Macpherson's use of Homer in a note on a simile in *Fingal*, Gaskill ed., *The Poems of Ossian*, 421.
[37] Hugh Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, The Son of Fingal' (1763), in Gaskill ed., *The Poems of Ossian*, 357.
[38] Malcolm Laing, *The Poems of Ossian, &c. Containing the Poetical Works of James Macpherson*, two vols (Edinburgh, 1805), i. xviii.
[39] Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation', 358. For Homer versus Ossian, see also Smart, *James Macpherson*, 12-15; and Margaret Mary Rubel, *Savage and Barbarian: Historical Attitudes in the Criticism of Homer and Ossian in Britain, 1760-1800* (Amsterdam, 1978).

position of the Greek Ossian.'[40] Much valuable investigation has been done into how this Homer-Ossian crossover shaped the developing discipline of *Altertumswissenschaft.*[41] Kristine Haugen, for example, has studied how such Homer-Ossian comparisons were powerful not only for establishing the qualities of both as primitive epicists, but also as textual editions, arguing that 'Macpherson and Blair's fledgling attempts at textual history influenced the subsequent Homeric treatises of Robert Wood and of Wolf.'[42] 'Macpherson himself', she explains, 'was now praised as the last triumphant link in a chain of accurate Ossianic transmission.'[43] Indeed, Robert Wood, in his ground-breaking study of Homer, likened those who 'committed to writing, and introduced into Greece, what had been before only sung by the Rhapsodists of Ionia,' to Macpherson, who had likewise gathered oral fragments 'in the northern parts of this island'.[44] 'Their reduction to order in Greece was a work of taste and judgement', he declared, 'and those great names which we have mentioned might claim the same merit in regard to Homer, that the ingenious Editor of Fingal is entitled to from Ossian.'[45]

Joep Leerssen has also argued that the true significance of Macpherson's work may have been 'the oxymoron that his fragments were epic'.[46] Part of his evidence is a

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[40] Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E.G. Zetzel, 'Introduction', in F.A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer (1795)*, trans. Anthony Grafton et al. (Princeton, 1985), 11. For the reception of Ossian in Germany beyond Homeric scholarship, see Tombo, *Ossian in Germany*; Gaskill, 'Herder, Ossian and the Celtic', in Brown ed., *Celticism*, 257-271; Kidd, *British Identities*, 203; and Joshua Billings, 'Epic and Tragic Music: The Union of the Arts in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 72, no. 1 (Jan., 2011), 105-111.

[41] For the development of *Altertumswissenschaft*, see M.S. Silk and J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche on tragedy* (Cambridge, 1981), 10-14; Constanze Güthenke, 'Romanticism', in Anthony Grafton et al. eds., *The Classical Tradition* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2010), 835-839; and Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity: History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft* (Oxford, 2013), 137-202.

[42] Kristine Louise Haugen, 'Ossian and the Invention of Textual History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 59, no. 2 (Apr., 1998), 314-315.

[43] Haugen, 'Ossian and the Invention', 321.

[44] Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer: with a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the Troade* (London, 1775), 279.

[45] Wood, *Original Genius*, 279. For Wood, who was born in County Meath, see T.J.B. Spencer, 'Robert Wood and the Problem of Troy in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 20, no. 1/2 (Jan.-Jun., 1957), 75-105.

[46] Joep Leerssen, 'Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism', in Gaskill ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, 112.

letter from C.G. Heyne to Wolf, written in 1796 during the lasting feud which Harloe has studied for its influence on the attitude of classicists to Homer.[47] In the letter, Heyne assures Wolf that he had come to the truth about Homer when he read Macpherson's Ossian, and learnt about its apparent provenance. He now realised that 'there seemed a preponderant likelihood that a possibly Homeric core had been reworked by later Macphersons, with much material added, and a whole constructed from many individual songs'.[48] In other words, Macpherson's example demonstrated that the oral and fragmentary nature of the Homeric poems need reduce neither their poetic nor their scholarly value, and, in addition, conferred on classical scholars a heroic role as salvaging editors.

The counterconceptual status of Homer and Ossian was not just a passing phenomenon. As late as 1870, an editor was defending Macpherson against the charges of fraudulence, by reference to the treatment of Homeric epics. Scholars like Wolf had long ago argued that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were the accumulation of hands and ages, containing 'not only certain small portions…but also whole sections which are not by Homer'.[49] 'Notwithstanding all this,' wrote the Reverend Archibald Clerk, 'the Homeric poems…are received by their general public in every civilised country, as the genuine utterance of the ancient Grecian muse.'[50] Clerk then demanded that 'the same broad common-sense view…be taken of the Ossianic poems', allowing them at last to take their rightful place, at least as far as their reception was concerned, as 'the genuine utterance of the ancient Celtic muse.'[51] Similarly, in his 1881 lectures, the Oxford Professor of Poetry, John Campbell Shairp

[47] Harloe, *Winckelmann*, 137-202.
[48] C.G. Heyne letter to F.A. Wolf (1796), quoted in Joep Leerssen, 'Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism', 121. For further observations about Ossian and Homeric textual scholarship, see Myers on the importance for Wolf and his contemporaries of the 'discovery that such oral traditions did in fact take place, in Gaelic Scotland', John L. Myers, *Homer and his Critics*, ed. Dorothea Gray (London, 1958), 83; and Malcolm Chapman's observation that much of the power of the controversy was that '"Macpherson's Ossian" invited judgement by the canons appropriate to ancient heroic verse, but had itself largely created these canons.' Chapman*, The Celts*, 121.
[49] Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, 132.
[50] Archibald Clerk, *The Poems of Ossian In the Original Gaelic with a Literal Translation into English and a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems* (Edinburgh, 1870), xlvii-xlviii.
[51] Clerk, *The Poems of Ossian*, xlvii-xlviii.

called for Celtic Studies as a discipline to match what he saw as a superior Homeric scholarship. 'If some one were to assert that he had discovered a lost book of Homer', Shairp claimed, then '…the resources of Greek scholarship are quite competent to settle whether the Greek were authentic or a forgery. Why should not Gaelic scholarship achieve as much?'[52]

While Ossian had been used, therefore, at the end of the eighteenth century, to explain Homeric transmission and to defend the notion of Homeric poetic genius, at the end of the nineteenth, it was Homer who was recruited to elucidate the nature of the 'Ossianic' relics, and to fight for their right to be labelled poetry. Macpherson's promise of Graeco-Celtic movement and fertile appropriation appears to have set a precedent for Graeco-Celtic relations, replotting the map of antiquity. His was the perfect (for some) piece of textual scholarship *and* the ideal union of Greek and Celt.[53] The potential for such Graeco-Celtic puzzling would have increased even further, incidentally, if Macpherson had carried through his plan, 'a curious crotchet', of publishing his Gaelic 'originals' in Greek letters.[54]

It is worth remembering, finally, that the reach of Macpherson's Ossian found its way to the work of the Revivalists, when the state of the union between Greek and Celt was just as contentious. This can be seen, for example in the Introduction to the 1896 anthology *Lyra Celtica*, by William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, a writer who represented, as John Brannigan writes, 'the very spirit and style of what a Celtic Revival could be' for no less than W.B. Yeats.[55] 'The Celtic Renascence,' Sharp judged, 'of which so much has been written of late…is, fundamentally, the outcome of "Ossian"'.[56] Yeats's own Homeric work, also – his longing 'to hear poems spoken to a

[52] John Campbell Shairp, *Aspects of Poetry* (1881), quoted in Smart, *James Macpherson*, 196.
[53] The same shared Greek-Celtic approach to Homer can be seen as late as Michael Wood's 1985 documentary for the BBC 'In Search of the Trojan War'. The prodigious stock of oral tales recalled by Seán Ó hEinirí, a Gaelic speaker from Kilgalligan in County Mayo, was commandeered to prove that a poem the length of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* could be stored in the head of a single singer.
[54] See Smart, *James Macpherson*, 190.
[55] John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh, 2015), 36.
[56] William Sharp, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth A. Sharp ed., *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1896), xxxv.

harp, as I imagined Homer to have spoken his,' his experiments with the psaltery, 'a stringed instrument not very unlike a lyre', and his characterisation of Maud Gonne as 'a woman Homer sung' – could all be seen as a continuation of Macpherson's promise of the possibility of discovering, or conjuring, a 'Celtic Homer.'[57]

b. Celtic-Greek philosophers: druids and Hyperboreans

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, an essay in *The Monthly Review* took particular issue with what it saw as a contagious habit of Greek alignment. It objected, particularly, to the ubiquitous tendency to compare Celtic bardic compositions with Homer:

> they may be compared, indeed, with the desultory productions of Oriental fancy, and they will not lose much by the comparison; but to set them in competition with the sublime models of Grecian genius, is an insult to the judgment and common sense of mankind…As to the phrase of "Celtic or Highland Homers," we could wish to see it entirely laid aside. The sacred name of the immortal father of verse ought not to be prophaned by ignoble comparisons; and the preposterous adulation offered to the son of Fingal, instead of exalting his character, exposes both himself and his admirers to ridicule and contempt.[58]

Such objections can be found everywhere. Herder, for example, questioned the value of such persistent comparisons, given the disparity of the two poets' cultural contexts and, more specifically, what he saw as a chasm between northern and southern sensibilities. 'Was sollte die ganze Parallele zwischen Homer und Ossian sagen?' he

[57] Yeats, 'Speaking to the Psaltery' (1902), in *Essays and Introductions*, 14; 'Literature and the Living Voice' (1906), in W.B. Yeats *Explorations* (London, 1962), 219; 'A Woman Homer Sung', in W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London and Basingstoke, 1961), 100.
[58] Anon., 'Smith's *Galic Antiquities*', *The Monthly Review*, vol. 63 (Nov., 1780), 340.

asked. 'Daß Homer kein Ossian und Ossian kein Homer sei? Wer hätte daran gezweifelt?'[59]

Together with Macpherson, the main target of the *Monthly Review*'s attack on the 'phrase of "Celtic or Highland Homers"' was a 'collection of ancient poems, translated from Galic' in 1780, the *Galic Antiquities*. This was by a minister in Campbeltown, John Smith, who according to Howard Gaskill rivalled Macpherson for popularity on the continent, though he is forgotten now.[60] The bulk of Smith's book is not, however, about bards, but druids. These figures, in their progression into the revered sages of Britain and Ireland and their availability 'as curiously satisfactory symbols,' were required to move through ancient Greek territory.[61] They changed it as they went, just as bards had done, to the displeasure of reviewers like Smith's.

In his *Galic Antiquities,* Smith drew what is, by this point in the eighteenth century, a typical picture of druids inventing gunpowder and telescopes and building Stonehenge – 'the Druids…have certainly an indubitable right to this edifice'.[62] Most pressingly of all, he attempted to reclaim the unidolatrous and monotheistic druids – 'the religion of the Druids was derived from Noah', he argued – from the slanderous and corrupting Greeks and Romans.[63] He argued that the classical authors misrepresented the Celts as a result of 'that pride…which led the Greeks and Romans to give all nations but their own the appellation of Barbarians'.[64] This classical complacence caused them to 'treat with indignation and contempt, the best institutions of the Druids,' and hence their texts are full of accounts of human sacrifice and cannibalism.[65]

[59] Johann Herder, 'Homer und Ossian', *Die Horen*, vol. 4, no. 10 (1795), 95.
[60] Gaskill, '"Genuine poetry…like gold"', 15-18.
[61] Piggott, *The Druids*, 15.
[62] John Smith, *Galic Antiquities: consisting of a History of the Druids, particularly of those of Caledonia; a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian; and a Collection of Ancient Poems, translated from the Galic of Ullin, Ossian, Orran, &c* (Edinburgh, 1780), 72-73.
[63] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 12.
[64] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 34.
[65] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 34.

In fact, the Celtic ritual was less superstitious and less violent than the Graeco-Roman, due to 'the general strain of simplicity and good sense which ran through the religion of the Druids'.[66] As a result, the Celts were better people than the Greeks and Romans, and the Celtic afterlife less 'full of horror' than the Elysium of the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*.[67] 'If we allow a Celt to have been formed of the same materials with a Greek or Roman,' Smith contends, then 'his religion ought certainly to make him a better man and a greater hero.'[68] Nevertheless, Smith's main emphasis and his principal means of advocating the value of the druids is the idea that they passed their wisdom onto the Greeks. They should therefore be seen as the Greeks are seen, as worthy of study and attention. 'The Celtic philosophy was one of the parents of the Grecian,' he states, so we 'may justly regret, that more pains have not been taken to rescue its *Platos* and its *Homers* from that oblivion into which they fell.'[69]

Again, the *Monthly Review* objected to this idea, chastising Smith for speaking 'familiarly of the Celtic Platos and Homers.'[70] The notion of a Celtic philosophy with priority, or at the very least similarity, with the Greek is, however, an idea with a long heritage and a long future. It came from classical sources on the religious and philosophic practices of the Celts, used as ballast throughout eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Celticism. In Cicero, for example, the druids are masters of divination (Cic. *Div*. 1.41.90), while both Strabo and Diodorus Siculus say that the Gauls hold the doctrines of Pythagoras – ὁ Πυθαγόρου λόγος, in Diodorus's phrase – when it comes to the question of the immortality of the soul (Diod. 5. 28.6; Str. 4.4.4).[71] Caesar writes that the druids 'use Greek characters' – '*Graecis litteris utantur*' (Caes. *Gal*. 6. 14) – a phrase often interpreted as meaning that they had an alphabet out of which

[66] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 33.
[67] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 21.
[68] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 26.
[69] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 2.
[70] Anon., 'Smith's *Galic Antiquities*', 340.
[71] The possible Pythagoreanism of the Celts continued to preoccupy Celticists in the late nineteenth century, see for example, Meyer and Nutt, *The Voyage of Bran*, ii. 114-123.

the Greek grew and to which it was indebted (and the basis for Macpherson's proposal of publishing his Gaelic texts in Greek).[72]

Most influential of all, was the interpretation of classical sources on the Hyperboreans – the blessed people of Greek myth who lived out of reach of the north wind (P. *Pyth.* 10 and *Ol.* 3) – as references to the Celts. As the antiquarian Marcus Keane would recall almost a hundred years after John Smith's researches, 'the subject of the *Insula Hyperborea*…has for nearly a century been a subject of warm dispute among…antiquaries'. Keane's own opinion, and the opinion of several of his fellow antiquaries, was that 'no other country than Ireland can lay any well-grounded claim to identity with that described as the Hyperborean Island.'[73] Accordingly, the legendary embassy of the Hyperboreans to Delos (Hdt. 4. 33-35), which was meant to bring great learning and wisdom with it, was thought to refer either to the Túatha Dé Danann on their travels to Greece or to the druids themselves. The Hyperborean Abaris, in particular, 'fair game for any antiquary of the day', was interpreted as a chief of the druids bringing wisdom to the Greeks, having 'carried the arrow to the whole world' (τὸν ὀιστὸν περιέφερε κατὰ πᾶσαν γῆν, Hdt. 4. 36).[74] Sylvester O'Halloran for example, in a feat of Butlerian pun-craft, identified Abaris with Heber, 'a name peculiar to our princes and great men.'[75]

All these druidic sources can be seen in clear and fruitful collision in the *Celtic Researches* of Edward Davies, a work with profound influence on William Blake, Robert Graves and others. A Gloucestershire curate, and author of the patriotic and

[72] See for example, Higgins, *The Celtic Druids*, 10-14.
[73] Marcus Keane, *The Towers and Temples of Ireland; their origin and history discussed from a new point of view* (Dublin, 1867), 241.
[74] Piggott, *The Druids*, 140.
[75] O'Halloran, *General History*, i. 77. For classical equations of the Hyperboreans with the Celts, see Timothy P. Bridgman, *Hyperboreans: Myth and History in Celtic-Hellenic Contacts* (New York and Abingdon, 2004), 158: 'this identification of the Hyperboreans with Celts probably preserves a hazy memory of trading and possibly diplomatic relations which went on between the Greeks and Celts.' For versions of the Hyperborean thesis in a later period, see for example, John Rhys, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (London, 1888), 194-195. Cf. Seamus Heaney's use of the Hyperborean as Irish trope, in his poems 'Out of the Bag' and 'Sonnets from Hellas', *Electric Light* (London, 2001), 7, 43.

classicizing poem *Aphtharte*, set in a resoundingly Arcadian Albion, Davies was greatly interested in druidic learning. He believed that the standard of civilisation in the world declined when they did, for 'their studies embraced those elevated objects which had engaged the attention of the world in its primitive age – The nature of the Deity – of the human Soul – of the future State – of the heavenly bodies – of the terrestrial globe, and of its various productions'.[76] 'Perhaps', he wrote, 'there was no order of men amongst the heathens, who preserved the history and the opinions of mankind, in its early state, with more simplicity, and with more integrity.'[77]

Davies argued that 'Homer sends Ulysses to consult the dead' in the territory of the Celtae in Portugal or Spain, because the druids were known to be knowledgeable on life after death and the judgement of souls.[78] He accepted that 'the *Hyperboreans*, who brought their gifts to *Apollo*, in the *Vale* of *Tempe*, down to the last ages of *Paganism*…were our *Druids* of *Britain*.'[79] He characterised Stonehenge as a '*Circular*, *Uncovered* Temple…in which the *Hyperborean* sages had once chaunted their hymns to Apollo'.[80] Finally, he contended that 'our very learning has led us into error…It has tempted us to look for the *rudiments* of the arts, at those, to whom we are only indebted, for *improvements*'. '*Modern Europe*', he argued '…indebted, as it is, to the arts, and muses, of *Greece*, and *Rome*, for much of its learning, has too implicitly adopted their opinions.'[81]

Writing in 1804, Edward Davies was the beneficiary of a century of Celtic constructions, which had yielded an image of a Celtic golden age, a lost civilisation characterised by being more refined and more ancient than the Greeks, despite also being understood through its relation to a Greek model (and often supported by classical sources). Its true identity has been obscured by the towering presence of

[76] Edward Davies, *Celtic Researches, on the origin, traditions & language, of the ancient Britons* (London, 1804), 119.
[77] Davies, *Celtic Researches*, 119.
[78] Davies, *Celtic Researches,* 142.
[79] Davies, *Celtic Researches,* 181. See also his Appendix outlining other opinions on Celtic Hyperboreans, at 549-554.
[80] Davies, *Celtic Researches,* 141.
[81] Davies, *Celtic Researches,* 337-338.

Greek antiquity, in terms both of suspect classical sources and subsequent classical bias, with damaging ramifications. 'By confining their studies to the Greek and Latin languages,' wrote the antiquarian William Beauford, 'the learned indeed obtained a competent knowledge of those people, but lost all remembrance of their own.'[82] The world has taken heed only of what came about 'when the little States of *Greece*, of *Italy*…began to want *elbow-room*'.[83]

In the face of this narrow-mindedness, however, the remnants of the Celtic tradition remember. 'The *Druids*,' said Davies, '…preserve the memory of remarkable things…indeed the *Celtae*, in general, are...extremely tenacious of old customs'.[84] The question remains, therefore, of whether that memory might still survive intact in some parts of the Celtic world. Moreover, the shape of Celtic, and Greek, antiquity was about to be radically readjusted.

3. The Indo-European promise

> *It pleases me to fancy that when we turn towards the East…we are turning not less to the ancient west and north…that our genuflections discover in that East something ancestral in ourselves*
>
> W.B. Yeats[85]

> *the antiquities of this island bear uncommon and indelible marks of very remote times. Phoenician monuments are scattered over the surface of it, and what is more extraordinary, Phoenician names of things and places are*

[82] William Beauford, 'Of the Origin and Language of the Irish; and of the Learning of the Druids', *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. 2, no. 7 (1781), 233.
[83] Davies, *Celtic Researches*, xi.
[84] Davies, *Celtic Researches,* 284.
[85] W.B. Yeats and Shree Purohit Swami trans., *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (London, 1937), 11.

retained even at this day.
Colonel Vallancey[86]

Chreeshna, the name of the Indian Apollo, is actually an old Irish word for the sun.
Godfrey Higgins[87]

a. Charles Vallancey

Colonel Charles Vallancey was a military surveyor in the British army who 'read dictionaries as modern critics would read *Finnegans Wake'*, twisting 'languages, towers, and traditions', as Thomas Davis put it, 'into his wicker-work theory of Pagan Ireland'.[88] 'From start to finish,' Clare O'Halloran observes, he was 'an unreflective enthusiast.'[89] Nevertheless Vallancey deserves attention, as both O'Halloran and Joep Leerssen have highlighted, for he was hugely influential; his work 'threw its shadow well into the nineteenth century.'[90] He moved with contemporary currents with such enthusiasm, and to such an extent, as to reveal many of the streams of thought in the development of Celtic antiquity. Above all, as Joseph Lennon has argued in his vital account of Irish Orientalism, it was Vallancey and his fellow antiquarians who 'shaped the intellectual climate in which [William] Jones famously recognized the connection between European languages, Persian, and Sanskrit.'[91]

In 'An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language,' published in Dublin in 1772, Vallancey argued that Irish was a dialect of Phoenician. He was induced to do this by a combination of the vision of wandering Phoenician settlers put forward in

[86] Charles Vallancey, 'The Editor's Preface', *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis,* vol. 1, no. 1 (2nd edn, 1786), ix.
[87] Godfrey Higgins, *The Celtic Druids* (London, 1829), 183.
[88] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 71; Thomas Davis, 'Irish Antiquities', in Thomas Davis, *Selections from his Prose and Poetry* (Dublin, 1920), 104.
[89] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 182.
[90] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 72.
[91] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 97.

Bochart's *Geographia Sacra*, and of certain origin myths as used by Keating and Spenser, which asserted that the Irish 'received the Use of *Letters* directly from the *Phoenicians*, and…that several Colonies from *Africa* settled in *Ireland*'.[92] The catalyst was his theory that the Punic speeches in Plautus' *Poenulus* were in Irish. As Vallancey told his fellow antiquarian, Charles O'Conor, these were 'as good Irish as can possibly be written in my humble opinion, spoken by an illiterate Carthaginian, transcribed by an ignorant solider…and on Classic Ground'.[93] 'The great Affinity found in many Words, nay whole Lines and Sentences of this Speech, between the Punic and the Irish…urged the Author to attempt an Irish Transcription, and from thence to make a free Translation into the English; how far he has succeeded, must be left to the impartial Critic.'[94]

Throughout his research, Vallancey stressed that his task was made harder through a deficiency of sources. It is 'impossible', he wrote, 'to come to an exact Knowledge of the *Carthaginian* Gods, from what is delivered of them by the *Greek* and *Roman* Authors.'[95] This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that 'the *Greek* and *Roman* Writers…have affixed the Names of their *own Gods* to those of the *Carthaginians*' which has 'rendered their Accounts and Observations on this Head more imperfect and less valuable.'[96] We must always bear in mind, he warned, 'the ignorance of the *Grecian* Authors'.[97] On the other, the Greeks and Romans were responsible for the physical destruction of the Carthaginian tradition, ruining any chance of access as well as fixing them for ever in the position of the enemy. 'Almost all the Carthaginian Manuscripts were committed to the flames,' he writes, 'and the History of this brave and learned People, has been written by their most bitter Enemies, the Greeks and

[92] Charles Vallancey, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language. Being a Collation of the Irish with the Punic Language* (Dublin, 1772), vii.
[93] Vallancey, letter to Charles O'Conor (1772), quoted in O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 42.
[94] Vallancey, *An Essay*, 30. For this passage as genuine Punic, see Wolfgang de Melo ed. and trans., *The Little Carthaginian, Pseudolus, The Rope* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 174. For other attempted interpretations, including the Irish theory of Tadhg Ó Neachtain, a Gaelic scholar, which predates Vallancey's, see O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 42.
[95] Vallancey, *An Essay*, 19.
[96] Vallancey, *An Essay*, 19.
[97] Vallancey, *An Essay*, 24.

Romans; in this too they resemble the Irish'.[98] Scholars therefore need to turn to other witnesses of antiquity, even for information about the Greeks and Romans themselves.

These witnesses include the Carthaginian Celts. In 1782, Vallancey added an essay to the second edition of his *Grammar of the Iberno-Celtic*, 'shewing the Importance of the Iberno-Celtic or Irish Dialect, to Students in History, Antiquity, and the Greek and Roman Classics'. He argued that Irish 'is the only language, left untaught, or unstudied, which can be of use to the classic scholar, the historian and the antiquarian, of all Europe in general, and of these northern nations in particular.'[99] Vallancey's proof that Irish is the same as Phoenician therefore allowed its value finally to come into its own. Now that Irish 'may be said to have been, in a great degree, the language of Hanibal, Hamilcar and of Asdrubal; it must consequently be as acceptable to the classic scholar, as useful to the historian.'[100]

Vallancey's realisations gave a new glimpse into antiquity; the eyes of the Celts preserve the long-lost ancient world, despite the efforts of the Greeks. Similarly, in his *Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland*, Vallancey argued for the truth of the claim that the Túatha Dé Danann helped protect Athens from Assyrian invasion, through 'their diabolical Charms'.[101] This, however, has been forgotten, as the affinity of the Celts and the Carthaginians has been forgotten, because of the exclusivity of 'the pedantic Greeks.'[102] 'With the Greeks,' he writes, 'all were barbarous but themselves.'[103]

[98] Vallancey, *An Essay*, 3. For Vallancey's equation of the Carthaginians with the Irish here, see Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 88-89.
[99] Charles Vallancey, *Grammar of the Iberno-Celtic, or Irish Language* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1782), 1.
[100] Vallancey, *Grammar*, 4.
[101] Charles Vallancey, *A Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1786), 151.
[102] Vallancey, *Vindication*, x.
[103] Vallancey, *Vindication*, xi.

b. William Jones

In the same year that Vallancey published his *Vindication of the Ancient History of Ireland*, 1786, William Jones delivered to the Asiatick Society the most influential, if not the first, exposition of the Indo-European hypothesis. 'The *Sanscrit* language', he famously declared, 'whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin,* and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity…than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source'.[104] This was the theory that, as Stefan Arvidsson explains, 'would establish the beginning of research about the Indo-Europeans, their language, culture and religion.'[105]

The consequences of the Indo-European hypothesis are well-known. It quickly became a racial, not just a linguistic family, and was heavy with ideology.[106] Maurice Olender has argued that the new comparative philology 'was a science that was by no means open to history.' He describes how the comparative linguist freely 'ambled about the garden of languages gathering linguistic roots', and argues that 'soon these roots metamorphosed into rigid structures that could not be eroded by time.'[107] The characteristics of these structures were applied to the people who spoke the languages, a process that 'made it possible to stereotype civilizations, which came to be identified with ideas about their linguistic systems.'[108] Responses to Indo-European were, Olender explains, 'some of the stories' that Europe 'told about its past.'[109]

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[104] William Jones, 'Third Anniversary Discourse' (1786), in William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones*, thirteen vols., (London, 1807), iii. 34.
[105] Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science,* trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago and London, 2006), 18.
[106] Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 41-43. See also Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York, 1984), 51-80. For a helpful overview of Indo-European studies, see M.L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007), 1-25.
[107] Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 15-16.
[108] Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 16.
[109] Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 140.

Just as Macpherson's Ossian had done, these stories required a realignment of antiquity, not least of the position of Greece within it. A letter written from Krishnagar reveals how forcibly Jones tugged at the shape of the ancient world: writing from the house he had named his 'Indian *Arcadia*' (where he kept a tiger called Jupiter as a pet), he identifies Sanskrit 'the *Latin* of *India*, and a sister of Latin & Greek'. In order to convey his exhilaration at what he had found, he then imagines 'an inquisitive Englishman' arriving in Greece, were 'Greek literature to be known in modern Greece only, and there to be in the hands of priests and philosophers'.[110] 'Suppose him to learn Greek there,' he writes, 'which none of his countrymen knew, and to read Homer, Pindar, Plato, which no other Europeans had even heard of. Such am I in this country; substituting Sanscrit for Greek…and *Vālmic*, *Vyāsa*, *Cālīdāsa*, for Homer, Plato, Pindar.'[111] This, as Phiroze Vasunia has argued in his account of the impact of Indo-European studies on Classics, is a flight of 'Anglo-Indo-Hellenic fantasy'.[112]

An appraisal of Vallancey's work reveals just how much the new world of the Indo-European grew around and out of the construction of Celtic antiquity. Jones praised 'Colonel Vallancey's…learned enquiries into the ancient literature of *Ireland*', in his 1785 speech on 'The Gods of Greece, Italy, and India,' and told Joseph Cooper Walker that he had read his work 'through twice with great pleasure'.[113] He also used Vallancey's ideas in his proposal for an epic on *Britain Rediscovered*, about the Phoenician discovery of Britain: 'the discovery of the British Isles by the *Tyrians*,' Jones noted, 'is mentioned by *Strabo*, *Diodorus*, and *Pliny*; and proved…by the affinity

[110] Garland Cannon ed., *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, two vols (Oxford, 1970), ii. 755. For the tiger, see 785.
[111] Cannon ed., *Letters*, ii. 755-756.
[112] Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford, 2013), 3. For the tiger, see Cannon ed., *Letters*, ii. 785.
[113] Jones, *Works*, iii. 378; Cannon ed., *Letters*, ii. 770. Cf. another letter to Walker praising Vallancey at ii. 841-842. Admittedly he was far more scathing at times, see ii. 758-769: 'it was written by a friend of mine…but a word in your ear – it is very stupid…Do you wish to laugh? Skim the book over. Do you wish to sleep? Read it regularly'. For Vallancey and Jones, see also Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1997), 93-97; and Michael J. Franklin, 'Sir William Jones, the Celtic Revival and the Oriental Renaissance', in Gerard Carruthers and Alan Rawes eds., *English Romanticism and the Celtic World* (Cambridge, 2003), 33-36.

between the *Irish* and *Punic* languages.'[114] In the other direction, Vallancey 'took Jones's musings several stages further,' as O'Halloran points out, '…and extrapolated from them definite racial and cultural links between Ireland and India'.[115]

c. Adolphe Pictet

Despite his engagement with Vallancey, Jones only gestured towards the inclusion of the Celtic family of languages (identified by Edward Lhuyd, the Keeper of the Ashmolean, in 1707) in his Indo-European melting pot. He suggested, after his announcement that Sanskrit, Latin and Greek 'sprang from some common source,' that 'there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the *Gothick* and the *Celtick*, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the *Sanscrit*'.[116] It was not until the 1830s, and the work of James Cowles Prichard, Adolphe Pictet and Franz Bopp that their position was firmly established.[117] From then on, all that was needed, as Prichard wrote, was a calculation of 'the relation of the Celtic people to the rest of mankind.'[118]

Ireland, in particular, had an important place in Indo-European research, thanks to the great age of its literary tradition, as well as the continued survival of Irish as a spoken language.[119] As Thomas Moore wrote in 1835, 'whatever obscurity may hang round the history of the tribes that followed this first Eastern swarm…it seems, at

[114] Jones, *Works*, ii. 452.
[115] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 49.
[116] Jones, 'Third Anniversary Discourse', 34. Cf. a letter of 1779 in which he referred to a theory in which 'a very old and almost primæval language was in use among these northern nations, from which not only the Celtic dialects, but even the Greek and Latin are derived', Cannon ed., *Letters*, i. 285.
[117] James Cowles Prichard, *The Eastern Origin of the Celtic Nations proved by a comparison of their dialects with the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Teutonic Languages* (Oxford, 1831); Adolphe Pictet, *De l'affinité des langues celtiques avec le sanscrit* (Paris, 1837); Franz Bopp, *Über die keltischen Sprachen vom Gesichtspunkte der vergleichenden Sprachforschung* (Berlin, 1839).
[118] Prichard, *The Eastern Origin*, 23.
[119] See for example, Pictet, *De l'affinité des langues celtiques*, viii-ix.

least, certain, that the Celts were the first inhabitants of the Western parts of Europe; and that, of the language of this most ancient people, the purest dialect now existing is the Irish.'[120]

Although Adolphe Pictet is consistently cited in studies of the development of Indo-Europeanism, both for his aspirations for the field as well as for his place in the inclusion of Celtic in this family, his earlier work, *Du culte des cabires* (1824) is almost never mentioned.[121] In it, however, he combines the essentials of Indo-European research, of Orientalist notions of Greek and of Celtic antiquity, and of classical sources on the religion and philosophy of the Celts, in order to give the Celtic languages their place in the Indo-European family, in the still being formed constellation of Graeco-Roman and Sanskrit antiquity. He picks up the eighteenth-century preoccupation with philosophical, Pythagorean Celts, and aligns it with the burgeoning nineteenth-century focus on the Celtic languages in the light of the Indo-European hypothesis. What is produced is a vision of Graeco-Celtic mysticism which would reappear later in the century, in the notion of both Greek and Irish spirituality.

In *Du culte des cabires,* Pictet focuses on '*une partie intéressante du système mythologique des Irlandais,*' taking up suggestions from classical sources and later interpretations that the Celts shared doctrines with Pythagoras. He sets out to determine '*quelle étoit…cette sagesse dont Pythagore adopta* [sic] *peut-être quelques préceptes?*'[122] His proposition is that the Celts had an advanced religious system, based on a dual construction of opposing principles, with each god – or for Pictet, each *Cabire*[123] – an emanation of either darkness or light: '*enchaînés l'un à l'autre par une*

[120] Thomas Moore, *The History of Ireland* (London, 1845), 1.
[121] He did later express hesitation over this book, judging it an honour to his imagination more than to his '*jugement critique*', Adolphe Pictet, 'Les noms celtiques du soleil comparés à ceux des autres langues indo-européennes', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiete des Deutschen, Griechischen und Lateinischen*, vol. 4, no. 5 (1855), 348. For Pictet, see Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 93-105; and Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 54-55.
[122] Pictet, *Cabires*, i-ii.
[123] Pictet, *Cabires*, 94-97. See also Vallancey's essay on 'Cabiric or Mithratic Caves, in Ireland', *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1804), 447-470. For the Cabiri as ubiquitous in this period, see for example George Eliot's Casaubon 'in an agitated dimness about the Cabeiri, or in an exposure of other mythologists' ill-considered parallels', George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London, 2012), 214.

éternelle nécessité, ces deux principes se manifestent mutuellement, et, par leur action simultanée et magique, ils produisent sans cesse la réalité.'[124]

The basis for Pictet's reconstruction of Celtic religion is a '*remarquable'* passage from Strabo, which reports that Artemidorus, in the first century BC, described an island near Britain, on which were celebrated the same rites as were celebrated on Samothrace, in Greece, for Demeter and Persephone (Str. 4.4.6).[125] Pictet takes this island to be Ireland, extrapolating from Samothracian to Irish mysteries and concluding that both the Greeks and the Pythagorean Celts held to a spirituality based on '*un rapport d'action et de réaction perpétuelle*'.[126] While the Greeks celebrated it in the form of Ceres and Persephone, the Irish had exact equivalents, which they worshipped in stone circles, named *Ceara* and *Porsaibhean*.[127]

While there has been much interesting work about the relationship between Ireland and 'the East' (in Joseph Lennon's study, for instance) the work of Adolphe Pictet and Charles Vallancey reveal that there is a third point in this constellation: ancient Greece. Just as Homer and Ossian, earlier in the century, depended on each other for their character, their judgement and their study, by the mid-1800s the Greek, the Celtic and the Oriental could not be separated from each other. It is worth noting that when W.B. Yeats was setting up his new theatre in Dublin in the 1890s, he did not aim to rebuild the ruins of classical Athens. What he reached for, instead, was 'another Samothrace'.[128] Thomas Moore, similarly, had pointed to the idea that Ireland 'had become the Samothrace, as it were, of the western seas.'[129]

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[124] Pictet, *Cabires*, 35.
[125] Pictet, *Cabires*, 3.
[126] Pictet, *Cabires*, 81.
[127] Pictet, *Cabires*, 62.
[128] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, eds. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (Basingstoke and New York, 1999), 438. For the link between Yeats's vision of 'Celticity' and his view of India, see John Rickard, 'Studying a New Science: Yeats, Irishness, and the East', in Susan Shaw Sailer ed., *Representing Ireland: Gender, Class, Nationality* (Gainesville, 1997), 94-112.
[129] Moore, *History of Ireland*, 12. It is perhaps significant that the author of an early account of 'Irish Orientalism', M. Mansoor, was a student of W.B. Stanford, who wrote the great *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*.

Chapter Two

The backlash against the Celts

1. The anticeltic writers

Nothing is more unsatisfactory than our conception of what is Celtic and what is not Celtic. I believe there were never any Celts, as a race.

D.H. Lawrence[1]

Anything is possible in the fabulous Celtic twilight, which is not so much a twilight of the gods as of the reason.

J.R.R. Tolkien[2]

When editing the "Book of the Dean of Lismore," the late Dr. McLauchlan was much struck by the numerous allusions as well as the prominence given to the Gregs in all the ancient traditions of the Gael. But, unfortunately, he made no attempt to break away from ten centuries of editorial traditions, preferring rather to follow the opinions of his uncritical predecessors who were able to establish the antiquity of Graeco-Celtic connections on the slender evidence of the similarity of names.

W.J. Edmonston-Scott[3]

[1] D.H. Lawrence, *Sea and Sardinia* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 90.
[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, 'English and Welsh', in *Angles and Britons: O'Donnell Lectures* (Cardiff, 1963), 30.
[3] W.J. Edmonston-Scott, 'Fionn's Wars with the Magregors', *The Celtic Monthly: A Magazine for Highlanders*, vol. 20, no. 6 (Jun., 1912), 117.

As Sinéad Garrigan Mattar has described, there was a 'virulent backlash' against this perceived swelling of the Celtic past.[4] In his *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland*, written in 1789, Thomas Campbell, for example, faulted his contemporary antiquarians for their 'vain humour,' their habit '*of extending antiquity beyond the truth*'.[5] He asserted that, 'to substantiate our claim to a very remote antiquity, some writers think it sufficient if they discover a similitude between some present Irish custom, or remain of rude art, and those of ancient Gaul, Greece, Persia, Phoenicia, or other countries celebrated in story', criticising the tendency of antiquarians thus 'to be for ever collecting the beggarly elements of rude monuments'.[6] What results is, according to Campbell, only an obscure, indistinct mosaic constructed from these elements. 'May we not then,' he asks, 'without any great harshness of metaphor, say that an intellectual prism is still wanting to separate and analyse the mixed lights which fall upon the subject of our antiquities?' 'Nor', he continues, 'shall we be the better philosophers, for being persuaded that our Gaelic Druids were masters of the Greek Sophists.'[7]

Such mixed lights split and refract across this antiquarian feud. Since the 'elements of monuments' are reconstructed in multiple configurations, it is vital to look at all sides of the image. This brief chapter will consider this resistance to the Celts, outlining responses to bardic and druidic notions as well as to the 'Oriental' Celts of the Indo-European hypothesis. It will reveal that such 'anticeltic'[8] opposition was bound to a specific attitude not only about the Celts, but also about the Greeks, an attitude that coloured the 'intellectual prism'.

[4] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 22.
[5] Thomas Campbell, *Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1789), 10. For Campbell's 'highly individual brand of unionism', in which he was both 'a firm adherent to the theory of native Irish barbarism and yet an opponent of most of the penal laws', see O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 154-155.
[6] Campbell, *Strictures*, 7.
[7] Campbell, *Strictures*, 22.
[8] R. Huddleston, *A New Edition of Toland's History of the Druids* (Montrose, 1814), 371.

2. Edward Ledwich and John Pinkerton

> *what the Romans did to other nations, was in a great degree done by Cromwell to the Scots; he civilized them by conquest, and introduced by useful violence the arts of peace. I was told at Aberdeen that the people learned from Cromwell's soldiers to make shoes and to plant kail.*
>
> Samuel Johnson[9]

One of the most vocal of those who resisted contemporary constructions of the Celt was the Irish antiquarian, Edward Ledwich. His name appears in other antiquarian works as a byword for bigoted scepticism well into the nineteenth century, as 'that *blot* upon letters,' for example.[10] Like Thomas Campbell, Ledwich was impatient with the course of antiquarianism so far. 'The pretensions of the Irish to remote genuine history have been examined,' he argued, 'and found destitute of verisimilitude or probability'.[11] In response, he wrote in 1790 'the first substantial politicized attack on Irish antiquarianism'.[12]

This was 'less accurate historiography than careful polemics', against what Ledwich perceived as a specifically 'Catholic political programme of religious toleration.'[13] Contradicting those who, dazzled by 'the evanescent meteors of romantic history' and 'the wild romance of Geoffrey Keating', had argued for druidic or Greek or Phoenician cultivation in Ireland's distant history, Ledwich argued that all that is good in Ireland came from 'the fostering care of Britain, the happy instrument

[9] Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (Dublin, 1775), 39-40.
[10] Henry O'Brien, *The Round Towers of Ireland* (London, 1834), 332.
[11] Edward Ledwich, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (2nd edn, Dublin, 1804), 12.
[12] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 133.
[13] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 134; O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 59.

for conferring them.'[14] 'It was not before the reign of the elder James, and the year 1607,' he believes, that '…a dawn of happiness first appeared in this isle.'[15]

Ledwich particularly attacked the holders of the Phoenician theory, which 'acted as a strong ferment on the intellects of British and Irish antiquaries,' producing 'frothy systems.'[16] Most of all he blamed Vallancey, 'who has completely orientalized our ancient history.'[17] He held instead to the Gothic theory of origins. While others had derived the names of the Fenian heroes from the ancestor Fénius Farsaid, for example, and consequently from the Phoenicians, through an etymology based on surface similarity, Ledwich derived them from the Viking invaders – 'the Finnish militia.' He objected to the corruption whereby, 'of these Fenni, Fene, Phinni and Phoenii, our bards and their followers have made Phoenicians'. This is just one aspect of 'all the wild oriental fabling which has disgraced our antiquities.'[18] 'Is it an honour to any country,' he asked, 'that it was inhabited in very remote ages by roving barbarians with a proper name?'[19]

Ledwich saw his closest ally in John Pinkerton, a Scottish antiquarian who similarly affirmed, he reports, that 'this same Celtic has the strange effect of obnubilating the mind'.[20] Pinkerton was the central proponent of the view that Scotland had nothing to do with the Celts and everything to do with the Goths. As Hugh Trevor-Roper put it, he wished 'to hack down the poisonous new growth of the Scottish Ossian, with its innumerable new shoots and suckers.'[21] Colin Kidd explains that Pinkerton initiated 'the great Pictish debate' of late eighteenth-century Scotland, using the 'Gothic associations of the Picts as the foundation for a full-blown Scottish Teutonism.' He was instrumental in 'the emergence in nineteenth-century Scotland of

[14] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 5, n.p.
[15] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 217.
[16] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 12.
[17] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 12.
[18] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 25.
[19] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 16.
[20] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 329.
[21] Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven, 2008), 147.

a racist ideology celebrating the common Teutonic origins of Britain's core English and Lowland Scots nations.'[22]

In his 1794 *Enquiry into the History of Scotland*, Pinkerton set out to criticise, as he explains in the preface to the second edition, 'the infatuation' of Celticism, and specifically of Celtic etymology, 'the peculiar frenzy of this superficial age.'[23] He claimed that this was a type of study which wholly depends upon 'a fluent imagination, which leaps over all the perplexities…of obscure and barbarous periods, so full of unexpected events…In those poetical fancies a thousand years are but as one day; the lapse of centuries, and the changes of time, are wholly disregarded.'[24] Because fancy is its method, he argues, and because 'imagination is the common gift of all,' then 'it is no wonder we abound so much in imaginary antiquaries, from the parish-clerk up to the squire; and even little misses lisp about the authenticity of Ossian, and the antique purity of the Celtic language.'[25]

Celticists so far have been, in Pinkerton's opinion, 'rejecting all ancient authorities and facts…by building romance on the ruins of history.'[26] He repairs history by building his own model of it. This opposes 'the Caledonians or Piks [the Picts], who were Goths, and the Highlanders, who were Celts from Ireland'.[27] The culture of these Highlanders had transfixed eighteenth-century Celticists, forcing Pinkerton 'to redeem the early history of his country from total annihilation.'[28] 'The Lowlanders,' he claims, 'really themselves the ancient Caledonians…were to lose their history and fame, to gratify the prejudices of these…writers'.[29] In actual fact, the 'Piks or Goths' had driven the indigenous Celts out of most of Scotland, around 300 BC, south below the Tyne and into Ireland.

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[22] Kidd, *British Identities*, 204.
[23] John Pinkerton, *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland, Preceding the Reign of Malcolm III. or the year 1056* (2nd edn, Edinburgh, 1814), i. iv, 137. See also his *A Dissertation on the Origins and Progress of the Scythians or Goths* (London, 1787).
[24] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. iv.
[25] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. iv.
[26] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 161.
[27] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 23
[28] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. L.
[29] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. Lxx.

These Piks are also called Scythians. As another Scottish antiquarian, George Chalmers wrote in 1807, the Scythians were, like the Phoenicians, a prime candidate for ancestry in this period. 'The pretensions of the Scythes have created confusion, through every age', he explains. 'They assumed so many shapes; they appeared in so many places; they arrogated such superior antiquity; that inquiry has been bewildered, in following their steps, and judgement is perplexed.'[30] John Pinkerton's judgement is that the Scythians,

> otherwise called Getae or Goths, proceeded from modern Persia upward, over the river Araxes, in Armenia, and the mountains of Caucasus, into Little or Ancient Scythia, on the Euxine. Thence they spread into Thrace, Greece, Illyricum, Dacia, Germany, Scandinavia [around 500 BC]. From Scandinavia they proceeded to Scotland, Jutland, and the Danish isles. From Germany, to Gaul, and Spain, and Italy; and form at this day almost the whole inhabitants of Europe, the few Celts in the British isles, the Fins of Lapland, Finland, and Hungary, and the Sarmations of Russia and Poland, being the sole exceptions.[31]

Through his model of history, Pinkerton thus excludes the Celts entirely from the mainstream of European tradition and retracts them from the Indo-European hypothesis. He judges the truth of this exclusion by an appeal to the characteristics of what he thinks are two opposing races. Even 'if all history were utterly extinguished,' the difference between Celt and Goth would be clear, he argues, 'at first sight.'[32]

Pinkerton depicts the Pictish Lowlander as 'tall and large, with fair complexions, and often with flaxen, yellow, and red hair, and blue eyes; the grand features of the Goths, in all ancient writers', and describes the Celtic Highlander as 'generally diminutive…with brown complexions, and almost always with black curled hair, and dark eyes.'[33] The distinction stretches to character traits, bound in Pinkerton's view inextricably to race. 'The Lowlanders', he asserts, 'are acute,

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[30] George Chalmers, *Caledonia: Or, an Account, Historical and Topographic, of North Britain; from the most ancient to the present times,* four vols (London, 1807), i. 8. John Jamieson, for example, who wrote the first historical dictionary of Scots, included in his *Hermes Scythicus: or, The Radical Affinities of the Greek and Latin Languages with The Gothic* (Edinburgh, 1814), 'a Dissertation on the Historical Proofs of the Scythian Origin of the Greeks.'
[31] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 191.
[32] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 339.
[33] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 339.

industrious, sensible, erect, free. The Highlanders indolent, slavish, strangers to industry.'[34] Believing in the inherency of race, Pinkerton can use ancient as well as modern observations to substantiate his claims. For example, in a thorough confusion of ancient and modern, he compares 'the contempt which the Celts had for the fair sex, and still have; for we may still behold them stretched at their ease in their huts, and their poor women toiling, like beasts of burden,' to 'the state of women among all the Gothic nations.'[35] This he deduces from the speech of Idanthyrsus in Herodotus Book Four, and from the treatment of women in the 'advanced society' of 'the Greeks and Romans, nations of Scythic or Gothic origin.'[36]

3. Anticelticism and the classical

> *There are schools in England where they teach good Greek and Latin, but where they represent Ireland, which produced an epic literature that challenges comparison with the literature of Greece and Rome, as a country hopelessly barbarous and savage, and redeemed from that condition only by the English Conquest. It dies hard, that distortion of history*
>
> Warre B. Wells[37]

These anticeltic claims are clearly tied to contemporary discourses of race and primitivism, and several scholars have explored this link in the shape of the relative Orientalism or Gothicism of Celticists in this period.[38] However the Gothic versus the

[34] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 339.
[35] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 267.
[36] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 268. For other uses of this shared origin between Greek, Roman and Gothic, see i. 391-392, 396.
[37] Warre B. Wells, *An Irish Apologia: Some Thoughts on Anglo-Irish relations and the War* (Dublin and London, 1917), 13.
[38] See for example, Kidd, *British Identities*, 250-286; and Leerssen, *Remembrance,* 94-100.

Oriental is by no means the only fracture differentiating Ledwich and Pinkerton from the antiquarians whom they condemn. While the thinkers encountered in the previous chapter were moving away from classical Greece, in terms of their sources, outlook and the proposed hierarchy of antiquity, Ledwich and Pinkerton both return squarely to the classical, in both their content and method.

Several antiquarians examined in Chapter One argued that the Greeks were indebted to the very Celts that they condemned as barbarians. Sylvester O'Halloran, among many others, stressed that 'our ancestors were the first reformers and improvers of Greece'.[39] For Ledwich, however, it was the Greeks who 'civilised' Ireland. All arguments about the Celtic druids 'anticipating the discoveries of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Archimedes and Newton' were based solely on 'a few imperfect and incidental notices in Cæsar and other ancients.'[40] 'There is not', Ledwich judges, 'in the extent of ancient literature a more unaccountable phenomenon than what is delivered by Cæsar of the Druids and their superstitions.'[41] Strabo's description of druidic philosophy, meanwhile, is written 'in terms solely applicable to the improved state of it in Greece, and by no means adapted to the wretched conjuring tricks of the Druids.'[42]

With interesting unpredictability, Ledwich then uses the same classical sources to support his picture of Celtic barbarism. He cites Strabo approvingly for 'giving such characteristic traits of national barbarity, as are only found among the most ignorant and savage people' – that they are cannibals and so on – and assents to Diodorus Siculus' articulation of the same complaint.[43] He also quotes Cicero's warning not to value slaves from the British Isles, as 'these you must not expect to find skilled in letters or music'.[44]

Rather than the Celtic yielding new insights into the growth of Greek greatness then, Ledwich argues, the Greeks brought everything to the Celts (especially at Massilia, which Strabo designated 'a school for the barbarians', Str. 4.1.6). 'The

[39] O'Halloran, *General History*, i. 72.
[40] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 32.
[41] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 32.
[42] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 38.
[43] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 38, 39.
[44] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 35, quoting Cic. *Att*. 4.16.7.

Greeks', he writes, 'gave letters to, and introduced not only civility but a high degree of polish and urbanity among the Gauls, and being also a mercantile people opened a commerce with the interior of the country.'[45] 'If we may judge from modern efforts in pursuit of trade,' he continues, '(and the Greeks were inferior to no nation) they probably penetrated to the confines of Britain…and to the shores of the Baltic, and from thence brought both tin and amber.'[46] There is a transparently-veiled relation here between the Greek introduction of civility to Gaul and Ledwich's belief, as encountered above, in the English introduction of 'the happy security of peace' into Ireland, after 'the miseries of barbarous manners'.[47]

For Pinkerton, the principal fault in Celticists was, similarly, their classicizing claims. This appears, in the first place, in his methodological objections to those who attempt to borrow classical learning and classical sources for their Celticist ends, but who were drastically underqualified to do so. He laments the eighteenth century for being 'fatal to real and solid literature…a century in which learning, the grand foundation of philosophy among the ancients, began to be despised; and ignorance was called philosophy. Now and not before…were the whole nations of Europe to be Celts'.[48] Pinkerton then envisages two 'very different spheres in human intellect'. There is, on the one hand, 'one supreme in which the classical or truly learned…move; and which is scarcely comprehensible, except by congenial minds', and, on the other, a 'very inferior sphere, a kind of phantasmagoria, in which a dark mirror sends forth unreal images to captivate the vulgar.'[49] The study of antiquities, 'a subject absolutely dependent upon much reading,' should be kept soundly in the former sphere.[50]

According to Pinkerton, the downfall of Scottish antiquarianism had been its failure to keep these two intellectual spheres separate. It follows that there should, therefore, be none of the crossover between classical and Celtic as disciplines or modes of scholarship as there was, for example, about Ossian. Indeed, in an earlier

[45] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 14.
[46] Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 14.
[47] Ledwich, 'Preface', in *Antiquities*, n.p.
[48] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 199.
[49] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. v.
[50] Pinkerton *Enquiry*, i. xxxiii.

essay on 'the Origin of Scotish Poetry', Pinkerton explicitly chastises those who, under the spell 'of a 'delicious delusion,' named Macpherson's Ossian 'the Celtic Homer.'[51] Macpherson himself erred because he 'with great resolution attacked, and *confuted*, all the ancients.'[52] When 'a modern pretends to confute Caesar and Tacitus,' proclaimed Pinkerton, 'in their accounts of the ancient inhabitants of Britain, any man of science would disdain to enter the field. In fact, such an idea could not even occur except to a mind totally estranged from sound and solid literature; it is a mere phantom of the darkness of ignorance.'[53] In response, he aimed to retrieve classical learning from this phantom grip.

Pinkerton's second objection to the mixing of classical and Celtic appears in his rejection, like Ledwich, of all who claim Celtic origin for anything Greek (or Roman). A section of his *Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths*, published in 1787 and intended as part of the *Enquiry*, was given over to reinstating the Goths instead of the Celts in the position of those 'from whom…the Greeks and Romans also sprung'.[54] Any attempt to prove otherwise comes from straying into the non-classical sphere of learning and denying the clear savagery of the Celts, which bars them from any relation to the 'polite Athenians.'[55] So he proves that the Greeks 'were not Celts' and demonstrates the '*Historic Truth that the Pelasgi, Hellenes, or Greeks, were Scythians or Goths*.'[56] It is in vain that Celticists aver, as proof of their position, that some Celtic words are found in Greek – 'the words,' Pinkerton states, 'thought Greek by dabblers in the Celtic, are all Gothic…the real Celtic is as remote from the Greek, as the Hottentot, or the Laplandic.'[57]

Pinkerton rejects, finally, those writers on Ireland who were arguing that 'their country was highly civilised, had letters and academies, as the Greeks and Romans.' 'The Greeks we know,' he writes, 'the Romans we know, but who are ye? Those

[51] John Pinkerton, *Ancient Scotish Poems, never before in Print,* two vols (London, 1786), i. L.
[52] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 123.
[53] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. xxii.
[54] Pinkerton, *Dissertation*, vii.
[55] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 396.
[56] Pinkerton, *Dissertation*, 76.
[57] Pinkerton, *Dissertation*, 67.

Greeks and Romans pronounce you not only barbarous, but utterly savage. Where are your authorities against this?...The old inhabitants of your country, the Wild Irish, the true Milesian breed, untainted with Gothic blood, we know to be rude clans at this day. Can a nation, once civilized, ever become savage? Impossible!'[58]

4. Conclusion

Godfrey Higgins, freemason and antiquarian, acquaintance of Pictet, inspiration for Madame Blavatsky and author of the notorious *Anacalypsis*, wrote a book on Celtic druids, published between 1827 and 1829, which, as the poet and canon of Salisbury, William Lisle Bowles, remarked in his *Hermes Britannicus*, could be taken as 'the Thesaurus of Druidical intelligence'.[59] In it, Higgins tells of how 'for a long time, I was quite in amazement at the irritation of temper displayed by various writers when treating of the learning of the ancient Druids.' He cites Ledwich as an example.[60] 'The contests', Higgins claims, 'constantly taking place between the literati of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, respecting their relative seniorities are only worthy of up-grown babies.'[61] He later likens his anticeltic opponents to the 'philosophers of Greece', who, 'in the time of Herodotus, were, with respect to knowledge of its early population, exactly in the same situation that Mr. Ledwich and Mr. Pinkerton are with respect to Scotland and Ireland, for, like Herodotus, they trouble themselves much about minute points and petty tribes, but never take an enlarged view of the whole.'[62]

What the broad survey in these two chapters has revealed is that arguments over the Celts, in the first century of their existence as a distinct people, were arguments over the proper degree of separation between the Greek and the Celt. A thinker like Higgins, or like Pezron, Macpherson, Davies, Vallancey or Pictet, desired

[58] Pinkerton, *Enquiry*, i. 18-19.
[59] W.L. Bowles, *Hermes Britannicus* (London, 1828), 133.
[60] Higgins, *Celtic Druids*, 12.
[61] Higgins, *Celtic Druids*, 99.
[62] Higgins, *Celtic Druids*, 261.

that there be a close, though meticulously characterised and adjudicated, relation between the Greek and the Celt. Ledwich and Pinkerton, on the other hand, pushed the pieces apart, separating Greek from Celt in terms of scholarly method, disciplinary boundaries, historical influence and varying degrees of civilisation or barbarity.

What for Pinkerton is a 'kind of phantasmagoria' or 'dark mirror', in which Greek and Celt are confuted and contaminate each other, is, for Macpherson and the rest, an opportunity for Homer and Ossian, for example, to inform one another. There is an interesting further implication here, of the relationship between the political impetus behind Ledwich and Pinkerton and their return, in direct opposition to the departure of others, to classical Greece and to self-sufficient classical scholarship.

Chapter Three

Revenant antiquarians and Ireland's material remains

1. Introduction

It is…historic truth, that the Celts are more ancient than the Greeks
Robert Huddleston[1]

Irish antiquarianism supposedly collapsed in the first half of the nineteenth century, 'under the weight of ethnographical and philological information'. It ceded to 'comparative linguistics, scientific archaeology and unscientific speculation'.[2] The first comparative grammar of the Celtic languages was meant to put an end to the comparison of Irish 'with most of the languages of the world', for example,[3] and Joep Leerssen has observed how few antiquarian studies of the Irish tradition more generally appeared in the *Transactions* of the Royal Irish Academy in 1800-1815, when compared to the last ten years of the eighteenth century.[4]

Leerssen, Joseph Lennon and Clare O'Halloran have demonstrated the relation of this decline to the extreme political unrest and violence surrounding the 1798 uprising in Ireland. 'Starry-eyed Irish antiquarianism suddenly seemed more ominous to many unionist Anglo-Irish and British readers and scholars', argues Lennon.[5] In 1839, the Antiquities Committee of the RIA then revived, but it did so with the intention of departing from what was seen as dangerously 'starry-eyed.' It aimed to continue with a new approach to the scientific study of Celtic antiquity.[6]

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[1] Huddleston, *A New Edition*, 360.
[2] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 69.
[3] John O'Donovan and Jacob Grimm, 'Zeuss's "Grammatica Celtica"', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 7 (1859), 11.
[4] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 75.
[5] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 95.
[6] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 183-184.

The trailblazer of this scientific method came from the growing discipline of scientific archaeology, and especially in the form of George Petrie's essay 'On the Origin and Uses of the Round Towers,' which won the Royal Irish Academy's essay competition in the early 1830s. This was 'the first scholarly contribution to the debate on these still perplexing structures' and, most importantly, a clarion call for 'the beginning of the specialist discipline of archaeology in Ireland.'[7] Petrie aimed, as John Hutchinson explains, 'to establish on a firm empirical basis the arguments for an independent Irish Celtic culture', which involved countering both the cynicism of the anticeltic writers like Ledwich, and 'the fabulism of the earlier antiquaries' like Sylvester O'Halloran and Vallancey (who had helped found the RIA in 1785).[8]

However, a great many antiquarians nevertheless appeared, in the nineteenth century in Ireland, gripped by the apparent 'affinity' between Ireland and elsewhere. Eighteenth-century researches also remained popular, with three editions of O'Halloran, for instance, released between 1800 and 1820.[9] These revenant antiquarians were met with great impatience from many quarters, for seeming to repeat what should have been silenced for ever – the theories of Vallancey and the rest – by the voices of scholars like Petrie. To one reviewer, they proved 'that the *mind*, like a crab, can march backward as well as forward'.[10] As Hubert Butler wrote, 'Ledwich and Vallancey continued to have their disciples, sceptics and romantics, like Henry O'Brien, Sir William Betham, Dr Beaufort, Marcus Keane, but the archaeological societies mostly cold-shouldered them…In their remote country houses they peopled the past, which reason had emptied of its saints and heroes, with Phoenicians, Etruscans, Cuthites.'[11] These disciples include several of the central figures of what

[7] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 184.
[8] John Hutchinson, 'Archaeology and the Irish rediscovery of the Celtic past', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Oct., 2001), 507. For the role of archaeology in Irish Celticism, see also Norman Vance, 'Archaeology and the Ideology of Colony and Nation: The Case of New Grange', in Joep Leerssen et al. eds., *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1995), 175-182.
[9] O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 184.
[10] Anon., 'The Round Towers of Ireland', *The Dublin Penny Journal*, vol. 2, no. 98 (17 May, 1834), 362.
[11] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 7.

Seamus Deane titled the 'first Celtic revival'.[12] Writers such as Sydney Owenson and Charlotte Brooke, as Norman Vance points out, 'popularised much of the antiquarian work of the previous twenty years and provided a powerful stimulus to its continuation.'[13] In her novel *The Wild Irish Girl*, for example, Owenson compared the 'custom of retaining the nurse who has reared the children' in Ireland and 'in ancient *Greece*', adding that 'they are probably both derived from the same origin.'[14]

This chapter will examine the work of three of the revenant antiquarians whom Butler identified as pupils of the eighteenth century: Henry O'Brien, William Betham and Marcus Keane. It will investigate how these thinkers were reacting to the new, archaeological turn in the Irish intellectual climate, pioneered by Petrie and designed to overturn 'fantasies about the pagan origin' of Ireland's material remains, as Hutchinson put it.[15] The chapter will demonstrate that this increased interest in Ireland's ruins, when combined with excavations going on at the same time in the Mediterranean, seems to have suggested a particularly potent affinity between the Celtic and the Greek, to allow for a return, in other words, to 'fantastic' equations between the Celt and the classical pagan. These antiquarians could now argue for a new form of similarity, conducting a form of visual comparatism. As archaeology made Celtic Ireland increasingly visible, nineteenth-century revenant antiquarians could construct Graeco-Celtic theories based on similarities in the appearance of the material remains of Ireland and Greece.

The same period that saw the establishment of scientific archaeology in Ireland also saw the famous Ordnance Survey project, run by the British Army but with the involvement of some Irish scholars, including George Petrie. From 1825 until the 1840s the surveyors mapped the whole of Ireland at a scale of six inches to a mile, increasing the visibility of Irish ruins as well as its landscape. However, as Brian Friel explored in his play *Translations*, the map was a colonially-driven project which, as Angèle Smith

[12] Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980* (London, 1987), 20.
[13] Norman Vance, 'Celts, Carthaginians and Constitutions: Anglo-Irish Literary Relations, 1780-1820', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87 (Mar., 1981), 21.
[14] Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford, 1999), 96. For a study of Owenson and Orientalism, see Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 142-155.
[15] Hutchinson, 'Archaeology and the Irish', 509.

puts it, also 'standardized and anglicized…the Irish landscape.'[16] If the Ordnance Survey, with its compass points, coordinates and measurements, was a process of imposing 'colonial powers over the local',[17] then it must be acknowledged that, for at least two of the revenant antiquarians to be considered in this chapter, connecting Irish ruins to Greek may have become a way of controlling and regulating the Irish landscape, plotting Irish history via the coordinates of Greece.[18]

2. Round Towers

It is only by comparison of the remains of nations, we can hope to arrive at the truth of their history.

William Betham[19]

The similarity of form between the brazen casque of the Hellenic warrior and the featherhelm of the Polynesian chief, is to me no proof of the common origin of the Greeks and the South Sea islanders.

Thomas Keightley[20]

[16] Angèle Smith, 'Mapped Landscapes: The Politics of Metaphor, Knowledge, and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Irish Ordnance Survey Maps', *Historical Archaeology,* vol. 41, no. 1 (2007), 83.
[17] Smith, 'Mapped Landscapes', 84.
[18] NB the analogy between the Irish situation and Güthenke's account of the power of the 'materiality of [modern] Greece, as an indicator of the past,' in the same period, and with the same tensions concerning political and historical 'territory', Constanze Güthenke, *Placing Modern Greece: The Dynamics of Romantic Hellenism, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2008), 10, 6.
[19] William Betham, *Etruria-Celtica: Etruscan Literature and Antiquities Investigated*, two vols (Dublin, 1842), ii. 190.
[20] Thomas Keightley, *Tales and Popular Fictions, Their Resemblance, and Transmission from Country to Country* (1834), quoted in Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson eds., *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (Bloomington and London, 1972), 447.

what struck me was the fact that a Greek vase had been found in this Hyperborean country
Paul Jacobsthal[21]

As the 'amateur Irish historian' Eneas MacDonnell said in 1826, Ireland was rich in 'splendid ruins' and 'ancient relics', *duns*, *cromlechs*, stone circles and so on.[22] But, as William Betham proclaimed, none of these relics 'excited more interest than her ancient round towers'.[23] The origin of these mysterious towers had been, so far, ascribed to a great arc of antiquities: Vallancey had read them as Zoroastrian fire towers; Louise Beaufort, the first woman to be published in the *Transactions* of the RIA, agreed, though argued that they 'might also have served for gnomons, like the obelisks of Thebes'; whilst Thomas Molyneux held that they were Viking fortifications.[24] The Royal Irish Academy's essay competition, won by George Petrie, was engineered to find a rational foundation, at last, for these 'gigantic puzzles'.[25]

One of Petrie's fellow contenders was Henry O'Brien, 'the Œdipus of the round towers riddle', and a Catholic who had studied at Trinity College Dublin.[26] As he 'pored over Sir William Jones and *The Asiatic Researches*', the editor of an 1898 reissue of his work recalls, '– not to mention his beloved, though decried, Herodotus – it was only natural that he should draw certain conclusions'.[27] This scholarly apprenticeship encouraged him to enter the Academy's competition, and, although he did not win, he was awarded a prize. His *Round Towers of Ireland* was then published in 1834.

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[21] Paul Jacobsthal, *Early Celtic Art* (Oxford, 1944), vi.
[22] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 132; Eneas MacDonnell, *Speech delivered by Eneas MacDonnell, Esq. at a meeting of the inhabitants of Mayo, held, July 6th, 1826* (Leeds, 1828), 19.
[23] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 189.
[24] Vallancey, *Vindication*, 235; L.C. Beaufort, 'An Essay upon the State of Architecture and Antiquities. Previous to the Landing of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland', *The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 15 (1828), 210; Thomas Molyneux, *Discourse concerning the Danish Mounts, Forts, and Towers in Ireland* (Dublin, 1725), cited in Vance, 'Archaeology and Ideology', 177.
[25] W.H.C., 'Introduction', in Henry O'Brien, *The Round Towers of Ireland or the History of the Tuath-De-Danaans* (new edn, London and Calcutta, 1898), xxiv.
[26] W.H.C., 'Introduction', xxix.
[27] W.H.C., 'Introduction', xi.

A wave of criticism was directed against the RIA, for allowing O'Brien's work to be put through the press. 'The Council of the Royal Irish Academy,' wrote one reviewer, 'deserve to be rather severely taken to task for their share in the publication…To have such a melange go before the learned with the impress of the Society's award, to us appears highly discreditable to the Academy'.[28] O'Brien himself credited the scandal, and his defeat in the competition, to an establishment bias in the Academy. He supposed a determination to give the towers a Christian origin, after too many accounts of Phoenicians or Zoroastrians – 'it is astonishing how fond they have *suddenly* become for the memory of the monks'.[29] Those who posited such an idea were, he argued, nothing more than 'deniers of the antiquity of those venerable memorials,' and his own intention was to 'give the lie and discomfiture to those, who, from the interested suggestions of an illiberal policy, or the more pardonable delusions of a beclouded judgment, would question the truth of our primeval civilisation'.[30]

O'Brien then put forward his own version of the towers' antiquity, against these deniers, in service of 'the rectification of my country's history'.[31] 'Be it known,' he declares, 'that the "*Round Towers*" of *Ireland* were temples constructed by the early Indian colonists of the country, in honour of that *fructifying* principle of nature, emanating, as was supposed, from the sun, under the denomination of Sol, Phoebus, Apollo, Abad or Budh, &c. &c.; and from the moon, under the epithet of Luna, Diana, Juno, Astarte, Venus, Babia or Butsee, &c. &c.'[32] He had to deal, however, with classical sources on Ireland, 'respecting the "barbarous" condition of the *then* Irish', and so argued that the civilisation of the towers was over by the time Strabo and the rest knew anything about Ireland; the towers were already, he writes, 'hoary with antiquity at that moment.'[33] Therefore, when Greece and Rome were still 'lowly and

[28] Anon., 'Review of Henry O'Brien', 364.
[29] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 137. See also x-xxxvi, for O'Brien's account of his entry into the competition.
[30] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 8, 2-3.
[31] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 130.
[32] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 91.
[33] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 27.

obscure…our high careering name, *synonymous* with civilization, was wafted by the four winds of heaven to all the quarters of the world which that heaven irradiates.'[34]

O'Brien rejected the authority of 'the affected pedants of Greece and Rome', with their 'pretended politeness', and criticised those who followed their lead.[35] The desire of K.O. Müller, for instance, 'to make everything square to the reveries of the Grecians,' had led him erroneously to take them 'as his clue, into a labyrinth of inextricability'.[36] In actual fact, the Greeks and Romans were, like the ancient Irish, 'Budhists,' although 'the circumscribed stupidity of Greek and Roman mythologists' had corrupted their veneration of 'Budh', loading it with anthropomorphized concepts under proper names. When due heed is given to Irish antiquity, rather than classical, then the damage can be undone.

As others have done, O'Brien nevertheless used Greek sources as evidence in his history. He argued for the identity of Ireland and 'the "Insula Hyperboreorum" of Hecateus,"' for example, using Diodorus as his source (Diod. 2.47.1-6).[37] He also cited Strabo's reference to Abaris (Str. 7.3.8) and the Hyperborean embassy to Delos, as a record of historical contact between the Irish and the Greeks.[38] This, he argued, was where the Greeks were 'initiated in all their religious mysteries by the Irish.' With all the 'lubricity' of the Greeks, who are 'ever sacrificing sense to sound,' it was also where they 'adopted the several epithets of our island…so that our *Muc-inis* became their *Myc-ene*, our *Tot-dana* their *Do-dona*, &c &c.'[39]

The most interesting moment in O'Brien's work comes when he asks 'why such features of similarity should be observed to exist between our antiquities and those of ancient Greece and Rome; not less perceptible in the circumstance of those edificial remains than in the collateral evidences of language and manners.'[40] He argues that this similitude in 'edificial remains' can be explained by the fact that they were all built

[34] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 28.
[35] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 107, 46.
[36] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 444.
[37] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 52. Cf. 397-403.
[38] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 52ff.
[39] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 120, 453-454.
[40] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 85, 86.

by the same 'caste of miners', who 'should properly be called Irish.'[41] This theory, O'Brien argues, 'must satisfactorily and for ever do away with the doubt' about why such similarities exist, and answer the mystery of the round towers.[42] By the time of O'Brien's work, then, similarity between Greek and Irish has become something that needs to be explained (as, for the anticeltic writers, it was something to be explained away).

According to O'Brien, 'relics of this ancient masonry' could be found in 'Mycenæ, Argos, and Tiryns, in Greece, as well as Etruria and other places in Italy' and, most crucially, in Ireland (wherever the so-called Cyclopean remains of Europe, which were later to be particularly associated with Mycenae, could be found).[43] The tower in Killmallock church, for example, in County Limerick, 'careering towards the skies… [in] bold preoccupancy', could now be appreciated for what it truly was, a temple for Apollo and a relic of his 'recorded glories'.[44] 'He must be indeed,' writes O'Brien, 'a slave to faction, or the dupe of prejudice, who will not subscribe to that evidence which the very stones proclaim.' The tower was a relic of Graeco-Celtic, or 'Budhist,' kinship, still visible despite 'the violence which this structure has latterly undergone – by the effort made to incorporate it with the Christian cathedral'.

Similarly, O'Brien argues that Knockmoy Abbey in Galway, 'though now dreary, inconsiderable, and forgotten…was once the theatre of soul-stirring impressions!', 'the remnant of an ancient Tuath-de-danaan Temple, vaulted with stone'.[45] Crucial to his argument is a fresco, depicting two archers firing at a figure against a tree. This he identifies as a 'pathetic representation of the *youth Apollo slaying with his arrow the serpent Python*'.[46] He also refers the iconography back to Abaris, the 'druid' in the Herodotean account of the Hyperboreans. 'Look, Sir,' he writes,' what do you see before you? The solution of that all-healing *arrow* which Abaris was said to have

[41] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 86.
[42] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 86.
[43] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 86.
[44] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 202-203.
[45] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 329
[46] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 330.

brought with him from the island of the Hyperboreans, on his visit of religion to Greece!'[47]

In the face of the deniers of the antiquity of Ireland, therefore, there stands the similarity between ruins in Ireland and, in O'Brien's account, the 'Cyclopean' ruins of the Mediterranean. The round towers and other ruins were becoming, as Eneas Macdonnell declared, 'the defence of our ancestry', and O'Brien argued for their value to Ireland and the world by demonstrating them to be built by the same builders as 'the ancient walls around the acropolis of Athens'.[48] This should rule out any possible asymmetry in the treatment of Greek and Irish ruins: for O'Brien, the value assigned to one should be assigned to the other.

3. Ireland and the Etruscans

> *it becomes us all who do not wish to lose the heritage of centuries, nor to feel ourselves living among nameless ruins, when we might have an ancestral home…to aid in or originate a series of efforts to save all that remains of the past.*
>
> Thomas Davis[49]

> *details which I have, like this, to dredge laboriously out of an undefined rapture.*
>
> Hubert Butler[50]

The next revenant antiquarian named by Butler and considered in this chapter, William Betham, takes this visual comparatism a stage further. Betham was the Ulster

[47] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 328. He also sees Newgrange as a 'Mithratic temple,' dedicated to the Cabiric mysteries which Pictet had already identified with Celtic religion, at 351, 354.
[48] MacDonnell, *Speech delivered by Eneas MacDonnell,* 19; O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 2-3.
[49] Davis, 'Ancient Ireland', in *Selections from his Poetry and Prose*, 94.
[50] From Butler's diary, quoted in Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 279.

King of Arms and Secretary of the Royal Irish Academy. He stands as an example of the fact that, as Hutchinson has argued, Celtic researches in Ireland were in part driven by 'the "colonial" Protestant minority' (Henry O'Brien is an interesting exception).[51] He also starkly exemplifies 'the outdated approaches', as Leerssen points out, 'still prevailing among Irish antiquarians'.[52] For Betham, in his *Etruria Celtica*, published in Dublin in 1842, 'Irish antiquity functions as a mere void which he fills with colourful incidents and adventurous journeys, obviously inspired by Homer, the Aeneid, and Ossian.'[53]

The poet and antiquarian Samuel Ferguson reviewed Betham's book very harshly, objecting to his complete disregard of linguistic laws. Ferguson, who likened travelling around Ireland to 'going backwards and forwards through the rooms of a well-arranged historical museum', could not sanction what he saw as the disparity between the weightiness of Betham's subject and the incompetence of its author, who threw the rational order of this well-arranged museum into disarray, shaking up the pieces of Celtic antiquity.[54] 'His fatuity and presumption appear almost incredible', Ferguson wrote, '…really this is mere lunacy.'[55] Nevertheless, Betham is essential to an understanding of how the Celtic past morphs in relation to advances in thinking about other antiquities, and, particularly, how it reacts to the discovery of new material evidence for the 'museum,' whether well-arranged or chaotic. Betham's book should be seen seriously, in relation to the uncovering of the Etruscan world.

Betham argued that the Etruscans were once part of a great empire, also known as Phoenician, whose only survivors were now the Irish Celts. Etruscans, Phoenicians and Celts, as well as Greeks and Romans, are synonymous with each other; the Phoenician Celts, he says, 'were the same people as the *Pelasgoi, Pelargoi,*

[51] Hutchinson, 'Archaeology and the Irish', 505.
[52] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 91.
[53] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 93.
[54] Samuel Ferguson, 'Attractions of Ireland, no. 3' (1836), quoted in Eve Patten, *Samuel Ferguson and the culture of nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), 44; Samuel Ferguson, 'Betham's *Etruria Celtica*', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 57 (Apr., 1845), 474-488.
[55] Ferguson, 'Betham's *Etruria*', 483-484. For Ferguson's own 'alignment' of Greek and Irish, see McDonald, 'The Greeks in Ireland', 184-185. For his long campaign to get this review published, see Patten, *Samuel Ferguson*, 177.

Etruscans, Tyrrheni, &c. who occupied Italy and Greece.'[56] His first volume concerns linguistic kinship: 'the Irish, or Gaelic tongue,' he argues, 'is the genuine and least adulterated dialect of the ancient Phœnician Celtic' and likewise 'the Etruscan is, in fact, the simple uncompounded Celtic, or Phœnician'.[57] The Irish language will therefore supply 'the means of acquiring a knowledge of the meaning and import of the ancient Etruscan inscriptions, as well as a clue to the learning of that interesting people…and also to their notions of the deity, religion, and worship.'[58]

Believing in the identity of Old Irish and Etruscan, Betham then undertakes to translate the Umbrian Eugubian Tablets, which he thought were written in Etruscan, in what Leerssen terms an 'ever-thickening fog of semantic entropy'.[59] Having apparently deciphered the tablets, he discovers that they were seafaring manuals for the Etruscan Celtic colonists, noting 'how puny and feeble the early nautical exploits of the Greeks appear, when compared with the exertions of these glorious Etrusco-Phœnician navigators.'[60]

Despite this reassessment of the relative advancement of Greek, Etruscan and Celtic, Betham is careful about the balancing of origins. 'It is repugnant to common sense', he explains, 'to suppose that these remote islands were the means by which civilization was communicated to the countries surrounding the Mediterranean and the East, which seems to be implied when we assert that the roots of many words in the Greek and Latin are to be found in the *Irish language*'. But his lost Etruscan-Celtic empire allows him to surmount this difficulty. 'If', he points out, 'we are able to show that [the Irish language] is the same as that spoken by the people who occupied Italy and the countries bordering on that sea, the absurdity vanishes and the fact ceases to surprise. A man will laugh in your face if you assert that Latin is mostly derived from the Irish, but if you are able to show that the Etruscan inhabitants of Italy spoke the

[56] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 10. This homogeneity is the justification for including Betham in the tradition of Graeco-Celtic thought, despite the fact that the Etruscans were of course not Greeks.
[57] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 10-11, 44.
[58] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 11.
[59] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 92-93.
[60] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 389.

same, or a kindred language, with what is now called Irish, if he be not convinced, his sarcasm and ridicule will certainly be deprived of all its point.'[61]

This empire was then 'exterminated' by the Greeks and Romans, who were 'in due time annihilated by other barbarians'.[62] 'The selfish and jealous Greeks', Betham writes, 'have been justly accused of a desire to make themselves appear the source from which all civilization flowed; to accomplish this end they anxiously annihilated the remains of the language and the arts of their predecessors.'[63] Once again, however, this annihilation at the 'destroying hands of Greek and Roman' has not been acknowledged; for too long, there has been a tendency 'to believe the Greek origin of every thing ancient.'[64] 'The mythology of the Greeks and Romans', Betham writes, '…is so interwoven and dovetailed into the minds, and has so strong a hold of the prejudices of mankind, that…any attempt to question its being founded in something like truth, excites an irritation of feeling'.[65]

The analogy of the colonising English in Ireland is readily apparent in Betham's image of the destructive, belated Greeks and Romans obscuring the memory of the colonised Etruscan Celts. Betham explicitly argues for the plausibility of his model – here, the obliteration of Phoenician Celtic in Ireland – by looking to the current state of the Irish language. 'That six or eight generations', he writes,' are quite sufficient, even to destroy all knowledge of a language in a country under such circumstances, is proved in the case of Ireland. Two hundred years since the Irish language prevailed over the whole of the province of Leinster…at the present moment not one person in a thousand…understands Irish. This accounts, and satisfactorily, for the total disappearance of the Etruscan language in Italy'.[66] 'The paralyzing influence of the incursions of a barbarous conqueror,' he writes, 'soon effaces the effects of civilization, from which man recedes much more rapidly than he advances.'[67]

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[61] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 11.
[62] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. xi.
[63] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 30.
[64] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 34, 205.
[65] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii .7.
[66] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 31.
[67] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 189

Alongside language, Betham was interested in material remains, having been inspired by an exhibition of Etruscan antiquities. This display of, in Betham's words, 'magnificent specimens of sarcophagi, fictile vases, bronzes, gold ornaments, and other remains of ancient Italy,' was the first major exhibition of Etruscan remains.[68] It had opened in Pall Mall in 1837, presented by the Campanari family, and broke ground by being arranged in order to conjure the atmosphere of the excavations as they happened. The tombs were reconstructed and filled with artefacts, and the visitor moved through the exhibition by torchlight. All this was designed to provoke 'an emotive reaction halfway between the aesthetic of the picturesque of the romantic era and the necessity to adhere to some archaeological facts.'[69]

It worked on Betham, who was awestruck by what he saw. Perhaps because of this three-dimensional approach to exhibiting, he thought that he could now gain access to the mental and physical culture of an entire, previously overlooked civilisation. 'The works of Etruscan art', he wrote, 'demonstrate high civilization, and a progress of the human mind, equal to the most elevated point of any age of Greek or Roman civilization, or even of modern improvement. The human face divine of their statuary and painting exhibits a noble physiognomy…and indeed all their remains – evince a highly civilized, refined, and glorious people, powerful both by sea and land'.[70] 'If their sepulchres exhibit so much greatness, refinement, and dignity,' Betham asks, 'what splendour might be expected in their temples, theatres, public buildings, palaces, and the habitations, in which they lived, moved, and acted?'[71]

Betham was also inspired by 'the agreeable and interesting volume of Mrs. Hamilton Gray,' an account by Elizabeth Caroline Hamilton Gray of her trip to visit Etruscan tombs *in situ* as well as the collections in Italian museums.[72] This book contains, Betham judges, 'a mass of valuable information on the present appearance and statistics of the most interesting portions of ancient Etruria, clothed in an airy and

[68] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 18.
[69] Marcello Barbanera, 'The Impossible Museum: Exhibitions of Archaeology as Reflections of Contemporary Ideologies', in Nathan Schlanger and Jarl Nordbladh eds., *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in the Light of its History* (New York and Oxford, 2008), 169.
[70] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 19.
[71] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 20.
[72] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 18.

attractive vesture'. 'The whole', he declares, 'is written with such lively and rightminded cheerfulness, as to make a subject…which hitherto defied investigation, or only yielded a harvest of dull and unsatisfactory, if not repulsive surmises…attractive and popular.'[73]

Hamilton Gray was herself motivated by the Campanari exhibition. She explains how before this experience, she had paid little attention to the Etruscan world. Instead, she had existed in a 'blissful state of ignorance,' considering 'its fall and extinction before the conquering arms of Rome as matter of course.'[74] This changed when she saw the exhibition in Pall Mall, and resolved to go to Italy to visit 'our Etruscan friends.'[75] Betham was equally transported by what he saw of the Etruscans. In particular, he was struck by the similarity of what he saw in the exhibition and catalogues and what he had seen in Ireland. These were the fuel for his Etruscan-Celtic theory, leading him to move in the second volume of *Etruria-Celtica* into a demonstration of the 'similarity between the remains of ancient architecture in Italy and Ireland'.[76]

Like O'Brien, Betham focuses first on Cyclopean architecture, explaining that 'the architecture of the Etruscans was distinguished for strength and massive solidity: its remains are generally denominated Cyclopean.' Like O'Brien, also, he argues that 'specimens of these modes of wall-building exist in Ireland.'[77] In addition to these Cyclopean echoes, he scrutinises Irish and Etruscan tombs. 'The sepulchral architecture' of both civilisations, he thinks, 'has a still more striking similarity…a resemblance nearly amounting to identity.'[78] 'The sepulchre of Killeavy', for example, 'bears a strong resemblance to that of Monte-Rozzi, and the other tumuli of Etruria, even to the circular wall of large stones round its base.'[79] Moreover, 'Etruscan sepulchral monuments have lately been uncovered, which, like the Irish, were

[73] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 18-19.
[74] Elizabeth Caroline Hamilton Gray, *Tour to the Sepulchres of Etruria, in 1839* (London 1840), 3.
[75] Hamilton Gray, *Tour to the Sepulchres*, 11.
[76] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 170.
[77] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 169-170.
[78] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 170.
[79] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 179.

completely buried under tumuli, and much more elaborate; round and square towers, and chambers of regular masonry were built, in these they deposited their dead'.[80]

Using an account of a site in Hamilton Gray's book, Betham can then describe how 'the monument, or tumulus, called Cucumella, in the plains of *Canino*, partakes of the character of the round tower, as well as of the tumulus. It closely resembled Newgrange, Dowth, and many other Irish sepulchral tumuli, as to its external appearance'.[81] All things considered, he notes, 'what a remarkable similarity is exhibited...of the mode of burial among the ancient Irish and the Etruscans.'[82] 'The similarity of these Italian tumuli, with those of Ireland,' he concludes, 'is too palpable to require comment.'[83]

For all the novelty of her subject – 'Etruria being a subject wholly new' – Hamilton Gray expected that, nevertheless, a great many of her 'classically educated and thinking countrymen', would seek to fit the Etruscan world into pre-existing models of antiquity.[84] This was not the case with Betham. Rather, it jolted him into a completely new vision of the past, into a reassessment of the value of Irish literature, and into an adjustment of his current notion of the Greeks and Romans. They were not the first and they were not the most civilised, but were 'barbarous and inexorable conquerors', who borrowed everything they knew from a civilisation which they came after and which they destroyed.[85]

Irish literature and antiquities were, for Betham, the best witness of this golden age. In turn, Ireland's own and proper footing in the world will be restored only when it is seen in line with the Etruscans – 'the History of Ireland has still to be written!'[86] As it was for Hubert Butler, Ireland is the crucial and overlooked piece of the European puzzle. 'They speak', writes Betham of the Etruscan Irish, 'but are not understood.'[87]

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[80] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 179.
[81] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 180.
[82] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 179.
[83] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, ii. 182.
[84] Hamilton Gray, *Tour to the Sepulchres*, 21, 71.
[85] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 39.
[86] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 7.
[87] Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, i. 39.

4. Marcus Keane

the classical world was overrun. Only its bleached bones stood out against the Mediterranean sky. The old source of civilisation was sealed off, and if a new civilisation was to be born it would have to face the Atlantic. What a hope!...On one side the sea battering away, on the other infinite stretches of bog and forest. A most melancholy existence

Kenneth Clark[88]

She begins to study the past – not to acquire a beggar's eloquence in petition, but a hero's wrath in strife.

Thomas Davis[89]

There is a persistent tradition of Mediterranean origin that certain tribes crossed Europe to Ireland from Mycenae.

Warre B. Wells[90]

Marcus Keane, a tyrannical land agent in County Clare, was still discussing round towers and their origin in 1867. 'Ireland', he wrote, 'more than any other country of Europe abounds with Ruins, such as Round Towers, Sculptured Crosses, and Stone-roofed Churches, many of which display no mean degree of artistic skill. Of such remote antiquity are some of these Ruins, that the age of their foundation has never yet been determined. Questions as to what race of men erected such buildings…have given rise to much ingenious speculation, and to a vast amount of laborious research.'[91] By now, as Keane says, 'the favorite theory respecting our Round Towers

[88] Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (London, 1969), 7.
[89] Davis, 'The History of Ireland', in *Selections from his Poetry and Prose*, 83.
[90] Wells, *An Irish Apologia*, 10.
[91] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 1.

and their contemporary architectural remains is, that they belong to the Christian era of Ireland'.[92]

Keane's own 'object,' however, 'is to prove, that they were erected for the purposes of heathen worship, several hundred years before the Birth of Christ.'[93] He argues that Ireland, around 1000 BC, 'was inhabited by a highly civilized race of building celebrity; and a careful investigation of the ancient classic and Oriental histories and traditions will clearly prove the identity of this primitive race with the Cuthites of Antiquity, the descendants of Ham', whom he also styles Scythians and 'Tuath-de-Danaans.'[94] These were the builders of 'the remains of ancient Irish Architecture,' a category in which Keane includes the stone crosses and churches.[95]

Keane returns to the idea of the widespread culture of Cyclopean architecture, and the positing of a common source to explain it. 'It is an undeniable fact,' he writes, that 'there exist throughout Ireland numerous ruins manifesting as much of the characteristic Cyclopean sloping jambs, irregular courses of masonry, etc., as if they had been built by the very persons who constructed the more magnificent edifices of Greece and Italy.'[96] 'By Cyclopean Architecture', he explains, 'I mean the building with massive stones, laid in irregular courses…for the purpose of imparting strength and durability. Not only are the Irish Round Towers generally built in this Cyclopean style at the base, but also numerous ancient ruins of so-called Churches or Temples.'[97]

Keane studies many instances of this confluence of style, in particular of sloping jambs. In a striking instance of visual comparatism, he compares, in facing page illustrations, a doorway of a church in County Clare with the lion gate at Mycenae [see fig. 1]. 'The only reasonable solution' of the affinity between them, he concludes, 'is to assign all these buildings to the Cuthites, or Tuath-de-Danaans of antiquity – as the architects of those Cyclopean remains in Greece and Italy, with which, as the foregoing

[92] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, xvii.
[93] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, xvii.
[94] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, xix.
[95] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, xx.
[96] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 219-220.
[97] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 181.

illustrations prove, the Irish Ruins so strikingly correspond. This hypothesis entirely removes the difficulty.'[98]

'Let the reader examine the base of the Round Tower at Kilmachduagh', he writes. 'If an intelligent English Archaeologist were to find this specimen of architecture in Greece, he would have no hesitation in at once pronouncing it to be undoubtedly Cyclopean; but, finding it in Ireland, he reserves his judgment.'[99] This an explicit identification of asymmetry in the treatment of Irish ruins, which has been a recurrent implication in the work of Henry O'Brien and William Betham, also. It can similarly be seen in the essays and speeches of the Young Irelander, Thomas Davis (who, as David Dwan has explained, 'glorified the ancient republics of Greece' in his vision for Ireland).[100] 'Shall we,' he asked, 'spend time and money to see, to guard, or to decipher…Tuscan graves, and Egyptian hieroglyphics, and shall every nation in Europe shelter and study the remains of what it once was…and shall Ireland let all go to ruin?'[101] Positing a shared origin as an explanation for the similarities between Irish and other ruins, as in Keane, O'Brien and Betham, is one way to put an end to this asymmetry.

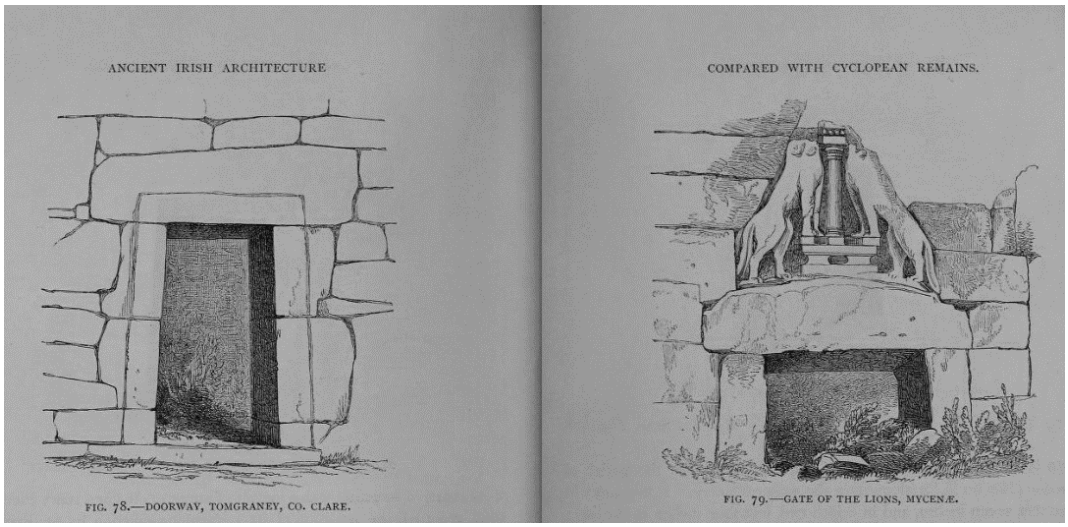


Figure 1, 'Ancient Irish Architecture Compared with Cyclopean Remains', comparing 'Doorway, Tomgraney, Co. Clare' with 'Gate of the Lions, Mycenae'. Keane, Towers and Temples*, 188-189.*

[98] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 192.
[99] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 18.
[100] David Dwan, *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin, 2008), 61.
[101] Davis, 'Historical Monuments of Ireland' in *Selections from his Poetry and Prose*, 96.

5. James O'Laverty

Philological views chase one another like cloud shadows among mountains
Gerard Manley Hopkins[102]

I am quite alive to the hazard of all this
Gerard Manley Hopkins[103]

A reviewer in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* deemed Marcus Keane's book an 'unparalleled hallucination.' In the face of the contemporary, more scientific approach to Celtic antiquity, he saw Keane's work as 'little more than a reproduction of the writings of Vallancey and O'Brien.'[104] 'He has exhumed,' the reviewer complained, 'from the obscurity into which they have long deservedly sunk…most of their baseless speculations and etymological dreams, and has added others of his own, more startling and visionary than any they ever conceived.'[105] Keane found, for example (in a prefiguring of Butler's 'pun-craft') the names of the Irish saints to be 'aliases' bestowed upon the 'heathen divinities' by early Christian writers, '*perhaps* from well-meaning ignorance.'[106] As Butler put it, he identified 'St Ciaran with Chiron, the Centaur, St Cronan with Cronos, St Bolcan with Vulcan, St Nessan with Nessus and so on.'[107]

However, there is something new emerging in the fringes of Keane's work, despite the condemnation of the reviewer. Keane based some of his speculation on 'a

[102] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Correspondence. Volume I 1852-1881*, eds. R.K.R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford, 2013), 984.
[103] Hopkins, *Correspondence*, 764.
[104] Anon., 'Remarks on some statements of Marcus Keane, Esq., M.R.I.A., in his work "The Towers and Temples of Ancient Ireland"', *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 5 (May, 1869), 376.
[105] Anon., 'Remarks on some statements of Marcus Keane', 376.
[106] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 45.
[107] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 8. See Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 88-89.

most interesting article by Mr. O'Laverty, in which he records several very ancient Irish legends, comparing them with similar legends of the East, and of ancient Grecian Mythology.'[108] This was a new manner of concurrence between the Celtic and the Greek. 'The coincidence,' continues Keane, 'of names and events is wonderful and…the incidents are so much alike in each case, as to prove that both were derived from the same mythological origin. Mr O'Laverty's article is well worthy [sic] the attention of every student of the subject.'[109]

This James O'Laverty was a Catholic priest, an 'antiquary, historian, and Gaelic scholar', and frequent contributor to the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*.[110] The article recommended by Keane was written in 1859, on the 'Remarkable Correspondence of Irish, Greek, and Oriental Legends.' According to O'Laverty, what is transmitted in the movements of people is neither so-called racial characteristics nor vocabulary nor building techniques, but myth. 'In examining what little has been published, out of the immense mass of legendary lore yet extant,' O'Laverty writes,

> the reader cannot fail to observe a striking resemblance between the Irish bardic tales and those which have from the most distant antiquity been current in Greece, Persia, and even India. The natural deduction from this is, that at some remote period, a communication existed between those distant countries, by which stories popular in one have been transmitted to the others. At the very dawn of history, we find the carrying trade of the world in the hands of the Phoenicians; their ships were to be seen in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the British seas; their mariners, as they coasted along the isles of the Mediterranean, probably conveyed to the Greeks the same oriental myths which they carried to the remote Ierne, and which, being adopted by the poets of both countries, received from them a local habitation, and were embodied in their respective mythologies. This seems the most reasonable way of accounting for the remarkable similarity which exists between many of the Greek and Irish legends.[111]

[108] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 39.
[109] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 39-40.
[110] John J. Marshall, 'An Obituary: Right Rev. Monsignor James O'Laverty, P.P., M.R.I.A., V.P.R.S.A', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, second series, vol. 12, no. 3 (Jul., 1906), 131.
[111] James O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence of Irish, Greek, and Oriental Legends', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 7 (1859), 334.

O'Laverty's article is primarily an account of possible parallels founded on the level of story pattern. Adonis, for example, is seen alongside the story of Diarmuid and Grainne, as both Adonis and Diarmuid are 'cautioned against hunting the wild boar; both are slain by that animal; and in both cases the wild boar is a rational being, metamorphosed into that shape for the express purpose of effecting the destruction of the hunter.'[112] If one adds to this, argues O'Laverty, 'that the corpse of both is sought for with loud mourning, and both are again raised to life', then 'it is impossible to doubt that the story of [Diarmuid] O'Duibhne is an Irish version of the legend of Adonis.'[113] Therefore, 'the story of Adonis seems to have at an early period travelled to Ireland, where it somehow gained admission into our bardic mythology.'[114]

O'Laverty also begins to do comparative study of Greek and Irish customs and folklore. 'Our common fairy superstition,' he points out, 'which places every stunted tree under the especial care of the "Good People," has its counterpart in the classic mythology…The numerous tales of destructive serpents or gigantic worms, which abound in our Irish legendary lore, have a close resemblance to the classic legends concerning the Hydra, the Dragon of the Hesperides, the Python, and other monsters'.[115] This is the point that caught the attention of an approving respondent in the next issue of the journal, who wrote that the article had convinced him of the importance of 'seemingly insignificant coincidences in little matters of customs and traditions.' 'Many commonly-retailed jokes and bon-mots', he wrote, 'might thus be easily traced back, from land to land, and from age to age; and the evidence thus hinted, of mutual intercourse, would often be found more convincing than that drawn from coincidences of greater seeming importance.'[116]

O'Laverty continued this interest in 'insignificant coincidences' in 1890, in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, with a suggestion of the kinship between an Irish custom of wren-day and the Greek swallow-song. These customs, he

[112] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 341.
[113] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 341.
[114] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 340. For Keane's use of this, see Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 76.
[115] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 344.
[116] "Cosmas", 'Antiquarian Notes and Queries', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, first series, vol. 8 (1860), 70.

wrote, 'common to Greek and Irish boys, carry us back to the earliest days of the Indo-European nations, when the Irishman and the Greek were brothers at the knee of their common mother.'[117]

Though undeveloped and tentative, O'Laverty's interest in 'comparing the Greek and Irish fables,' his theory and his method speak of something new and landmark in Celtic research.[118] Unlike previously, observed similarities between Greece and Ireland are explained not by race and not by a simple model of language transmission but by the sharing of tales and stories. Moreover, this communication between antiquities does not happen through an embassy from Ireland to Delos or through the Túatha Dé Danann's spell in Athens, through the transmission of occult wisdom between initiates or through the Phoenician establishment of colonies in Ireland, but in the process of trade, which leads to the adoption and adaptation of mythological motifs, and the spread of culture among different people. O'Laverty's work is interesting as an early and seemingly self-driven instance of the inclusion of Irish mythology in a comparative mythological mode.

In the hands of Keane, however, the lure of antiquarianism pulls O'Laverty's theories back to conjectural etymology, extrapolations from surface similarity of both language and material remains, and an indiscriminate treatment of myth as history. Unlike O'Laverty, Keane believes, for example, in the Hyperborean embassy as fact and uses it to explain these similarities between figures like Diarmuid and Adonis. 'A mission or journey of certain Tuath-de-Danaans from Ireland to Greece is a fact mentioned in the most ancient records of Ireland,' he argues 'and the reputation of these Tuath-de-Danaans for science and magic corresponds exactly with that ascribed by Grecian authors to Abaris the Hyperborean.'[119] 'The main point of coincidence', Keane argues, 'is remarkable…We must therefore conclude, that the events referred to by the Grecian and the Irish authors are one and the same, and consequently that the Hyperborean Island of Grecian authors, and Ireland the abode of Tuath-de-Danaan

[117] James O'Laverty, 'The Wren Boys', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1890), 241.
[118] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 334.
[119] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 240.

sages, are identical.'[120] This is a different explanation for the same phenomenon noticed by O'Laverty, and to be scrutinised with increased focus as the century went on, 'the remarkable similarity which exists between many of the Greek and Irish legends'.[121]

[120] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 240-241.
[121] O'Laverty, 'Remarkable Correspondence', 334.

Chapter Four

Graeco-Celtic comparative mythology and folklore

1. Introduction

I should have guessed what other men have known,
that definition means comparison,
and that we find our lightest words demand
a cosmos weighed within a human hand
John Hewitt[1]

comparison is the method of Science
Andrew Lang[2]

In the 1850s, Friedrich Max Müller, 'one of those figures who have given nineteenth-century scholarship its reputation for heroic enterprise', argued that if the Indo-Europeans shared a common language then they also shared a common mythology.[3] In 1856, he 'perceived family resemblances in the metaphorical names of the ancient gods of India and Greece' and came up with his famous solar theory, which 'reoriented all previous thinking about the origin of myths.'[4] While comparative philology had already done a great deal, he said – 'whoever has followed the forward march of these discoveries during the present century will understand…that the whole history of the world has been changed by them' – it now, thanks to Müller's application of it to the study of mythology, could also disclose the growth of the mind as revealed in

[1] Hewitt, 'Conacre' (1943), in *Collected Poems*, 9.
[2] Andrew Lang, *Homer and his Age* (London, 1906), 289.
[3] Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London, 1981), 104; Arvidsson points out that he was also the later nineteenth-century's 'most persistent champion for the position that linguistic affinity equals ethnic affinity,' *Aryan Idols*, 47. For Arvidsson's critique of Müller's mythological theory, see 66-84.
[4] Richard M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (London, 1968), 161.

narrative, god and hero.[5] It could tell us how 'our more or less barbarous ancestors' viewed their world through myth.[6] As John Burrow explains in his essay on 'Images of time,' 'the history of language…generalised as "the comparative method", became in turn a metaphor for other kinds of historical recovery'.[7]

According to Müller's theory, 'the wonderful parallelisms in the myths of the Aryan world' were the result of the fact that 'the epic poems of the Aryan nations are simply different versions of one and the same story', a story whose origin could be found 'in the phenomena of the natural world, and the course of the day and the year.'[8] The 'key to all Aryan mythology' is, therefore, that the names of all the gods really 'stand forth as simple names for the sun, the dew, the wind, the dawn, the heaven and the sky'.[9] The worshippers of these gods gradually forgot the meaning of the names, however, as they moved away from their Indo-European homeland and as the ur-language fragmented. The gods then needed new attributes to serve as explanations of their names, but this filling in of the gaps led to 'an indiscriminate anthropomorphism', full of stories of bestiality, incest, cannibalism and so on.[10] Müllerian comparative mythology, however, could reverse that process and allow a return to the proper signification: 'like an old precious metal,' Müller promised, 'the ancient religion, after the rust of ages has been removed, will come out in all its purity and brightness'.[11]

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[5] Max Müller, 'Preface', in *Collected Works of the Right Hon. Max Müller. Volume One: Natural Religion* (London, New York and Bombay, 1899), xvii.
[6] Müller, 'Preface', xi, xii-xiii.
[7] John Burrow, 'Images of time: from Carlylean Vulcanism to sedimentary gradualism', in Stefan Collini et al. eds., *History, Religion and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 215. For the comparative method, see also Stefan Collini, Donald Winch and John Burrow, *That noble science of politics. A study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (repr. Cambridge, 1987), 209-246; and Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (London, 2002), 60-64.
[8] George Cox, *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, two vols (London, 1870), i. vi.
[9] Cox, *Mythology*, i. 103.
[10] Cox, *Mythology*, i. 2
[11] Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London, 1870), 12. For a helpful contemporary assessment of comparative mythology, see anon., 'Lectures on the Science of Language, delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, and June, 1861', *The Quarterly Review,* vol. 199, no. 238 (Apr., 1866), 394-435. The reviewer judges that Müller's method has 'almost everything to do with poetry and almost nothing to do with logic', at 412.

As Frank Turner has pointed out in his survey of nineteenth-century attitudes to Greek antiquity, Müller's theory allowed Victorians to countenance the indecency of myths.[12] According to his ardent disciple George Cox, Müller's theory of these Indo-European ancestors meant that 'the mode in which they regarded the external world became a source of inexhaustible beauty, a fountain of the most exquisite and touching poetry.'[13] Earliest man, according to this theory, was a supreme poet, naming nature with perfect accuracy, and the Victorian conviction that their own civilisation and that of the Greeks 'were essentially similar' could stand firm.[14] To Müller's great 'relief', the 'gods of Greece and India were not mere devils… even in their greatest degradation, [they] had a rational meaning and a noble purpose.'[15] Such noble gods need not disturb the 'sweetness and light' of the Hellenes as characterised by Matthew Arnold, with their 'finely tempered nature' and 'aërial ease'.[16]

However, the traces of the footsteps of man assumed varying forms, and some were far less palatable for nineteenth-century sensibilities. What Turner delineates as the 'turn to anthropology' drew attention to the 'savage' undercurrent of mythology.[17] Following the application onto culture of anthropological models, after E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, and of Darwinian evolutionary theory, after Herbert Spencer, 'comparative mythology was answerable to evolutionary science.'[18] Rather than linguistic kinship entailing mythic, it was merely the case that 'similar conditions of mind produce similar practices, apart from identity of race, or borrowing of ideas and manners.'[19]

Andrew Lang, the pioneer of the new method and a self-styled 'revolutionary mythologist,' explained this in his foundational essay on the subject of 1884, in which he 'brought Max Müller and the celestial mythologists down to earth and erected over

[12] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 110-111.
[13] Cox, *Mythology*, i. 39.
[14] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 11.
[15] Max Müller, *Contributions to the Science of Mythology*, two vols (London, 1897), i. 22.
[16] Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold,* eleven vols, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1960-1977), v. 99, 167. For Arnold's Greeks, see Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 17-36.
[17] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 115.
[18] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 8.
[19] Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (new edn, London, 1898), 22.

their bones the new structure of folklore science based on anthropology.'[20] He used the analogy of arrow-heads, found scattered around far-flung places yet always with the same shape and apparent purpose. Like arrow-heads, 'myths…resemble each other because they were originally framed to meet the same needs out of the same material.'[21] As Edwin Sidney Hartland, a solicitor in Gloucester and President of the Folklore Society, declared in 1900, 'stories of the same general characteristics as those of the Greeks are known to almost all nations throughout the world. The Zulus and the Maoris, for example…tell stories which, if we make allowance for difference of customs and environment, are startling in their likeness to some of the classical stories.'[22]

This undercut the picture of Müllerian antiquity via two channels. First, the stories of the non-Indo-European world – the subject of comparative anthropology – displayed similarities with the Indo-European, critically undermining a theory driven by Indo-European philology. Secondly, such stories were now perceived to inaugurate, celebrate and commemorate 'savage' rites or superstitions. Myth came from violence and magic, not from poetry, and there could be no distinction between 'civilised' and 'primitive,' now that all had been revealed to contain a 'substratum of savagery'.[23] The rise of the science of folklore, which Hartland, as 'a champion of the folklore method' helped to engineer, 'reduced' mythology even further, bringing nursery rhymes and fairy tales into the ken of comparative mythologists.[24] When the Folklore Society was founded in London in 1878, 'for the purposes of collecting and preserving the fast-perishing relics of Folk-lore,' the essential politeness of antiquity collapsed.[25]

The implication of this new view of antiquity for classicists was that, as Hartland wrote, 'the classical tales, then, like other European folktales, are tales

[20] Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 2; Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 187. For Müller versus Lang, see Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 126-131.
[21] Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 24-25.
[22] Edwin Sidney Hartland, *Mythology and Folktales: Their Relation and Interpretation* (London, 1900), 2.
[23] John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough* (Princeton, 1973), 35-36.
[24] Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 244.
[25] Advertisement for the Folk-Lore Society, in *The Archaeological Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Mar.-Aug., 1888).

handed down by tradition from older and more barbarous ages'; 'all alike,' he wrote, 'they date from savagery.'[26] Turner has analysed how this shift moulded the image of classical antiquity as the century came to a close: 'the veil…drawn across the prehistoric age of Greece was rent asunder, and the cloak that the solar theorists had so carefully laid across the nakedness of Greek sexuality and irrationality was thrust aside.'[27] 'We ought not,' Hartland cautioned, 'to overlook the fact that we have to do with barbarous ideals.'[28]

Furthermore, as both Turner and G.S. Kirk have suggested, this brought into the glare of attention the notion and importance of ritual. Of all cultural practices, ritual, according to Andrew Lang, is the most barnacled with savage residue. It 'holds on,' he wrote, 'with the tenacity of superstition, to all that has ever been practised.'[29] Interest in 'the growth and nature of cult and institution', and the role of mythology in consolidating those cults and preserving their traces, became, as Alfred Nutt wrote, 'one of the most marked features of the modern historical spirit.'[30] This is well-attested in the work of the so-called Cambridge Ritualists, and their interest in the cult of Dionysiac worship. Indeed, Turner identifies J.G. Frazer, patriarch of the school, as the scholar who forged the most lasting and influential bond between anthropology, folklore, mythology and Classics. 'For Frazer,' he argues, 'savagery, cruelty, and irrationality had survived well into the classical age of Greece not only in the stories of the myths but in the rituals of the religious life of the people.'[31]

Similarly, G.S. Kirk has demonstrated how this moment in intellectual history shaped and spurred on classical scholarship. He observes that its power continued even as he himself was writing, in the late twentieth century: 'the classical attitude to myth, after being rescued…by Andrew Lang from Max Müller, has been dominated in

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[26] Hartland, *Mythology and Folktales*, 34, 29.
[27] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 116.
[28] Edwin Sidney Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales. An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London, 1891), 3.
[29] Lang, *Custom and Myth*, 241.
[30] Alfred Nutt, 'Recent Archaeological Research. No. II. – Folklore', *The Archaeological Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1889), 78.
[31] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 120. For a critique of the idea of a coherent school of 'Cambridge Ritualists,' see Mary Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2000), 109-128.

this century by the trends initiated by J.G. Frazer.' Frazer's work, including his editions of Pausanias and Ovid, 'seemed to open up unknown vistas in the interpretation of Greek religion and of the myths and rituals that accompanied it', and spurred others to apply comparative anthropology to ancient Greek myth and religion in order to find its 'savage' source.[32] After Lang, Tylor and Frazer, and fuelled by Schliemann's excavations at Troy and Mycenae from the 1870s, Greek history 'no longer began with Homer nor ended at the Euphrates.'[33]

All in all, the final decades of the nineteenth century bore witness, in the words of Jane Harrison, to 'an access of new material, and, *pari passu*, an advance of method, that…produced little short of a revolution in the whole outlook of classical scholarship…To find an adequate parallel, we must look back to the days of the Renaissance.'[34] This accession and advance, Harrison believed, had 'compelled classical scholarship to widen its horizon and include three…continents.'[35] 'We renounce perforce that academic phantom,' she wrote,

> the insulated and 'ideal' Greek, and find in his place the actual man, the outcome of long past, the Greek of anthropology and archaeology. The 'great age' is still there, but, as prologue to it we thankfully accept the unrolling of the great panorama of history, the shifting of populations…the eternal πάντα ῥεῖ.[36]

As with the Indo-European hypothesis and its aftermath, the rise of comparative mythology, anthropology and folklore thus hollowed out a space around and behind ancient Greece, no longer isolated but critically subject to the 'shifting of populations'. Just as the Greek language, for example, and just as its sculptures, vases and architecture had older and non-Greek ancestors, its stories and mythology now had their own and more ancient prototypes. The boundaries of the ancient world waver and are redrawn.

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[32] G.S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and other Cultures* (Cambridge, 1970), 2-3. For the impact of Frazer on classics, see also Vickery, *The Literary Impact*, 88-93.
[33] Downie, *Frazer*, 16-17.
[34] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 218.
[35] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 222.
[36] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 242. The role of Freudian analysis of myth is also important. For Harrison, Freud, with his 'big constructive imagination,' managed to lay bare 'the origins of Greek drama as no classical scholar had ever done…probing the mysteries of sin, of sanctity, of sacrament', Jane Harrison, *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* (London, 1925), 82.

Given the survey undertaken in the previous chapters, it is not surprising that the boundaries of the Celtic take a new form too. It might also be hypothesised that they not only responded to these shifts in classical scholarship, but also fuelled and influenced, or countered and resisted them. This chapter will follow the path of the inclusion of Celtic antiquity in this new way of viewing the relation of one tradition to another. It will examine how the Celtic was reoriented accordingly, within and around this fresh network of the ancient world, investigating how perceived similarities between Greek and Celtic myths gained new ground in terms of scholarly and cultural significance.

2. Alfred Nutt

> *As far as we can trace back the footsteps of man, even on the lowest strata of history, we see that the divine gift of a sound and sober intellect belonged to him from the very first*
>
> Max Müller[37]

> *Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.*
>
> C.P. Cavafy[38]

> *we must remember…that…the attitude of civilised man towards barbarian belief differed in antiquity from that of our own times*
>
> Alfred Nutt[39]

[37] Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, two vols (New York, 1872), ii. 7.
[38] C.P. Cavafy, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', in *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (London, 1984), 15.
[39] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 117.

Alfred Nutt is crucial to the knot of antiquity at this point in the nineteenth century and, particularly, the position of the Celtic thread within it. He was one of those working to combine the methods of anthropology with the resources of folklore and myth, bringing the comparative method to bear on the surviving oral traditional stories of so-called 'primitive' societies, whether ancient or modern. He was one of the founding members of the Folklore Society, published its journals and monographs and contributed notes and prefaces to its members' work.

He was also a Celticist. He brought the gains of the last two centuries of Celticism into the nexus of researches that were thriving in this period, studying the origins and growth of mythology and folklore always 'with his own Celtic-Gaelic slant.'[40] By looking at Irish manuscripts, which were being unearthed and edited with increasing frequency as the century passed, and at stories gathered from ordinary people in Ireland, in the light of the new advances in comparative science of the second half of the century, he intended to illuminate what he saw as a still-living Celtic tradition. He aimed to uncover 'the elements of a conception of life and nature older than the most ancient recorded utterance of earth's most ancient races.'[41] Believing in a 'folk-lore protoplasm out of which myth and heroic saga develop' he could, through a combination of comparative mythology and folklore, restore into full understanding 'the dispossessed inmates of an Irish Pantheon' and work with his Celtic chisel at the shape of European and world-wide antiquity.[42]

Although Müller glanced at Celtic mythology, and reviewed John Campbell's highly-influential collection of Scottish folklore the year after it came out, Nutt was among the first comparative mythologists really to focus on Celtic material.[43] He helped to bring the gathering of folklore and mythology that had been going on in Ireland since Thomas Crofton Croker in the 1820s and the later collections of Jeremiah

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[40] Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 237.
[41] Alfred Nutt, 'The Fairy Mythology of English Literature: Its Origin and Nature', *Folklore*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Mar., 1897), 32.
[42] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 173; Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 40.
[43] For the great importance of Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860-2), see Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 392-393. Influenced by the efforts of the Grimm brothers in Germany and Asbjörnsen and Moe in Norway, it jogged British and Irish folklorists into realising that the 'fountains of oral folklore bubbled at their very doorstep.'

Curtin, Jane Wilde and Patrick Kennedy, into line with anthropological science, comparative mythology and the science of folklore.[44] According to his obituary in *Folklore*, written by Edward Clodd, 'he was happy in his choice, because, save in Germany…that branch of mythology had received but scant attention. So far as mythology entered into the education of those of us who are well-on in life, it was restricted to that of Rome and Greece'.[45]

Nutt's major work was the essay he appended to Kuno Meyer's edition of a medieval Irish manuscript, *The Voyage of Bran*, examining 'the Irish vision of the happy otherworld and the Celtic doctrine of rebirth.' Published between 1895 and 1897, this was much longer than the text itself and spread into a second volume.[46] It was also the work upon which he chose to expand in his Presidential Address to the Folklore Society of 1897, and which Yeats declared to be one of a triad of books 'without which there is no understanding of Celtic legends.'[47] Having been criticised by the Celtic scholar, Henri Gaidoz, for his use of Vedic literature, Nutt allowed that he had committed 'the unpardonable sin of "comparative mythology"', but announced that he was nevertheless 'an impenitent sinner.'[48] As well as being a work of Graeco-Celtic comparative mythology, it is a work of Celtic folklore – Yeats deemed it Frazer for the Celtic tradition.[49] It uses Indo-European researches, Müllerian solar theories, anthropological folklore and contemporary ideas about Dionysus. Reviewing it in *The Classical Review* of 1898, F.B. Jevons helpfully termed it 'comparative antiquities.'[50]

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[44] For Croker et al., see Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 160.
[45] Edward Clodd, 'In Memoriam: Alfred Nutt (1865-1910)', *Folklore*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Sep., 1910), 336.
[46] Kuno Meyer himself would warrant further study in a Graeco-Celtic context. A prominent Celtic scholar, there are grounds for an argument that he had a special interest in Greek-Celtic crossover texts. He wrote his doctoral thesis on *Eine irische Version der Alexandersage*, and edited both *Merugud Uilix maicc Leirtis: The Irish Odyssey* (London, 1886), and *Fingal Rónáin*, in which he noted parallels with the Hippolytus story, see his 'Fingal Rónáin', *Revue celtique*, vol. 13 (1892), 368-397. His biographer argues that 'he introduced to Ireland and Irish Studies the concept of Altertumswissenschaft', see Seán Ó Lúing, *Celtic Studies in Europe and Other Essays* (Dublin, 2000), 29. Mary Colum recalls that he 'passionately loved' old Irish literature 'as some men love the Greek', in her *Life and the Dream* (rev. edn, 1966), 135-136.
[47] Yeats, 'Celtic Beliefs About the Soul' (1898), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume Two*, 119.
[48] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 272.
[49] Yeats, 'Celtic Beliefs About the Soul', 120.
[50] F.B. Jevons, 'Nutt on the Celtic doctrine of Re-Birth', *The Classical Review*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Feb., 1898), 48.

Squaring up to the question of the origin and dating of Meyer's text, which fused pagan and Christian elements, Nutt asked, 'how far the non-Christian residue in Irish belief is due to a share in a common inheritance of Aryan mythic beliefs, how far to contact with the Græco-Roman world in (for the Gaels) prehistoric times, how far to later influences of Græco-Roman culture, consequent upon the introduction of Christianity.'[51] To answer this question, Nutt draws on contemporary ways of looking at the world. 'During the last hundred years', he writes, 'the careful study of lower by higher races has been pursued with unremitting zeal…in our own days a new faculty, practically unknown in classical times, that of critical comparative analysis, has been developed.'[52] Using this method, he proposes to map out 'a sufficiently large number of examples of the Elysium conception…to enable us to sketch, if only roughly, its development in Irish mythico-romantic literature', and to ascertain where *The Voyage of Bran* lies in that development.[53]

In Volume One, Nutt argues that Irish eschatology is a relic of a very early conception, of which Homer is the only other memory: the notion of the 'Happy Otherworld.' He develops Rohde's account of the Homeric afterlife, as given in 'excellent summary' by Jane Harrison, in which, for Homer, what lives on after death is nothing but 'the very opposite of life…the shadowy double of a man deprived of all the characteristics of life.'[54] According to Nutt, this is a 'tragic' notion; the hero 'must suffer his doom utterly…unrelieved by any vision of after bliss'.[55] In the face of this blankness, Homer then envisaged an Elysium set aside for a few favoured heroes: 'if you die, you end; if you are favoured by the gods, you are translated.'[56] After Homer, however, from the fifth-century onwards, 'Orphic-Pythagoreanism' rationalised the more primitive conception away, in what Nutt calls elsewhere 'a fining away of the legends'.[57] Other Indo-European traditions have also passed through this cleaning

[51] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 134.
[52] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 116.
[53] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 229.
[54] Jane Harrison's review of Rhode's *Psyche*, *The Classical Review*, vol. 4, no. 8 (Oct., 1890), 376-377, quoted in Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 262.
[55] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 266-267.
[56] Harrison quoted in Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 263.
[57] Alfred Nutt, 'The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return-Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts', *The Folk-Lore Record*, vol. 4 (1881), 38.

process, losing what Homer preserved. Nutt investigates Scandinavian, Indian and Iranian ideas about the afterlife and finds nothing comparable.[58]

The Voyage of Bran on the other hand, and the epics of the Irish tradition, are full of parallels with Homeric eschatology. 'The vision of a Happy Otherworld found in Irish mythic romances of the eight and following centuries', Nutt explains, '…finds its closest analogues in that stage of Hellenic mythic belief which precedes the modification of Hellenic religion consequent upon the spread of the Orphic-Pythagorean doctrines'.[59] 'I must restate fully and emphatically what I have several times hinted at', he writes, '– the parallelism between Greek and Irish legend in the development of this conception.' He argues, for example, that 'the land of amorous goddesses met with in Bran and Connla' finds its parallels in 'the garden of the singing daughters of the night, in Calypso's isle, in Rhadamanthus' realm', while 'the account of Olympus, or the sun-god's western halls, may be likened to that of Mider's *sid*, of the *Brugh* in which Angus takes his delight.'[60]

Only Homer and the Irish epics, therefore, reveal the earliest stages of Indo-European attitudes towards death. 'Although', Nutt writes, 'from fifteen hundred to two thousand years separate the earliest recorded Greek and Irish utterances…yet both stand on much the same stage of development, save that Ireland has preserved, with greater fullness and precision, a conception out of which Homeric Greece had already emerged. Examination of the mythologies due to other Aryan races…reveals the remarkable fact that Greeks and Irish alone have preserved the early stage of the Happy Otherworld conception in any fullness.'[61]

In Volume Two, Nutt set his hand to explaining this remarkable fact, by finding a 'prehistoric community of Greek and Celtic belief', consisting not only of their Indo-European common heritage, but of a direct influence.[62] He used his discoveries from the first volume about the primitive nature of the Irish and Homeric conception of the afterlife to argue that 'if Celtdom *was* influenced by Greece in historic times, such

[58] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 294-326.
[59] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 331.
[60] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 282.
[61] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 241.
[62] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 127.

influence is likely to have been exercised by a ritualistic mythology rather than by an abstract ethical philosophy.'[63] 'Mythology presupposes belief' he said in his accompanying speech, 'and also rites in which those beliefs find practical expression.'[64]

Out of this ritualistic mythology developed the regeneration rituals of, on the one hand, Dionysus in Greece, annually reborn with the harvest, and, on the other, the Túatha Dé Danann in Ireland, 'the representatives of an early Gaelic Olympus' and 'the divine *dramatic personæ* of a series of myths the theme of which is, largely, the agricultural prosperity of Ireland'.[65] Nutt is here cross-pollinating between an image of Dionysus and an image of the Túatha Dé Danann, with one giving colour and firm line to the other. His Dionysus is, as he says, 'practically summarising and restating the views of Mannhardt and Mr. Frazer', as well as E.S. Hartland.[66] He is the god of vegetation and ritual, 'a divinity of growth, vegetable and animal, worshipped, placated, and strengthened for his task…by ritual sacrifice.'[67] This Dionysiac ritual consisted of 'sacrificial rites…originally of savage horror,' whose 'participants were wrought up to a pitch of the wildest frenzy'.[68]

Likewise, the Irish Túatha Dé Danann are 'in the main, deities of agriculture, and…their worship consisted, in the main, of ritual sacrifices.'[69] Although Nutt's equation of this mode of worship with the mode of worship of Dionysus is an extrapolation, given the lack of evidence on the Irish side, he can nevertheless 'surmise' that the worshippers of the Túatha Dé Danann worshipped with exactly the rites ascribed to Dionysiac maenads.[70] Their nocturnal congregations were characterised by 'rapid motion prolonged to exhaustion, the music maddening to the senses, the sudden change from the blackness of night to the fierce flare of torch and bonfire, in short all the accompaniments of the frenzied midnight worship we know to

[63] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 130.
[64] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 50-51.
[65] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii, 76; Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 43.
[66] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii, 144.
[67] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 46.
[68] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 46.
[69] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii, 198.
[70] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii, 159.

have characterised the cult of Dionysus amid the mountains of Thrace.'[71] 'The reader may', Nutt points out, 'be startled by seeing how aptly Greek myth and ritual illustrate Irish romance'.[72]

There is one more startling equation lying in wait in Nutt's book, which increases the polyphony of his engagement with Greece, and gives the Túatha Dé Danann another vital identity. So far, these figures have been portrayed, in the *Lebor Gabála*, as a wave of invaders into Ireland who 'completed all their education among the Greeks,' before returning to Ireland to conquer the Fir Bolg.[73] In Keating, they were 'of the posterity of the third chief of the race of Neimheadh', who went either to Boeotia or Athens and helped the Athenians against 'a great fleet…from the country of Syria'.[74] Vallancey held that they sojourned in Achaia and here 'learned the Art of Necromancy and Enchantment,' rallying with Athens against an Assyrian invasion.[75] For Henry O'Brien they were 'the true Hyperborean Tuath-de-danaans,' who built the walls of Athens and the round towers of Ireland; for Ledwich, who judged by their name, they were Danes; while for William Gladstone their name suggested Phoenician origins, despite the 'connection established in Homer between Greece and the Danaan name.'[76] For Marcus Keane they were Cuthites, along with the Fir Bolg and the Fomorians, who 'were learned, and well skilled in Science and Magic.'[77] For John Rhys, first professor of Celtic Studies at Oxford, they were the gods of light, in the struggle between light and dark that was the essential characteristic of Indo-European mythological thought.[78] For the final two scholars to be analysed below, they were '*identiques à la race d'or des Grecs*' or, alternatively, they were 'no mere sun-myths or vegetation spirits,' but rather 'Scandinavian or Teutonic invaders'.[79]

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[71] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii, 138-139.
[72] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 137.
[73] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála*, iv. 141.
[74] Keating, *History*, 203.
[75] Vallancey, *Vindication*, 151.
[76] O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 429; Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 25-26; William Ewart Gladstone, *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Heroic Age* (2nd edn, London, 1870), 137.
[77] Keane, *Towers and Temples*, 36.
[78] Rhys, *Lectures,* 585-587.
[79] Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique* (Paris, 1884), 11; William Ridgeway, *The Early Age of Greece*, two vols (Cambridge, 2014), ii. 668, 665.

The sparks they throw out to the ancient world multiply again, thanks to the anthropological and folklore-laden vision of Greek antiquity that arises at this point in the nineteenth century. After his section on Dionysus, Nutt extracts what he terms the 'Rabelaisian, Aristophanesque element' of the Túatha Dé Danann.[80] He characterises them as 'gods of growth and fertility, manifestations of the spirit of life animating in ever fresh transformations the whole of nature'.[81] Writing of their battle with the Fomorians (previous settlers in Ireland, whom the Abbé Pezron equated with the Titans of Greek mythology), he argues that it is 'no chance coincidence, but is due to the essential kinship of the two bodies of mythic fiction, that this very element is prominent also in the mythology which has Dionysus for its centre.'[82] For Nutt, the Túatha Dé Danann are Dionysiac and Aristophanic, bucolic and life-giving figures, which owed as much to folklore as to myth. They exist as a comic counterpart to the tragedy which he finds in Greek and Irish mythology, in the shape of their attitude to life after death.

By throwing together the essential ingredients of late nineteenth-century views of antiquity – comparative mythology, folklore, anthropology, solar myth and ritual – and adding Celtic traditions into it, Nutt produces a vision of antiquity that is tragic, violent and comic. He gathers the harvest of Celtic investigations, reaped in the last two centuries, and puts it through the sorting machine of the comparative science of his own day. The fusion is highly creative, with Greek and Celt charting their course by shared coordinates. The Dionysiac world of late nineteenth-century Classics vividly informs this influential work of Graeco-Celtic comparative mythology, giving it a crucial place in this crucial phase of classical thought. As Nutt himself points out, 'in postulating an agricultural basis for the Tuatha de Danann mythology and ritual I do but find myself in accord with all recent students of mythology in this country.'[83]

Conspicuous by his absence here is, of course, Nietzsche, the abiding advocate for the power of Dionysus and his cult. Fiona Macintosh has explored the links

[80] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 180.
[81] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 182.
[82] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 180.
[83] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 29.

between Nietzschean theory, Cambridge Classics and Irish theatre, in the person of Gilbert Murray and his influence on George Bernard Shaw.[84] Similarly, despite Maud Gonne's assertion that '*Neiche* [sic] *is not Celtic*,' Macintosh has demonstrated the Nietzschean undercurrents of the Celticism of, in particular, Yeats.[85] It is in the Irish context that the idea of the Dionysiac Greek is taken up most readily, she argues, creating a hybrid 'Greek-Celt' in the Nietzschean mode.[86] Nutt is surely a key piece of this intriguing puzzle; read carefully by W.B. Yeats and others, he not only anticipated, as Robert Ackerman pointed out, the dramatic theories of the Cambridge ritualists, 'a decade later', but he also bound Greek tragedy and, perhaps more interestingly, Greek comedy, to Ireland with distinctly Nietzschean ties.[87]

It is well-known, moreover, that Nietzsche's work had an influence far beyond the world of scholarship; Silk and Stern have stressed his efforts to bridge the 'ever-widening gulf' in German Hellenism between classical scholarship, on the one hand, and 'the creative art and life of the time' on the other.[88] Nietzsche, they argue, was 'committing himself to contemporary culture' through Classics.[89] Nutt, too, both desired this sort of connection between scholarship and life and was received in this way, by Yeats and others. It would therefore be worth analysing whether his work and its reception, as informed by the Nietzschean context of late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Classics, was a symptom of a wider phenomenon, a movement not only between scholarly disciplines but also beyond the academy. Perhaps the ways in which Nietzsche's work has been overlooked by Classics as not being 'proper' philology

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[84] Fiona Macintosh, 'From the Court to the National: The Theatrical Legacy of Gilbert Murray's *Bacchae*', in Christopher Stray ed. *Gilbert Murray Reassessed: Hellenism, Theatre, and International Politics* (Oxford, 2007), 151-155. For Nietzsche and the Cambridge School, see M.S. Silk and J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche on tragedy* (Cambridge, 1981), 143-145.

[85] Maud Gonne in Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares eds., *The Gonne-Yeats Letters 1893-1938: Always your Friend* (London, 1992), 169.

[86] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 16-18. For Yeats and Nietzsche, see also Ben Levitas, 'The Abbey and the Idea of a Theatre', in Grene and Morash eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, 50-51.

[87] Robert Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge, 1987), 170. For Nutt and Yeats, see Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 50-52, 67-69.

[88] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on tragedy*, 13, 100. This is also the value ascribed by many to Gilbert Murray, see J.A.K. Thomson, 'The Present and Future of Classical Scholarship', in J.A.K. Thomson and A.S. Toynbee eds., *Essays in Honour of Gilbert Murray* (London, 1936), 291.

[89] Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on tragedy*, 100.

may help understand why Graeco-Celtic scholarship, like Nutt's, has been side-lined in the history of scholarship, as not quite belonging to scholarship at all, and not quite belonging to the study of the Greek or of the Celt.[90]

3. Comparative folklore and imperialism

> *The ancient farmers and herdsmen were full of love and hatred, and made their friends gods, and their enemies the enemies of gods, and those who keep their tradition are not less mythological.*
>
> W.B. Yeats[91]

> *These old tales are the fossils of thought preserved as miraculously as are the pterodactyl or the Irish Elk.*
>
> James Stephens[92]

> *the root-stories of the Greek poets are told to-day at the cabin fires of Donegal*
>
> W.B. Yeats[93]

In the eighteenth chapter of the second volume, Nutt's so far mythological method moves into folklore. 'I have hitherto refrained from making any use of the fairy belief of modern Ireland', he says, but he now feels 'in a position to examine the evidence of modern folklore, and see if it also supports this contention.'[94] Nutt believes folklore to

[90] For the possibilities for the engagement of Reception Studies with the history of scholarship, and for the 'tension between scholarship and artistic practice', see Constanze Güthenke, 'Shop Talk. Reception studies and recent work in the history of scholarship', *Classical Reception Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2009), 112.
[91] Yeats, 'The Celtic Element in Literature' (1897), in *Essays and Introductions*, 181.
[92] James Stephens, 'Review of James Cousins's *The Wisdom of the West*', *The Irish Review*, vol. 2, no. 14 (Apr., 1912), 101.
[93] W.B. Yeats, 'The Message of the Folklorist' (1893), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One: First Reviews and Articles, 1886-1896*, ed. John P. Frayne (London and New York, 1970), 284.
[94] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 198.

be the survival of 'elements of culture…among the less advanced sections of the community,' and he finds that what survives in the folklore of Ireland does indeed support his hypothesis about the Dionysiac nature of the Túatha Dé Danann.[95]

During the fifth century in Greece, Nutt argues, and irreversibly from then on, 'the highest minds of the race turned away from…mythology; Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, the tragedians, the heroic historian Herodotus, are replaced by Thucydides, Plato, the orators, the writers of realistic comedy.' Therefore, 'mythology loses its import for the thinker'.[96] In Celtic Ireland, on the other hand, the importance of mythology never fully waned. 'The Greek Dionysiac myths, expanding with the marvellous expansion of Hellenic genius, grew away from their primitive rustic basis, and connection was broken between the peasant creed and the highest imaginative literature. Celtic mythology developed likewise, but to an extent as far less as the Celt had lagged behind the Greek in the race of civilisation.'[97]

This 'Celtic mythology' was drowned out for a while by Christianity, but its submersion was only shallow. Now that interest had turned once again to the belief of the folk, according to Nutt, it was also being recovered. 'The peasant's belief is everywhere of much the same character,' Nutt argues, 'because everywhere his mode of life, his interests, are very similar; these have changed little since the earliest time, hence the comparatively slight change in his beliefs.'[98] When, therefore, 'bereft of their trappings, shorn of their splendour, Dionysus and Demeter creep back to the peasant's hut, he is conscious of little sense of degradation…the old faith retains its power.'[99] 'Here,' Nutt pronounced in his address to the Folklore Society, 'if I am right, living tradition has preserved the memory of a cult which the Greek of two thousand years back held to be of immemorial antiquity. Historical mythology and current tradition confirm and interpret each other.'[100]

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[95] Alfred Nutt, 'The Discrimination of Racial Elements in the Folklore of the British Isles', *Folklore*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Mar., 1898), 31.
[96] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 202.
[97] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 51.
[98] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 233.
[99] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 204-5.
[100] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 48-49.

As has already become apparent in other contexts, Celtic tradition is thought to grant access to a time before the intrusion of the classical world. With Nutt's pronouncement, however, about the possible survival of Dionysiac worship in 'the peasants' huts' of Ireland, it becomes clear that the study of ancient traditions can encroach on the contemporary reality of Ireland. Particularly when comparative mythology overlaps with folklore, as it does from the beginning of its development and as it does paradigmatically in Nutt's work, a space is thrown open for the insinuation of judgements about the present life of Ireland as well as the past. The comparison between Greek and Celtic becomes a comparison of Greek antiquity and Irish modernity, pulling Ireland back into the ancient past.

Much vital work has been done on a similar process in eighteenth-century British attitudes to India, following William Jones's belief, outlined in Chapter One, that the Calcutta of the Asiatick Society was a 'second Athens.'[101] Javeed Majeed has stressed the relationship between Jones's blurring of ancient Greece and modern India into a 'form of contemporary ancientness', and his imperialist motivations.[102] 'It is no accident', Phiroze Vasunia points out, 'that the comparativist method reached its heights…at a time when the British Empire was also reaching its greatest point of expansion'.[103] In India, this resulted in what Vasunia identified as 'comparative empire.'[104]

This relationship between comparison and imperialism is also to be found in the study of Irish folklore and mythology by means of comparison with the Greek; British folklorists often saw their study to be in the service of empire.[105] 'To govern a

[101] Alexander Riddiford, *Madly after the Muses: Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Datta and his Reception of the Graeco-Roman Classics* (Oxford, 2013), 13.
[102] Javeed Majeed, 'Comparativism and references to Rome in British imperial attitudes to India', in Catharine Edwards ed., *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1945* (Cambridge, 1999), 90-91, 107.
[103] Vasunia, *Classics and Colonial India*, 154.
[104] Vasunia, *Classics and Colonial India*, 120. See also Schwab on Homer, *Oriental Renaissance*, 211-214; and Brian Young, '"The Lust of Empire and Religious Hate": Christianity, history, and India, 1790-1820', in Collini et al. eds., *History, Religion and Culture*, 91-111, especially his discussion of Thomas Maurice's Greek-inspired play, *The Fall of the Great Mogul* (1806), 'complete with Hindu priests acting as a somewhat shambolic Greek chorus', 92.
[105] For an interesting discussion of postcolonialism and comparison, see Robert J.C. Young, 'The Postcolonial Comparative', *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 3, (2013), 683-689.

subject people properly, it is necessary to understand them', wrote E.S Hartland, '…to impose upon barbarians the laws of a higher civilisation, you must first penetrate their modes of thought.'[106] He wrote elsewhere of the practical value of the study of folklore 'to the maintenance and prosperity of the British Empire.'[107] 'Who would have imagined', he asks, 'that the obscure and technical details of the land tenure of the aboriginal tribes of India could throw any light upon the condition of Ireland? Yet it is hardly too much to say that, if we had been in possession of India at the time when the conquest and settlements of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took place, and had then understood as we now understand the land tenures of India, there would have been no Irish Land Question to worry us to-day.'[108]

Alfred Nutt had similar ideas, arguing that folklorists 'as Englishmen, as Britons,' should 'cherish and foster our study.'[109] 'It is the privilege of English literature', he writes, 'to enshrine utterances of countless races of men which otherwise must wholly perish, to make them part of the world's thought and fancy. This privilege is, I think, most wholly likely to be realised by the folklorist…It is part of his task to hold up to English literature the duty of incorporating the souls of vanishing peoples'.[110] Revealingly, Nutt compares this English privilege to that brandished by the Roman Empire, arguing that 'England, preserving…the native customs of one of the component elements of our mixed race, has reared a structure of institutions not unworthy to be set by the side of the Roman, and destined to control the fortunes of ever wider realms and more numerous populations.'[111] 'In the true ideal of imperialism,' he concludes, '…there are elements which can be apprehended rightly and vindicated by the folklorist alone.'[112]

For Nutt, Ireland had a particular place in this great structure of humanity, and the empire had a particular duty towards it, determined by the urgent question of Home Rule. 'I would urge increased study of the Celtic past by the English-speaking

[106] Hartland, *Mythology and Folktales*, 14-15.
[107] Edwin Sidney Hartland, *Folklore: What is It and What is the Good of It?* (London, 1904), 28.
[108] Hartland, *Folklore*, 28-29.
[109] Nutt, 'Britain and Folklore', *Folklore*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Mar., 1899), 72.
[110] Nutt, 'Britain and Folklore', 72-73.
[111] Nutt, 'Britain and Folklore', 74.
[112] Nutt, 'Britain and Folklore', 76.

communities', he wrote in *The Voyage of Bran*. 'They are pledged to it alike by filial piety and by political expediency, for the Celtic element in their civilisation is considerable, and, though it may somewhat change its form, it is not likely to decrease.'[113]

In this, Nutt followed the archduke of imperial Celticism in the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold, who had exhorted the 'Celt-haters' of England to embrace the Celtic element of 'their race,' because, crucially, it would ease the imperial project. Arnold has a major role in Patrick Brantlinger's study of the pervasive racism of the Victorian English attitude to the Irish, and his essay 'On the Study of Celtic Literature', is, as Chapman writes 'arguably the most influential piece ever written in the field of Celtic studies'.[114] The kernel of Arnold's argument in the essay is that, although the 'Celts' have no power to exert in the world, being fatally 'airy and unsubstantial' (Arnold's epitome of 'the Celtic nature' is 'sentimental') they nevertheless retain great value 'as an object of science'.[115] For the English, the important thing is to study them; 'what we want' he declares, 'is to *know* the Celt'.[116]

The best placed for such knowledge were, for Arnold, those comparative scholars (especially linguists) who had established an apparent unity between Celt and Saxon.[117] For Arnold this had political effect. It brought the 'pleasure' of a placatory kinship: 'who does not feel his mind agreeably cleared about our friends the Fenians,' he asks, 'when he learns that the root of their name, *fen*…appears in the hero Fingal…in the Roman Venedotia; in Vannes in Brittany; in Venice?'[118] 'How delightfully', he declares, 'that brings Ireland into the Indo-European concert!'[119]

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[113] Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. viii.
[114] Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca and London, 2011), 134-152; Chapman, *The Celts*, 215. For Arnold on Celts and Greeks, see Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 7-8. For an analysis of Arnold as a response to Ernest Renan, see Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 24-26.
[115] Matthew Arnold, 'On the Study of Celtic Literature', in Arnold, *Complete Prose Works*, iii. 344, 343, 298.
[116] Arnold, *On the Study*, 328.
[117] Arnold, *On the Study*, 330-335.
[118] Arnold, *On the Study*, 333.
[119] Arnold, *On the Study*, 334.

The actual weight, nature and responsibilities of Ireland's place in this Indo-European puzzle is revealed in Arnold's attitude to and use for comparative scholarship. Joining Celt to Greek is, for Arnold and also for Nutt, a way to manacle the Celt safely within the imperial fold. 'However much it may be regretted in certain quarters,' Nutt writes, 'the Celt is an abiding element in the imperial life of the British race.'[120] Through the comparison of Greek and Irish mythology and folklore, Nutt, like Arnold before him, could assess the qualities of this enduring element, and bring it into line.

4. Comparative folklore and the Irish Literary Revival

I am ignorant, and I am careless, of the blind mythology of the Barbarians.
Edward Gibbon[121]

the coloured glasses…of the Greeks and Romans, to whom everyone outside of themselves was a barbarian.
Douglas Hyde[122]

The ruling fact which England – or any other country which wishes to understand Ireland – has got to recognise is that Ireland is the home, not of a mob of Celts, but of a nation of Irishmen.
Robert Lynd[123]

[120] Alfred Nutt in James MacDougall, *Folk and Hero Tales* (London, 1891), xxviii. Before he died trying to save his son from drowning, Nutt was working on an edition of Arnold's book, which was published posthumously, see Clodd, 'In Memoriam', 335.
[121] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* quoted in Feldmann and Richardson eds., *The Rise of Modern Mythology*, 186.
[122] Douglas Hyde, *The Story of Early Gaelic Literature* (London, 1905), 41.
[123] Robert Lynd, *Ireland A Nation* (London, 1919), 63.

It is essential, however, to look at the approach and attitude of scholars like Nutt alongside the work that was going on in Ireland, which used the same scholarship and methods but with radically different ends. In contrast to the imperialist currents of Nutt and Arnold, advances in mythological and folklore science were a great force in the rising tide of cultural nationalism. Douglas Hyde, the instigator of folklore science in Ireland and, eventually, the first President of Ireland, is the key and pioneering figure.

In 1893, Hyde helped to found the Gaelic League, a Revivalist organisation which set up branches across Ireland (almost four hundred by 1902), to teach Irishmen and women to speak Irish and generally, in the words of Patrick Pearse, 'to learn to know Ireland'.[124] In Hyde's eyes, Gaelic Ireland could not be revived, however, without first paying serious attention to what comparative mythologists and folklorists were doing. For Irish traditions to live, the stories told by native Irish speakers had to be collected and preserved, and had to be done so properly. He criticised the forerunners in this task, including Croker, Curtin and Jane Wilde, for their unscrupulousness in coming clean about where they got their tales and who told them, and for their lavishness in adding their own touches. 'They tell us stories in which like Aeneas they bore a great part themselves', he argued. 'We have more of Crofton Croker and Lady Wilde than we have of anybody else'.[125]

Such errors could now be corrected, however, thanks to advances in folklore as a science. From 1885 onwards, Hyde published essays and delivered lectures exhorting his audience to learn how to be collectors of folklore and outlining what had been done in the field so far. Taking up comparative science in the service of Ireland, he argued in a lecture in Rathmines, Dublin of 1889 that, although the oral tradition of Ireland had been looked at before, now that its products were being examined in the light of the stories of other traditions, they had gained a tangible new significance. He asks why folk stories should have any particular value at all, arguing that 'if…Irish folk

[124] Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1989), 456; Patrick Pearse, 'The Coming Revolution' (1913), in *Collected Works of Pádraic H. Pearse: Political Writings and Speeches* (Dublin, Cork and Belfast, 1916), 93.
[125] Douglas Hyde, 'Irish Folk-Lore' (1889), in *Language, Lore and Lyrics: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Breandán Ó Conaire (Dublin, 1986), 99.

stories bore no resemblance to those of any other nation…then there would be nothing so very wonderful in the existence of a body of tales such as we might any of us invent to amuse children with.' But he counters this claim through reference to the comparative method, demonstrating that there is indeed such a resemblance, and then unravelling its meaning. He compares 'a very curious story which I heard from an old man' in Ireland, for example, with the story of 'Kephalus… enamoured of Procis,' from Greek mythology.[126]

For Hyde, the comparative method enabled, and at the same time required, stories from Irish folklore to be seen in their proper position as equal to the 'tales of the Aryan race handed down for indefinite ages.'[127] It could lift Irish folk-stories from slight and incidental entertainment to keyholes into the prehistoric past, as comparative linguistics had transformed Celtic languages into a vital piece of the Indo-European puzzle. The Revival and scholarship march together, as they will so consistently do. While scholars had been comparing Celtic to Greek for many years, now, by comparing an Irish story with a Greek story – 'the flotsam and jetsam of the ages' – the true and ancient meaning of both could apparently be found, at the point where their features most resembled one another.[128] 'We find in our most ancient tales a genuine picture of Pagan life in Europe,' declared Hyde, 'for which we look in vain elsewhere.'[129]

'That does not sound like the beginning of a revolution,' recalled Augusta Gregory as she looked back on Hyde's efforts with the benefit of hindsight, 'yet it was one. It was the discovery, the disclosure of the folk-learning, the folk-poetry, the folk-tradition.'[130]

[126] Hyde, 'Irish Folk-Lore', 94-95.
[127] Hyde, 'Irish Folk-Lore', 103.
[128] Douglas Hyde, *Beside the Fire: A Collection of Irish Gaelic Folk Stories* (London, 1890), x.
[129] Hyde, *The Story of Early Gaelic*, 41.
[130] Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York and London, 1913), 76.

5. William Ridgeway

I have made no distinctions between the mythologies of different nations, but have considered them all together as jointly forming a single well-compacted and regular system.

George Faber[131]

Exploits like that of Paris were in the twelfth century not uncommon in Ireland.

William Mitford[132]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was, then, a new wave of Celtic researches, amplified by comparative studies, and by the efforts of Revivalists to combat the imperialist Celticism of thinkers like Arnold, with Indo-European ideas continuing to have their say. But, as before, such waves oscillate and clash against one another other. Alfred Nutt had aligned Celtic with Homeric, arguing that the living tradition which Hyde was working to preserve could provide access to archaic Greece. Another scholar, William Ridgeway, was tracing a similar constellation but with a crucially different agenda. As before, Greek and Celtic antiquities collide, displaying striking similarities which require explanation. Ridgeway's way of sorting them into some kind of order was to argue that Homer's Achaeans were Celts.

William Ridgeway held the chair of Greek in University College Cork from 1883 and was appointed Disney Chair of Archaeology in Cambridge in 1892, becoming Brereton Reader in Classics in 1907. He was knighted in 1919. A teacher of Jane Harrison and colleague of Frazer, he was particularly interested in folklore, ethnology and comparative science. It was, a reviewer in *Folklore* sustained, 'his application of

[131] George Faber, *The Origin of Pagan Idolatry* (1816), quoted in Feldmann and Richardson eds., *The Rise of Modern Mythology*, 399.
[132] William Mitford, *The History of Greece*, ten vols, (new edn, London, 1835), i. 76.

these to classical subjects which have made his reputation.'[133] In 1909, Ridgeway dedicated his Presidential Address before the Anthropological Institute to the value of anthropology for Classics, pronouncing that 'most of my own work for the last thirty years has consisted in bringing anthropological methods to bear on classical subjects.'[134]

The final section of this chapter will argue that the long thread that runs through Ridgeway, right at the centre of the fabric of Classics, stretches back to eighteenth-century antiquarian debates about Celts. An establishment figure and a well-known classicist, Ridgeway's position in the narrative of the construction of the Celt is not, however, acknowledged. Once again, there is overlap and connection where perhaps none is expected; Celt is still a counterconcept to Greek.[135]

Throughout his career, Ridgeway engaged with the expansion of antiquity driven by folklore, comparatism and anthropology, while resisting the conclusions of his contemporaries who were doing the same thing. A verse written for his *Festschrift* places him firmly in this widening of antiquity or hollowing out of a space behind fifth-century Greece. 'Where ancient scholars all unskilled to seek', it proclaims,

> Knew but the country of the classic Greek,
> That world of Hellas now we see at last
> A transient phase, a moment in the past:
> We view the Grecian in his proper place,
> Heir to the legends of some alien race.[136]

The volume, which includes essays by Frazer, Harrison, Francis Cornford, Henry Browne, J.P. Mahaffy and Osborn Bergin, testifies, as a reviewer said, 'to the wide

[133] Anon., 'The Early Age of Greece by W. Ridgeway', *Folklore*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Sep., 1901), 360.
[134] William Ridgeway, 'The Relation of Anthropology to Classical Studies', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 39 (Jan.-Jun., 1909), 10.
[135] There is no mention of Ridgeway's Celtic interests in *The Dictionary of British Classicists*, for example. For a helpful account and assessment of the non-Celtic elements of Ridgeway's work, and especially his relation to the Cambridge Ritualists, see Mary Beard, '"While RIDGEWAY lives, Research can ne'er be dull"', in Christopher Stray ed., *The Owl of Minerva: the Cambridge Praelections of 1906* (Cambridge, 2005), 111-141; for his use of both anthropology and archaeology, see Simon Cook, 'Squaring the Shield: William Ridgeway's Two Models of Early Greece', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 40, no. 5 (2014), 693-713.
[136] A.D. Godley, in E.C. Quiggin ed., *Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway* (Cambridge, 1913), xxii.

range of Prof. Ridgeway's intellectual activity, which indeed surveys mankind from China to Peru', but these lines demonstrate that, at the same time, such a broad range was in keeping with the widening of antiquity that was going on around him.[137] They also highlight the continued centrality of archaeology. With Schliemann digging at Mycenae and Troy since the 1870s and Arthur Evans excavating the 'Minoan' civilisation in Crete in 1900, 'the curtain was rung up on a whole new Aegean – nay, more…a whole unknown Mediterranean'.[138]

Ridgeway must therefore be seen in the context of Cambridge Classics, engulfed by ritualism, Dionysiac researches and comparatism. He was a prominent, if idiosyncratic, part of the ritualist and folklorist ferment of antiquities that had been brewing. His *Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, published in 1915, stingingly criticised Frazer and his school in the Introduction, arguing that tragedy 'did not arise in the worship of the Thracian god Dionysos', but rather 'out of…dramatic dances in honour of the dead.'[139] 'Tragedy and serious Drama,' he argued, 'wherever they are found under the sun, have their roots in the world-wide belief in the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body'.[140] Though incomplete, Ridgeway's major work was *The Early Age of Greece*.[141] It was a response to this new and broader Greece. A work of Homeric scholarship, it was also in large part a view of Irish history, and a display of a certain attitude towards the Celt; as with Nutt, Graeco-Celtic researches, though neglected now, reach right into classical scholarship.

In this work, Ridgeway seeks to answer the mystery of the identity of Homer's Achaeans. He sets out to establish that 'there existed a culture very similar to that of the Homeric poems,' which can stand as the original of Homer. If he succeeds, he

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[137] W.H.D. Rouse, 'Essays and Studies Presented to William Ridgeway on His Sixtieth Birthday, 6th August, 1913. Edited by E.C. Quiggin', *Folklore*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Mar. 31, 1915), 107.
[138] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 221.
[139] William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races. In Special Reference to the Origin of Greek Tragedy, with an Appendix on the Origin of Greek Comedy* (Cambridge, 1915), 5, 64.
[140] Ridgeway, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, 385.
[141] The first volume was first published in 1901, the second posthumously in 1931, constructed by editors out of chapters left behind by Ridgeway. W.B. Stanford suggests the negative reception of Volume One dissuaded Ridgeway of publishing the second volume. See Stanford, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*, 158.

explains, then 'we shall have made an important step towards the solution of the whole problem of the ethnology of early Greece.'[142] He resists the preponderate view of this problem, which followed Schliemann in his belief that he had dug up the remains of Agamemnon in Mycenae. Rather than the Achaeans, he argues that it was the Pelasgians who were the 'authors of the Mycenaean civilisation' (though he allows that to write about Pelasgians, autochthonous inhabitants of Greece, 'is enough to bring down on the writer grave suspicions that he is one of those who deal with Druids').[143] If not at Mycenae, therefore, Ridgeway finds this Homeric-style culture in the excavations current in central Europe, of the Bronze and Early Iron Age 'Hallstatt' civilisation.

Jane Harrison saw this focus on Hallstatt as the principle inciter of 'storm' and 'panic' in Ridgeway's career. 'Northern archaeologists,' she wrote, 'might know of a widespread civilisation of the Bronze Age, extending over Central and Western Europe, but such questions were not for the classical scholar; they savoured of flints and stone implements, matter for the eccentric collector or the student of savage customs.'[144] Nevertheless, Ridgeway studied this civilisation, accepting its ascription to the Celts. He then argued that Homer's Achaeans were 'one of these bodies of Celts, who had made their way down into Greece and had become the masters of the indigenous race.'[145]

Ridgeway's theory, as given in Harrison's summary, is that 'the culture of Hallstatt…agrees with the culture of the Achæans as described in Homer. The culture of Hallstatt agrees also with the description left us by ancient historians of the culture

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[142] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 339.

[143] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 74, 88. For Pelasgians and Celticism, see Betham's argument that Pelasgians were Phoenician mariners, and Jamieson's that they were Scythians, Betham, *Etruria-Celtica*, 261-262; Jamieson, *Hermes Scythicus*, 15. Cf. a reviewer's comment that 'merely to believe in the Pelasgians was thought not so long since the mark of a madman. Prof. Ridgeway has indeed the courage of his convictions', anon., 'The Early Age of Greece', *The Athenaeum* (15 Jun., 1901), 764.

[144] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 223, 222.

[145] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 683-684. But NB his too early dating of Hallstatt. And the Hallstatt culture is no longer seen as predominantly 'Celtic.' It fails, for example, to explain the presence of a Celtic language in the Iberian Peninsula. See John T. Koch, 'Prologue: Ha C1a ≠ PC ("The Earliest Hallstatt Iron Age cannot equal Proto-Celtic")', in Koch and Cunliffe eds., *Celtic from the West*, 2-6.

of the Celts. Therefore the Achæans of Homer were Celts.'[146] This was a far-reaching conclusion, in Harrison's opinion, because it allowed readers of Homer to understand something vital not only about Homer's world but also their own. 'We are suddenly at home among the long-haired Achæans', she declared, 'because they are ourselves.'[147] Therefore and triumphantly, Ridgeway argues, 'the bridge between the land of the Celts and Greece itself is now complete'.[148]

Throughout his work, Ridgeway sticks to a racialist model dividing north and south, gleaned primarily from Giuseppe Sergi. A strict divide must be drawn, in Ridgeway's eyes, between these 'true Celts' who colonised Greece, 'a large fair-haired and blue-eyed people,' and the 'false Celts,' 'the dark-complexioned Iberic people of France, Great Britain and Ireland'.[149] 'Starting from the Mediterranean,' Ridgeway argues, 'we meet in the lower parts a melanochrous race; but gradually, as we advance upwards, the population as a whole is growing less dark, until finally, along the shores of the Baltic, we meet the tallest and most light-complexioned race in the world.' The Pelasgians were part of the former, and were invaded and colonised by the Celts, 'this light-complexioned race.'[150]

Ridgeway therefore uses the word Celtic where a writer like Nutt or Arnold would use Teutonic, or, earlier, an anticeltic writer like Jamieson and Pinkerton would use Scythian or Pict. W.B. Stanford points out that 'the Celts could hardly be distinguished from the Germanic races on [Ridgeway's] terms.'[151] Crucially, though, Ridgeway does elect to use the word 'Celt', with all its connotations and history, where he could have used another, and he foregrounds this discrepancy between his Celts and the Celts of popular usage. He highlights this supposed confusion in his entry on the Celts for the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, stating that they were a race, 'distinguished by a long head, a long face, a narrow aquiline nose, blue eyes, very light hair and great stature.' When contrasted to the 'dark-complexioned

[146] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 229.
[147] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 231.
[148] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 444.
[149] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 370.
[150] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 261.
[151] Stanford, *Ireland the Classical Tradition*, 158.

people of France, Great Britain and Ireland…the Celts are thus clearly distinguished from the Gaelic-speaking dark race of Britain and Ireland'.[152]

'Much confusion,' Ridgeway proclaims, 'has arisen from the inaccurate use of the terms "Celt" and "Celtic."'[153] For example, those aspersions cast upon the 'Celts' by classical writers – the polyandry, incest and cannibalism of Caesar and Strabo, as challenged by O'Halloran and others in Chapter One – were really directed at the 'false Celts', whilst 'the chastity of their women has ever been the glory of the Teutonic peoples.'[154] Such things were not 'the national habit of the fair-haired conquerors of Gaul and Britain.'[155] Similarly Ridgeway scrutinises 'some of the sociological facts of ancient Greece' and reveals that the 'vices' of the Greeks – homosexuality, totem-worship, 'the lower forms of religion' and so on – derived from the indigenous Pelasgians, not the northern, true Celtic invaders.[156] They were then preserved in trace forms in plays like the *Eumenides*, with its suggestion of matriarchy and human sacrifice.[157] As the co-editor of the second volume of *The Early Age of Greece* explained, for Ridgeway 'the conviction of separable Northern and Southern strains in the Greek race was almost a psychological necessity, for there was much in classical Greece that repelled him, and he was implacable against "the old Southern vices".'[158]

In other words, all the elements of Greece which are illuminated by contemporary scholars at Cambridge, inspired by anthropological and comparative science, are lit up also in Ridgeway, but they are determinedly assigned to one particular 'race,' allowing another to continue life as the sweet and light 'Hellenes' of Arnold. The 'false Celts' provide an answer for Ridgeway for any indecencies in Greek mythology; 'the Acheans,' he argues, 'were essentially different in race from the

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[152] William Ridgeway, 'Celt, or Kelt', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Volume Five* (eleventh edn, Cambridge, 1909-1911), 611-612.
[153] Ridgeway, 'Celt, or Kelt', 611. It is worth remembering that much reception of his work absorbed Ridgeway's general conclusion about Homeric and Celtic parallels, whilst overlooking this distinction. See for example, another verse by A.D. Godley, quoted in Stanford, *Ireland the Classical Tradition*, 178.
[154] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 21.
[155] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 32.
[156] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 2, 420-421.
[157] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 61.
[158] D.S. Robertson, quoted in R.S. Conway, *Sir William Ridgeway 1853-1926* (Oxford, 1926), 5.

aboriginal population.'[159] In Homer, on the other hand, can be found 'the noble conception of the relations between man and woman depicted in unfading colours'.[160]

The principal conclusion of Ridgeway's second volume is that Irish epics, like the Homeric, commemorate tall and fair-haired invaders from the north. Irish heroes such as Cuchulain were, like the Achaean heroes, 'true Celts.' Judging by 'their armature and method of fighting' and the fact that they were 'great of stature and blond-complexioned', Ridgeway finds Cuchulain, Fionn Mac Cumhail and the other heroes to be of the same race as the Achaeans of the first volume.[161] They were one of the 'successive waves of fair-haired people', immortalised as the Túatha Dé Danann, who invaded Ireland and colonised the Firbolg, 'the dark-complexioned race, which still forms the great majority of the Irish population,' who came from south-west Europe in the Neolithic age.[162] These Túatha Dé Danann are 'no mere sun-myths or vegetation spirits, but actual invaders of flesh and blood, who made themselves masters of the rich plains of Meath and became the overlords of the older dark-complexioned tribes'.[163]

Just as Nutt had done, Ridgeway argues that a study of these epics would, therefore, inform a study of Homer (though they have been overlooked in favour of 'their classical compeers').[164] In addition, he claims that classicists and Celticists alike have failed to grasp that these epic heroes should be studied as historical figures, in opposition to the contemporary mythological current: 'just as the school of…Max Müller, and Sir George Coxe [sic] made Heracles, Agamemnon, and Achilles into sun-myths, so the late Professor d'Arbois de Jubainville, Sir John Rhys, and others maintain that Cuchulain had never any human existence, but is purely a solar hero.'[165]

In summary, all that is good for Ridgeway in Homer and in Ireland comes from the north, which not only exonerates Homer and Ireland from any tinge of immorality,

[159] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, 455.
[160] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 158.
[161] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 536.
[162] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 665.
[163] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 668.
[164] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 530.
[165] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, ii. 530.

but also binds them inexorably together. Achilles and Cuchulainn are bound, in Ridgeway's work, by a comparison founded solely on an idea of race. This is an equation of a very different kind from the links drawn by comparative mythologists, which place them on the same plane by virtue of being two anthropomorphic versions of the same conception of the sun, or, alternatively, of being two manifestations of a primitive cultic or ritual structure. His theory harks back to eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century attempts to link Celtic and Greek, on the grounds of apparent similarity. What appeared then to be antiquarian views reappear here in the centre of Classics, where folklore, anthropology and archaeology meet.

6. Conclusion

Born in what is now County Offaly, Ridgeway stressed, as his obituarist put it, that he himself was 'descended from one of James I's Ulster Settlers' and 'that he "had not a drop of Gaelic blood in his veins".[166] 'He never forgot that he came of a conquering race, and his vision of this coloured all his life and all his work. He was "of the Pale"; and as he scanned history he saw everywhere invader and invaded – Norman and Sicilian, Sabine and Ligurian, Achaean and Pelasgian.'[167] In a reversal of William Betham's analogy, the parallel between all this and the colonisation of Ireland is not far off; indeed, Ridgeway frequently draws it himself. In a section on the dialect of the Achaean Celts, for example, he investigates 'the conditions under which the conquering adopt the language of a conquered race.' There are, he writes, 'some good examples at hand in modern times'.[168] He uses the analogy of Cromwell's planters in Munster, many of whom married Irish women and whose children spoke Irish, whilst

[166] Conway, 'Sir William Ridgeway', 5.
[167] D.S Robertson, quoted in Conway, 'Sir William Ridgeway', 5.
[168] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 647.

'only a remnant remained English, and these were chiefly of the better class, who had never lost their connection with England'.[169]

Ridgeway was outspokenly imperialist, writing in a pamphlet of 1921 on 'what Irish Home Rule is Doing for the Empire,' that 'already the Irish Free State is acting as a powerful dissolvent upon the Empire.' He argues that 'many of the Indian and Egyptian agitators learned their methods from the Sinn Feiners in Dublin. They see that Southern Ireland is now practically independent…and they believe that, if they simply stick to the Irish methods, at the next opportunity they will be able to throw off the British "yoke."' 'The fact is,' he states, 'that the British press, London and Provincial, is honeycombed with men educated in the Christian Brothers' schools in Ireland, and holding strong anti-British views. It was they who engineered the cry of "settlement with Ireland once and for all," and suppressed or minimised the sufferings of the Irish loyalists.'[170]

Crucially, Ridgeway also saw himself as a corrector of method. He argued that his application of the comparative method onto Classics was, in fact, a restoration of what was good in an older approach. *The Early Age of Greece* 'is interesting,' as a reviewer in *Hermathena* said, 'as a return to the wider method of scholarship, which tends to fall into disuse in the modern developments of specialism.'[171] J.L. Myers in *The Classical Review* similarly pointed to its 'more than Herodotean digressiveness,' while damning its argumentation and its 'antiquated terminology' – 'any big fair-haired person who comes south is for him a "Celt"…just as any dark-haired southerner is for him a "Pelasgian."'[172] Ridgeway argued that his approach would bring an end to what he saw as a narrowness of classical method. In a lecture to the Classical Association of Scotland in 1908, he held that Classics was in decline, having been met, for the last quarter of a century, with a 'discontent' which scholars 'have done little

[169] Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 648. Martin Bernal saw a different parallel in Ridgeway, with the Cromwellian colonists as Dorians, see *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation. Volume I* (London, 1987), 294. But see Ridgeway, *Early Age*, i. 91-92.
[170] William Ridgeway, *What Irish Home Rule is Doing for the Empire* (1921), 5, 2.
[171] George Coffey, 'The Early Age of Greece', *Hermathena*, vol. 11, no. 27 (1901), 403.
[172] J. L. Myers, 'Ridgeway's *Early Age of Greece*', *The Classical Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Feb. 1902), 69, 74. This sparked a heated correspondence with Ridgeway, see the same issue, at 78-91. Cf. Myers, *Homer and his Critics*, 189.

save to darken and encumber.' 'It is to the badness of their ideals and method', he argued, 'that the reaction against classical education is either wholly or in great part due.'[173] For its resuscitation, the discipline required an embrace of 'the whole length and breadth of the Classics – their literature, their languages, and their archaeology'.[174]

Ridgeway's method and outlook chimes with what has become a recurring note in the Graeco-Celtic researches described in the previous pages: breadth, ambition and expansiveness. Desires to link Celtic and Greek have repeatedly appeared as a reaction against the narrowness of what is seen as classical study, the focus on one shred of civilisation at the expense of all others (just as Ledwich and Pinkerton's desire to sever that link was also a desire to restrict the accessibility of Classics). The drive to make connections or chain one tradition in line with another, to anchor antiquity onto antiquity (as Nutt also had done), recurs and brings with it great illumination. It is the appeal of Butler's jigsaw puzzle addict.

William Ridgeway, however, stops one short from falling into the trap of romanticising Graeco-Celtic relations. Such connection-making is exclusive, perhaps inherently so, and it is also frequently bound to notions of race. Until nineteenth-century essentialist ideas of race and its rigid connection with culture were severed, attempts to shift and reshuffle categories of antiquity faced the grave danger of categorising and sorting 'race.'

Moreover, the comparative method of categorising different antiquities – understanding Irish and Homeric mythology, for example, by means of comparing them – was particularly prone to intrusions of ideology, as evident in the connection between imperialism and Nutt's comparative method. 'Comparison,' wrote Benedict Anderson, 'is a discursive strategy.' It depends not on inherent connections, but on 'one's angle of vision, one's framework, and the conclusions towards which one intends to move.'[175] Nevertheless, one of the most frequently romanticised antique

[173] William Ridgeway, 'The Relation of Archaeology to Classical Studies', in *Classical Association of Scotland: Proceedings 1907-1908* (Edinburgh, 1908), 38, 41.
[174] Ridgeway, 'The Relation of Archaeology', 43.
[175] Benedict Anderson, 'Frameworks of Comparison', *London Review of Books*, vol. 38, no. 2 (21 Jan., 2016), 18. For a discussion of the problems of comparison within the modern

comparisons is that drawn between the Irish and the Greek (especially perhaps, between Irish culture and Homer). As Peter McDonald puts it, such an identification is capable of being, still, 'a little lacking in detachment.'[176] Both Nutt and Ridgeway show the jagged edges of that Irish-Greek equation, as it has been drawn in the past.

discipline of comparative mythology, see Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger eds., *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville and London, 1996), 1-12.

[176] McDonald, 'The Greeks in Ireland', 185.

Chapter Five

French Celticism and Irish nationalism: Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville

1. Introduction

In the times of which Homer sang, the Greek nobles had yellow hair and blue eyes. At the time when the heroic literature of Ireland was composed, the Irish nobles had yellow hair and blue eyes.

Standish O'Grady[1]

I cannot but think that these facts may be of some significance to students of the Homeric problem.

Alfred Nutt[2]

But there are excavations of excavations

MacGregor Mathers[3]

Jane Harrison proclaimed William Ridgeway to be the first to compare the Celts to Homer's Achaeans, in 'a double identification leading direct to a momentous conclusion.'[4] With Hallstatt being under excavation since the 1840s, 'the discoveries were, of course, known to all students of comparative anthropology'. However, 'it remained for Professor Ridgeway to see their significance in relation to Homeric antiquities'.[5] Here', she writes, 'is the very mirror of Homer'.[6] Ridgeway himself, however, felt that this lofty position as a pioneer was far from secure. He had

[1] Standish O'Grady, *History of Ireland*, two vols (London and Dublin, 1878-1880), i. 15.
[2] Alfred Nutt, 'History, Tradition, and Historic Myth', *Folklore*, vol. 13, no. 1 (25 Mar., 1902), 86.
[3] S.L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (London, 1887), 50.
[4] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 229.
[5] Harrison, 'The Dawn of Greece', 229.
[6] Harrison, 'Dawn of Greece', 228.

complained to the *Athenaeum* in July 1899 that his status as the instigator of the Celtic-Achaean link had been unfairly overlooked. 'May I point out', he wrote, 'that the identification of the culture of the Homeric Acheans with that of the Celts was the subject of a lecture which I gave before the Hellenic Society on February 24th, 1898…I had put forward the same view still earlier in the *Journal* of the Anthropological Institute, 1897.'[7]

This was part of Ridgeway's wider self-image; he was continually preoccupied in establishing himself as the leading figure in the shift in thought about the classical from isolation to connection. Before him, he claimed, 'no one had dreamed of instituting any comparison between the material remains of Greece and Rome and those of savage peoples.'[8] But his specific complaint about the comparison of Homeric Greece and the 'savage' Celts was written in response to a review that had appeared in the previous issue of the *Athenaeum*, of a book by the French Celtic scholar Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *La civilisation des Celtes et celle de l'épopée homérique.* An article in *The Classical Review* would indeed, despite Ridgeway, find this to be the first to employ a systematic Graeco-Celtic comparative lens: 'all scholars now agree in assigning to the Celtic languages and literatures the importance they really deserve in the history of Indo-Germanic philology, civilisation, and mythology', it explains, '…but this is the first attempt to bring Greek and Celt side by side and compare in detail their ways and customs.'[9]

The issue of who came first to these ideas – Ridgeway or d'Arbois[10] – is not the point here, but rather the fact that these two scholars, one a Cambridge classicist, the other a French Celtic scholar, came to a similar conclusion about the Irish and the Greeks, at similar times and with vastly different standpoints. The pairing of the two reveals the myriad creations that can come from the process of Greek and Celtic comparison. Moreover, the strands of Homeric comparison and myth, and of the

[7] William Ridgeway, 'Prof. D'Arbois de Jubainville's New Book', *The Athenaeum* (15 Jul., 1899), 98.
[8] Ridgeway, 'The Relation of Anthropology', 11.
[9] T. Hudson Williams, 'D'Arbois de Jubainville's Celtic and Homeric Civilisations', *The Classical Review*, vol. 14, no. 6 (Jul., 1900), 328.
[10] See above, Introduction, note 42 for a comment on his name.

simultaneous aspersion and recruitment of the Greeks – the desire for the identity of a 'Celtic' nation to be both united to and independent from the Greeks – all come together in the figure of d'Arbois, the most prominent figure within the growing discipline of Celtic Studies in Europe.

When it is remembered that d'Arbois also had an essential role in the Irish Revival, he gains still more significance. Several scholars have demonstrated how crucial he was as a carrier of continental Celtic scholarship to those working in Ireland to build the identity of an independent Irish nation. His role as an importer of Graeco-Celtic comparisons, however, and as an important piece in the wider picture of this long and complicated tradition, is very rarely recognised; there has not yet been a sustained study of his work in this light.[11] This chapter will examine d'Arbois in the context of Graeco-Celtic relations, both as they preceded him and as they grew out of his own researches, positing him as a vital hinge between Graeco-Celtic research and the Literary Revival in Ireland.

2. D'Arbois' Graeco-Celtic comparatism

The science of comparative philology is to the historian and antiquarian of the present time, what the correct system of astronomy has been to those who wander in safety and certainty amidst the stars. Things that before appeared difficult and uncertain to the antiquarian to-day are plain and pleasant.

Canon Bourke[12]

The dust of Achilles and Cuchulain
Itches in the palms of scholars

Ted Hughes[13]

[11] See Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 33-36; Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 10; Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 61-63, 163.
[12] Canon U.J. Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland* (Dublin, 1887), vii.
[13] Ted Hughes, 'Dick Straightup', in *Collected Poems*, ed. Paul Keegan (London, 2003), 64.

Now Ireland was to be "saved" by philology.
Patrick Kenny[14]

a. Homer

In his obituary of d'Arbois, Alfred Nutt compared the scholar to Walter Scott's famous fictional antiquarian (as Ridgeway had compared himself). 'Like Jonathan Oldbuck,' writes Nutt, 'his heart was set upon the past'.[15] '*Ce grande-pontife des études celtiques*' was the first chair of Celtic languages and literature at the Collège de France and the editor of the leading journal for Celtic research, the *Revue celtique*.[16] He began his career as the archivist of the cathedral in Troyes, travelling to Ireland in the early 1880s to be guided around the libraries of the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College Dublin by Samuel Ferguson.[17]

According to his own account, d'Arbois' interest in Celtic subjects was sparked by noticing striking resemblances between Homeric Greece and Celtic antiquity. In *La civilisation des Celtes*, he describes how '*recommençant à lire Homère, j'ai été surpris des nombreuses ressemblances que la civilisation décrite dans l'*Iliade *et l'*Odyssée *offre avec celle que nous dépeignent les auteurs grecs et latins quand ils nous montrent ce qu'étaient les Celtes indépendants pendant les trois premiers siècles qui ont précédé l'ère chrétienne, et, plus tard, pendant toute la durée de l'empire romain d'Occident*.'[18] '*Ces deux civilisations*,' have, d'Arbois argues, several '*grandes ressemblances*'.[19]

[14] Patrick Kenny, *Economics for Irishmen* (Dublin, 1906), 51.
[15] Nutt, 'H. d'Arbois de Jubainville', 276.
[16] Paul Gerbod, 'L'enseignement supérieur français à la découverte des Gaulois (1890-1940)', in Paul Viallaneix and Jean Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1982), 370.
[17] For d'Arbois' trip to Ireland, see Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Essai d'un catalogue de la littérature épique de l'Irlande* (Paris, 1883), xi-xvii.
[18] Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *La civilisation des Celtes et celle de l'épopée homérique* (Paris, 1899), ix-x.
[19] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes*, 3.

He then set out to scrutinize them, using Irish sources as well as classical, in a series of lectures in Paris in 1898, which would later be printed as *La civilisation des Celtes.*[20] He acknowledges early on that an endeavour to compare '*les mœurs celtiques à celles que décrivent l'*Iliade *et l'*Odyssée' may be considered '*une entreprise un peu hardie*.'[21] His justification for embarking on just such a project is that, as he reminds the reader, such a comparison was also drawn '*par un des historiens les plus savants de l'antiquité classique*,' Diodorus Siculus.[22]

By comparing Homeric and Celtic military tactics and single combat, oral poetry, social hierarchies, prophecies and prophets, '*l'interprétation des songes*,' nature worship, the anthropomorphism of gods, the buying of wives and '*le devoir du tuer*' one's father if he grows infirm, d'Arbois builds up a stock of '*celto-hellénique*' shared traits.[23] In the end, he concludes that '*les Gaulois, pendant les trois siècles qui ont précédé notre ère, les Irlandais, tels que nous dépeint leur littérature épique la plus ancienne, mise par écrit dans le moyen âge, étaient à peu près au même degré de civilisation que les Grecs et les Troyens de l'épopée homérique environ huit cents ans avant Jésus-Christ.*'[24]

As a reviewer predicted, this book had resounding implications for both classicists and Celtic scholars. It could be consulted '*avec fruit par tous ceux qui voudront désormais s'occuper aussi bien de la civilisation grecque de l'époque homérique que de la civilisation primitive des Celtes de la Gaule ou de ceux de l'Irlande et de la Grande-Bretagne*.'[25] Alfred Nutt declared that he 'should like to make it an indictable offence' to allow any student to enter into a study of Celtic antiquity without reading d'Arbois' work, and made use of his conclusions to sketch a picture of the hero Cuchulain as 'the Irish Achilles'.[26] He also, when writing of James Macpherson

[20] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes*, 3.
[21] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes*, 1.
[22] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes,* 3. See Diod. 5.28.4 on the Celts: τοὺς δ'ἀγαθοὺς ἄνδρας ταῖς καλλίσταις τῶν κρεῶν μοίραις γεραίρουσι, καθάπερ καὶ ὁ ποιητὴς τὸν Αἴαντα παρεισάγει τιμώμενον ὑπὸ τῶν ἀριστέων, ὅτε πρὸς Ἕκτορα μονομαχήσας ἐνίκησε.
[23] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes*, 87, 313, 125.
[24] D'Arbois, *La civilisation des Celtes,* 395.
[25] P. Le Nestour, 'La civilisation des Celtes et celle de l'épopée homérique, par H. d'Arbois de Jubainville', *Revue celtique*, vol. 21, no. 1. (Jan., 1900), 105.
[26] Alfred Nutt, 'The Critical Study of Gaelic Literature Indispensable for the History of the Gaelic

and Ossianic poetry, referred to 'Oscar, son of Ossian,' as 'the Achilles of the cycle'.[27] 'We shall yet find the parallel extraordinarily close and suggestive', he declared.[28]

The contemporary Indo-European scholar, Bernard Sergent, likewise attests to the lastingness of d'Arbois' conclusion, at the end of the twentieth century, crediting him as '*l'introducteur*' of Irish studies into France. According to Sergent, his great gift to the world of Celtic Studies was the linking of Greek and Celtic, his recognising, '*dans la civilisation qui se discerne dans ces textes mythologiques irlandais la trace d'un état culturel très archaique, de l'âge du Fer dit-il, car la comparaison avec la civilisation de la Grèce des poèmes homériques s'avérait parlante*.'[29] He argues that d'Arbois was the first to sound the comparison of Homeric and Irish heroic society for what it could reveal about their relative stages of development and, then, to conclude that they were at the same stage as each other. Such instances of '*coincidence*' between the Celtic and the Greek have high value, for Sergent, because they shine light on '*l'ancienne culture celtique, les origines de la civilisation grecque et un aspect de l'évolution des peuples issus de la diaspora indo-européenne*.'[30] The book is, Sergent writes, '*le précurseur direct des présentes* "*celto-hellenica*".'[31]

b. Myth

As Declan Kiberd has written, d'Arbois' 'method with literature and language was comparative', and *La civilisation des Celtes* is not his first work to revolve around a comparison between, in particular, the Greek and the Celtic.[32] *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*, published in 1884 as the second volume of his

Race', *The Celtic Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Jul., 1904), 55; Alfred Nutt, *Cuchulainn, The Irish Achilles* (London, 1900). For the parallel, see also Michael Clarke, 'An Irish Achilles and a Greek Cú Chulainn', 238-240.

[27] Alfred Nutt, *Ossian and the Ossianic Literature* (2nd edn, London, 1910), 9.

[28] Nutt, *Cuchulainn, The Irish Achilles*, 34.

[29] Bernard Sergent, *Celtes et Grecs I. Le livre des héros* (Paris, 1999), 18.

[30] Sergent, *Celtes et Grecs*, 11, 23.

[31] Sergent, *Celtes et Grecs*, 18.

[32] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 33.

monumental *Cours de la littérature celtique* is, Macintosh argued, 'the first systematic comparative study of Greek and Celtic mythologies'.[33] Here, as Kiberd points out, d'Arbois 'was not afraid to apply his comparative techniques to Celtic myth and folklore.'[34]

Le cycle mythologique is '*un essai sur les principes fondamentaux*' of Celtic mythology, amounting to '*un commentaire'* on the twelfth century *Lebor Gabála*, or the Book of Invasions.[35] As with his study on Homer, d'Arbois notices '*une grande ressemblance*' between Celtic and Greek traditions, here, between '*la mythologie irlandaise et la mythologie grecque.'*[36] He then, for the first time, embarks on a comprehensive investigation to probe it and see how deep it goes: '*l'important, pour nous, est de retrouver dans la mythologie irlandaise, dont les doctrines fondamentales peuvent être appelées, d'une façon plus générale, mythologie celtique, des conceptions qui ont aussi tenu, dans la mythologie grecque, une place considérable*.'[37]

As a reviewer of the 1884 volume described, it is an 'elaborate treatise'; 'to treat it in detail would be to plunge into the abyss of comparative mythology.'[38] Most important to realise, though, is that the chain which allows d'Arbois to anchor Greek and Celtic together is that of the Müllerian solar theory investigated above, at the beginning of Chapter Four. As the review points out, 'our old friend the Solar-myth is not wanting.'[39] For example, d'Arbois sees both the Greek Titanomachy and the battle between the Fomorians and the Túatha Dé Danaan (whose sundry interpretations by antiquarians and comparative mythologists were encountered in the previous chapter), as expressions of the same, fundamental struggle between darkness and light. This, he argues, is where their kinship comes from: '*ce qu'il y a de plus important dans la légende des Fomôrés est leur guerre contre les dieux de la lumière solaire et de*

[33] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 10.
[34] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 34.
[35] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, xi-xii.
[36] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 187.
[37] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 20.
[38] Anon., 'The Irish Mythological Circle and Irish Mythology. By H. D.'Arboride Jubainville', *The Spectator* (14 Mar., 1903), 24.
[39] Anon., 'The Irish Mythological Circle', 420. D'Arbois also analyses Greek mythology in terms of solar theory in his *Le Mythologie Grecque et l'Histoire de l'Europe Occidentale* (Paris, 1878).

la vie, c'est-à-dire contre les Tûatha Dê Danann. Monstrueux par leur taille et leur forme…ils sont l'expression celtique de conceptions identiques à celles qui, dans la mythologie grecque, ont donné naissance aux monstres qui combattent les dieux solaires.'[40]

Similarly, d'Arbois interprets the myth of Hermes killing Argos, with his one hundred eyes, as the contest between the sun and darkness: '*ces yeux sont les étoiles, et Argos est une personnification de la nuit étoilée. Hermès le tua d'un coup de pierre…Hermès est le crépuscule, et cette pierre qui lancée par Hermès, tue Argos ou la nuit, c'est le soleil qu'une main invisible jette tous les matins de l'Orient vers le haut des cieux*.'[41] He finds the Irish equivalent of the myth in the story of the Celtic god, Lug, killing the giant Balor, his grandfather: '*Lug est l'Hermès celtique: comme l'Hermès grec, il personnifie le crépuscule; comme lui, au moyen d'une pierre il tue son adversaire. Il lance cette pierre avec une fronde, et d'un coup mortel il atteint à l'œil Balar* [sic]*, qui est l'Argos celtique*'. '*Hermès vainqueur*', he contends, '*est comme Lug le crépuscule, Argos comme Balar est la nuit*'.[42]

Bolstering his mythological theory with a philological one, d'Arbois also argues that 'Balor' comes from the same root as 'Bellerophontes,' the name given to the killer of the Chimera: 'Bélleros *est le même mot que* Balar…Belléros, *en grec, est dérivé de la même racine que le verbe* βάλλω*…et que le substantif* βέλος'.[43] The explanation for these echoes and traces is, d'Arbois argues, that '*les deux fables, l'une grecque, l'autre celtique, qui racontent l'une mort de Balar tué par Lug, l'autre celle de la Chimère tuée par* Βελλερο-φόντης*, proviennent d'un fonds commun*'. '*Un hasard étrange a gardé,*' he explains, '*dans le récit irlandais, le nom de Balar identique à Belléros, que les poèmes d'Homère et d'Hésiode nous ont conservé dans le composé* Βελλερο-φόντης'.[44]

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[40] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 96. He also aligns the Fomorians with the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, at 102-103.
[41] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 201-202.
[42] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 201-202, 204. He makes a similar point in *Le Dieu de la Mort et les Origines de la Race Celtique* (Troyes, 1879), 8-9.
[43] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 205.
[44] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 206. Something similar was noticed by James O'Laverty, the solitary Graeco-Celtic comparative mythologist of the earlier nineteenth century (see above, Chapter Three) – 'It is remarkable, too, that the name of Balor Beimeann is pronounced, by

On the basis of these striking similarities and this web of coincidence, d'Arbois argues that Greek and Irish mythology should be seen as coming from a common source. His general conclusion is that,

> *les traits communs de la mythologie irlandaise et de la mythologie grecque proviennent d'un vieux fonds de légendes gréco-celtiques antérieur à la séparation des races, à la date inconnue où, abandonnant aux Celtes la froide vallée du Danube et les régions brumeuses de l'Europe occidentale, les Hellènes ou Grecs vinrent habiter les plaines chaudes et les splendides rivages de la presqu'île située au sud des Balkans.*[45]

Having found in *La civilisation des Celtes* a '*celto-hellénique*' world of epic, alive with crosscurrents, in *Le cycle mythologique* d'Arbois uncovers a body of *légendes gréco-celtiques*, a shared mythological world that is bound by a source, a process of development, and a theological and cosmological view of the world. As in Chapter Four, Indo-European comparatism, having stepped out from the reshaping of antiquity brought about by Indo-European comparative philology, makes both Greek and Celtic shift on their axes.

Nutt praised d'Arbois in *The Archaeological Review* for resolving Irish mythology 'into a series of variations upon one theme – the struggle of the gods of light, life and learning against those of death, darkness and storm'.[46] Crucially, like Nutt himself with his theory of the Otherworld, d'Arbois 'illustrated this theme, outside Celtic myth, chiefly from the oldest stratum of Hellenic cosmogonic belief'. 'The system', Nutt judges, 'constructed by the parallelism of these two forms of Aryan myth is coherent and rational.'[47] Not all readers, however, were so laudatory about this 'parallelism.' The prominent Greek archaeologist, Salomon Reinach, for example, criticised *Le cycle mythologique* for its intoxication '*sous l'influence des idées erronées de l'école de Max Müller*'. He found it to be '*le plus amusant, mais aussi le plus contestable qu'il ait écrit*.' It was marred, Reinach thought by *'une hardiesse que de*

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persons speaking the Gaelic language, almost like "Bellerophon!"' O'Laverty, *Remarkable Correspondences*, 343.

[45] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 122.

[46] Alfred Nutt, 'Celtic Myth and Saga – A Survey of Recent Literature', *The Archaeological Review*, vol.
2, no. 2 (Oct., 1888), 122.

[47] Nutt, 'Celtic Myth and Saga', 122.

bons juges trouvèrent bientôt excessive.'[48] Similarly, Henri Gaidoz, founder of the *Revue celtique,* faulted d'Arbois for rifling through prefixes and suffixes '*comme dans un trousseau de clefs que ouvrent toutes les portes*': '*M. d'A. de J.*', wrote Gaidoz*, 'est dupe de sa propre imagination*'.[49]

c. D'Arbois and the Revival

D'Arbois' '*trousseau de clefs*,*'* however, no matter how imaginary, and his application of Müllerian solar theory onto Celtic traditions, were extremely influential on the writers of the Irish Revival. He is frequently cited by Revivalists as one of their founding fathers; in the preface to his 1903 translation of d'Arbois' *Le cycle mythologique*, Richard Best, for example, who would later become the librarian of the National Library of Ireland, observed that 'on all sides there was an eagerness and growing desire to know something about the ancient Gods of Ireland, and the mythic races who are said to have peopled the island…and this book of Monsieur d'Arbois seemed to me the fullest and best yet written on the subject.'[50] 'Irishmen must, therefore,' he said, 'be grateful to Monsieur d'Arbois for having brought them to a knowledge of these great traditions of their race, which was already old when many of the proud nations of to-day were young.'[51] D'Arbois was also a great influence on Douglas Hyde, who thought d'Arbois had 'studied our literary antiquities to greater purpose than perhaps anyone else'.[52] For Hyde, he was the one 'continental scholar' 'to whom all Irishmen should owe a lasting debt of gratitude for the more than Gallic luminousness with which he has sought to disentangle the web of our early

[48] Salomon Reinach, 'Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville', *Revue Archéologique*, vol. 15 (1910), 282.
[49] Henri Gaidoz, 'Les premiers habitants de l'Europe, d'après les auteurs de l'antiquité et les recherches les plus récentes de la linguistique, par H. d'Arbois de Jubainville', *Revue celtique*, vol. 3 (1876-1878), 459.
[50] R.I. Best, 'Translator's Preface', in d'Arbois, *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*, trans. Richard Best (Dublin, 1903), iv.
[51] Best, 'Preface', in d'Arbois, *The Irish Mythological Cycle*, iv.
[52] Hyde, *The Story of Early Gaelic*, 3.

mythology.'[53] Through this, he had 'done more than all other men to popularise Celtic studies'.[54] D'Arbois' version of the mythological web can be seen at work in several versions of Irish mythology, such as James Cousins' *The Wisdom of the West*, a 'vision of cultural syncretism.'[55]

An obituary in the *Washington Post* called d'Arbois 'one of the most notable inspirers of that Celtic renaissance which is currently the outstanding literary moment of our time.' Significantly, it perceived him to be, above all, 'a leading pioneer' in the timely replacement of a classical bias in scholarship: 'the Grecian spirit,' it explains, 'which has for centuries dominated the world of thought and of literature, is destined ultimately to take a secondary place in face of competition from another spirit whose treasures, so long neglected by the high priests of scholarship as mere barbaric refuse, are now being gradually displayed in all their glory'.[56]

As well as shaping the world's interpretation of the forgotten glories of Ireland's past, d'Arbois' research and arguments could even direct the nature of the sort of literature to be produced by the Revival. Just as Macpherson's Ossian had done for the possibility of Graeco-Celtic epic, d'Arbois' comparative method and his conclusions were the kernel for further '*celto-hellénique*' modelling. As Macintosh has pointed out, by positing the equivalence of Old Irish and Homeric society, d'Arbois could grant 'authority to the claim, made by writers of the Literary Revival, that the rich epic tradition in Irish literature…would form the basis upon which the next literary stage – the dramatic one – was to be founded.'[57] Irish theatre could now be expected to develop from Irish mythology, as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides developed from Homer. In addition, by the same analogy, the characters and exploits of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley) could be used to provide models for the builders of the Irish nation, as the heroes of Homer had done for the Athenians of the democratic polis. This is another and slightly different articulation of the same promise offered by Nutt's theory, seen in Chapter Four, that the Túatha Dé Danaan are

[53] Hyde, *The Story of Early Gaelic*, 54.
[54] Hyde, *The Story of Early Gaelic*, 100.
[55] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 324.
[56] Anon., 'D'Arbois de Jubainville', *The Washington Post* (15 Mar., 1910), 6.
[57] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 10.

Dionysiac conceptions and that, therefore, their body of mythology can generate a theatre of ritual.[58]

Indeed, several writers would, increasingly from now on, view Ireland as Greece in embryonic form. George Russell ('*Æ*'), for example, declared that 'the Irish are like the Greeks before Pericles, Phidias, Sophocles, Plato and all that famous life whose after-coming justified a small city state in resisting the domination of a great empire.'[59]

3. D'Arbois and French national identity

> *It is, I know, unscholarly to speak of the 'Celts'…but I am nevertheless going to do so, because I can say about them what I dare not say about my countrymen: that they were splendid barbarians*
>
> Sean O'Faolain[60]

> *nous ne consulterons pas les travaux des anthropologistes pour établir notre identité comme descendants des Gaulois. Si l'on veut ressusciter le passé d'un peuple moderne, il ne suffit pas de simples considérations ethnologiques.*
>
> H. Dussauze[61]

The nature of the relationship between the classical and the Celtic was a serious preoccupation in nineteenth-century France, and d'Arbois was explicit about his desire

[58] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 95.
[59] George Russell, *The Inner and the Outer Ireland* (Dublin, 1921), 6-7. Nicholas Allen has analysed *Æ*'s vision of an 'Atlantic Sparta', see Nicholas Allen, *George Russell (Æ) and the New Ireland, 1905-30* (Dublin, 2003), 37. Intriguingly, *Æ*'s vision of the relevance of ancient Greek city-states to modern Ireland inspired Hubert Butler, see Tobin, *The Minority Voice*, 91-92.
[60] Sean O'Faolain, *Vive Moi! An Autobiography* (London, 1965), 201.
[61] H. Dussauze, *La Renaissance du Celtisme* (repr. Nîmes, 1996), 6.

to influence the way that the French nation thought about this pressing question. In order, therefore, to establish the nature of the Revivalists' attitude towards Greece and Ireland, as informed by d'Arbois' scholarship, it is first necessary to consider the context of fraught Graeco-Celtic negotiation in France, within which d'Arbois was working.

Early on in his career, d'Arbois published *Quelques observations sur les six premiers volumes de l'Histoire de France de M. Henri Martin*. His account is '*une éclatante condamnation de la science et de la critique de l'auteur*.'[62] Given that '*les livres d'histoire qui deviennent populaires sont une des puissances les plus redoutables qui existent en ce monde*', there was some urgency, d'Arbois believed, in correcting the impression that Martin's book left on France's notion of the Celts.[63] Henri Martin's history has so far been, d'Arbois explains, '*la principale source des jugements que notre nation portera sur elle-même*.'[64] This is despite its author's overuse of his '*ardente et patriotique imagination*'.[65]

D'Arbois continued to work against such patriotic readings of the French as Celts. By the time of the second edition of his *Les premiers habitants de l'Europe*, he had observed and lost patience with the fact that '*une croyance universellement admise dans la monde lettré…fait des français les fils des gaulois…C'est une idée préconçue'*, he argued, '*que, suivant-moi, la science doit rejeter.*'[66] D'Arbois was waging a war against those Celtic enthusiasts whose quest was for grand ancestors, rather than the truth. He regarded French Celticism as a divided ground, torn between overt nationalism, which relied primarily on the imagination and ingenuity of the author, and what he perceived to be objectivity, relying on critical insight and rigour.

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[62] Henri de L'Épinois, *Critiques et Réfutations: M. Henri Martin et son Histoire de France* (Paris, 1872), 5.
[63] Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Quelques observations sur les six premiers volumes de l'Histoire de France de M. Henri Martin* (Troyes and Paris, 1857), 9.
[64] D'Arbois, *Quelques observations*, 10.
[65] D'Arbois, *Quelques observations*, 31.
[66] Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Les premiers habitants de L'Europe d'après écrivains de l'antiquité et les travaux des linguistes,* two vols (2nd edn, Paris, 1889-94), ii. xi-xii.

His opponents were those romantic historians who, with Martin at their head, were turning to the Celts to find their own roots, in a 'frenzy of Celtic identity'.[67]

D'Arbois' rift can be seen running right through Celticism in France in the nineteenth century, and the stakes were high. As Michael Dietler explains, France had seen since the 1830s a frantic rush to establish 'the Celts as a primary ethnic foundation for the modern French nation'.[68] As Martin argued in the 1870s, for example, the possibility of the encounter between modern France and ancient Gaul – '*notre mère*' – had become a matter of life and death, after *'les catastrophes*' which had befallen France (the Franco-Prussian War).[69] To determine once and for all the Celtic rather than Germanic heritage of France was no longer '*une curiosité d'érudition,*' but instead '*un véritable appui moral*'.[70] '*Comme dans les légendes antiques,*' Martin writes, '*nos devanciers se lèvent, du fond du monument de pierre, pour nous venir en aide.*'[71]

It is a Frenchman, Ernest Renan, who, as is well-known, was responsible for introducing a certain image of the Celts into the world, disseminating the idea of '*l'infinie délicatesse de sentiment qui caractérise la race celtique*'.[72] His essay on '*La poésie des races celtiques*,' first published in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes* of 1854, was 'one of the most influential essays of its time.'[73] It presents a picture of the Celts, which Matthew Arnold would subsequently carry over into Britain and Ireland, as '*une race timide, réservée, vivant toute au dedans, pesante en apparence, mais sentant*

[67] Michael Dietler, '"Our Ancestors the Gauls": Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe', *American Anthropologist*, new series, vol. 96, no. 3 (Sept., 1994), 590.
[68] Dietler, 'Our Ancestors', 588. For another helpful overview of French Celticism, see the essays in Viallaneix and Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*.
[69] Henri Martin, *Histoire de France, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'en 1789*, seventeen vols (4th edn, Paris, 1855), i. xvi; Henri Martin, *Études d'archéologie celtique: notes de voyages dans les pays celtiques et scandinaves* (Paris, 1872), iv.
[70] Martin, *Études d'archéologie celtique*, iv.
[71] Martin, *Études d'archéologie celtique*, iv.
[72] Ernest Renan, 'La poésie des races celtiques' (1854), in Ernest Renan, *Essais de Morale et de Critique* (Paris, 1859), 384.
[73] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 188. For Renan, see also Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 51-81; and Laudyce Retat, 'Les Gaulois et les substitutions d'origine dans la conscience historique de Renan', in Viallaneix and Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*, 339-345.

profondément et portant dans ses instincts religieux une adorable délicatesse.'[74] Such a character could, Renan believed, be most effectively understood by conceiving of the Celts as '*une race essentiellement féminine.*'[75]

Various names are given to the combatants in this struggle between Renan and Martin, on the one hand, and d'Arbois on the other: the *'Celtomanes*,' for example, against the scholars; '*la Celtomanie*' against '*les études celtiques;'* the *école druidique* against the *école critique*; the Celticists against 'romantic Celtolatry', and so on.[76] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar has brilliantly analysed the conflict in terms of 'Celtology' – scholarly and critical, developing from the 1870s with the *Revue celtique* its centre of gravity – and 'Celticism,' romantic and unscientific.[77] In her invaluable study, she elects d'Arbois, with his 'ruthlessness…his merciless dismissal of…specious authenticity,' as the key figure in the split.[78]

It is worth noting briefly, however, that this stark picture can be adjusted somewhat. D'Arbois and his fellow Celtologues were not immune from the criticisms they fired against others. As well as for his overreliance on solar theory and his overenthusiastic etymology, d'Arbois was said to be guilty of the same patriotic blinkering for which he castigates Martin. In a lecture series on 'the somewhat academic origin and growth of the modern Celtic consciousness', Eoin MacNeill included d'Arbois as among the most prominent of 'modern Frenchmen' who, 'though their national name is in origin the name of a Germanic people, show a tendency...to minimise the Germanic element in their composition'.[79] When 'dealing with Caesar's statement that the Belgae were mainly of Germanic origin,' he had, MacNeill argues, sought 'to explain that this was true geographically not ethnographically…Against the

[74] Renan, 'La poésie', 376.
[75] Renan, 'La poésie', 385.
[76] For these terms in the *Revue celtique*, see Henri Gaidoz, 'Adieux au Lecteur', *Revue celtique*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1883-1885), v; Henri Gaidoz, 'Etudes d'Archéologie celtique, notes de voyage dans les pays Scandinaves, par Henri Martin', *Revue celtique*, vol. 1 (1870-1872), 465; Salomon Reinach, 'Esquisse d'une histoire de l'archéologie gauloise (préhistorique, celtique, gallo-romaine et franque)', *Revue celtique*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Apr., 1898), 111. For 'Celtolatry,' see Nutt, 'H. d'Arbois de Jubainville', 277.
[77] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 21-40.
[78] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 61.
[79] Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, 1920), 38, 22.

plain statement of a contemporary observer, such explanations are always to be received with caution.'[80] It is indeed true that in his 1883 *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique*, d'Arbois had proclaimed the Celts to be '*nos ancêtres*'.[81] His desire was then to bind the modern French to those origins, by means of an appeal to blood: '*nous ne pouvons lire*', he claims, '*les guerres des Gaulois contre Rome...sans comprendre qu'il coule dans nos veines plus de sang gaulois que de sang romain'.*[82]

Similarly, although Garrigan Mattar argues that the *Revue celtique* was notable for 'the fastidiousness of its criticism', for its 'unforgiving rigour,' it still contained plenty of articles which spoke from the side of the *école druidique*.[83] David Fitzgerald, for example, criticised several works of d'Arbois, among others, for demonstrating 'the practically stationary position of Celtic studies…The truth is that learned men have been long enough sucking the bone of pure Celtic philology to extract what marrow was to be gotten therefrom, and that if these studies are to advance they must get a different treatment from the treatment now in fashion, which is more arid than the sands of the Libyan desert.' He then constructed a long theory of Irish myth, relying heavily on the Müllerian mythologist George Cox, all based around the stars.[84]

However, what is really worth realising here is that that one locus of fracture in this politically-fraught and long-lasting split in the middle of French Celtic interests is the relationship between the Celtic and the classical. Perhaps above all because of the spectre of Caesar and the Gauls, those who turn to the Celts in France are preoccupied with establishing how they are positioned alongside the classical world. As a result, when Martin and other historians urge their compatriots to stand side-by-side with their Celtic ancestors, they have classical sources and scholarship at the heart of their call. They are negotiating on the same terms as the Celtic-anticeltic debate of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, encountered in Chapters One and Two.[85] While

[80] MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History*, 22.
[81] Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Introduction à l'étude de la littérature celtique* (Paris, 1883), 1.
[82] D'Arbois, *Introduction à l'étude*, 36-37.
[83] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 27, 28.
[84] David Fitzgerald, 'Early Celtic History and Mythology', *Revue celtique*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Sep., 1883), 196.
[85] The peculiarities of the French context makes it necessary to consider Celtic-Roman connections, rather than solely Greek as in other chapters.

the French 'construction of a heroic nationalist myth founded in the Celtic past' is well-studied, the role of the negotiation of the link between the classical and the Celtic is not.[86]

4. French Celticism and classical scholarship

> *it is surprising how many coincidences may be traced between the customs of the Greeks and Romans and those of the Bretons of the present day.*
>
> John Mounteney Jephson[87]

> *That strange tenacity of the Celtic race which makes a description of their habits and propensities when Cæsar was still a Proconsul in Gaul, true in essentials of the Irish people to this day*
>
> Charles Gavan Duffy[88]

> *Still facts are facts*
>
> Samuel Ferguson[89]

a. Sources

The role of classical antiquity in French Celticism can be divided into two broad streams. First, the question of the correct use of classical sources; second, the question of the extent of the Celts' influence over other ancient peoples. In terms of sources, there is a perceptible shift in the *école critique* away from texts and towards

[86] Dietler, 'Our Ancestors the Gauls', 587. Garrigan Mattar does mention the Greek presence in d'Arbois' work, in her discussion of Yeats, but does not engage with the context or significance of these being *classical* comparisons, see Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism,* 62-63.
[87] John Mounteney Jephson, *Narrative of a Walking Tour in Brittany* (London, 1859), 347.
[88] Charles Gavan Duffy ed., *The Ballad Poetry of Ireland* (Dublin, 1845), xxv-xxvi.
[89] Ferguson, 'Betham's *Etruria*', 480.

archaeology. There is a damning assessment in the *Revue celtique*, for example, written by its founder, Henri Gaidoz, of those Celticists who use classical testimony about remote and miraculous islands in the north to refer to Ireland. Their faith, he argues, is too great in *'les écrivains de la Grèce et de Rome*.' '*Faut-il remarquer*', he asks, '*que l'identification d'Irlande avec la fabuleuse Ogygie est purement gratuite, bien qu' O'Flaherty se soit audacieusement emparé de ce nom?*'[90] Faced with the spuriousness of many such claims about the Celts in written sources, the *école critique* advocated a change in focus from text to artefacts. Alexandre Bertrand and Salomon Reinach, in their *Nos Origines II*, warned against putting too much faith in the testimony of classical texts, which were fatally hindered by the crudity of the classical geographers' knowledge about the world. '*Polybe parle de la Gaule centrale et septentrionale*,' they argue, '*comme l'on pouvait, au début du XIXe siècle ou plus tard encore, parler du centre de l'Afrique.*'[91] Reinach similarly, in a note on the equation of the Hyperboreans and the Celts, equated the validity of the observations of the Greek geographers to '*celles qui se produiraient aujourd'hui si des géographes naïfs voulaient appliquer aux nains découverts par Stanley dans bassin du Congo ce que Swift, dans les voyages de Gulliver, raconte des Lilliputiens*.'[92]

The *Celtomanes* were equally concerned, however, with how the testimony of the Classics reflected on France's past. Most of all, they endeavoured to speak up against the 'classical conceptualization' of the Celts, the categories of civilised and other imposed by Graeco-Roman antiquity.[93] As a result of the bias of the Greeks and Romans, the Celts had been denigrated by history and brushed aside by the world. This can be seen right from the beginning, in the words of Chateaubriand, the usher of Romanticism in France. He proclaimed that from the very first instant they came across the Celtic race, the Romans '*déclarèrent qu'elle était née pour la ruine des villes*

[90] Henri Gaidoz, 'Du prétendu nom d'Ile Sacrée anciennement donné à l'Irlande', *Revue celtique*, vol. 2 (1873-5), 352.
[91] Alexandre Bertrand and Salomon Reinach, *Nos Origines II: Les Celtes dans les Vallées du Pô et du Danube* (Paris, 1894), 6.
[92] Salomon Reinach, 'Les Hyperboréens', *Revue celtique*, vol. 12 (1891), 166.
[93] Dietler, 'Our Ancestors the Gauls', 586.

et la destruction du genre humain.'[94] The other major inspiration of the romantic Celtic age, Théophile Malo de la Tour d'Auvergne Corret (laurelled by Napoleon and hailed by Martin as '*notre héroïque La Tour D'Auvergne*') was also suspicious of classical testimony.[95] His aim in turning to the Celts – '*le service que j'eusse tenté de rendre à ma patrie*'[96] – was to '*ressusciter la langue des Celtes nos ancêtres*' and '*rétablir enfin sur la liste des Nations, les Gaulois, ce peuple célèbre qui sembloit en avoir été effacé*'.[97] Such a task was made infinitely harder, however, because of his dependance on Roman sources. As he explains, '*les Romains jaloux de fixer sur eux seuls l'admiration et l'étonnement de la postérité, n'ont laissé que des notions imparfaites des peuples dont ils avoient triomphé, et sur-tout des Gaulois, ces rivaux redoutables qui ensanglantèrent si souvent leurs lauriers*.'[98]

Similarly, Amédée Thierry's *Histoire des Gaulois*, which was Martin's major source for his Celts and which went into its tenth edition in the 1870s, chooses as the '*héros*' of its story, the people of Gaul, on the grounds that they are '*le plus important et le plus curieux de tous ceux que les Grecs et les Romains désignaient sous le nom de* barbares'.[99] Again and again, revivers of the Celtic past perceive that '*la renommée de l'ancienne splendeur celtique, ne rencontra point…de plus grand obstacle que l'orgueil des Grecs et des Romains…Du fond de leurs tombeaux, ces Grecs et ces Romains persécutent encore ces Celtes qui les précédèrent et leur survivent*.'[100] The same tension, evident in the antiquarians studied in Chapters One and Two, arises here, however. Several of these *Celtomanes* rely on classical sources just as much as they dismiss them from the record. Despite his mistrust of Roman solipsism, La Tour d'Auvergne, for example, has Caesar for his principal source, '*dont les ouvrages ont*

[94] Chateaubriand, 'Sur Les Mémoires de Louis XIV' (1806), quoted in Viallaneix and Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*, 146.
[95] Martin, *L'Histoire de France*, i. vii.
[96] Théophile Malo de La Tour d'Auvergne Corret, *Nouvelles Recherches sur la Langue, l'Origine & les Antiquités des Bretons, pour servir à l'Histoire de ce Peuple* (Bayonne, 1792), v-vi.
[97] La Tour d'Auvergne, *Nouvelles Recherches*, v.
[98] La Tour d'Auvergne, *Nouvelles Recherches*, 9.
[99] Amédée Thierry, *Histoire des Gaulois, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à l'entière soumission de la Gaule à la domination Romaine*, three vols (Paris, 1828), i. i.
[100] Joseph Lavallée, *Discours Préliminaire*, quoted in Reinach, 'Esquisse d'une histoire', 115.

acquis tant de droits à notre confiance, et le guide le plus sûr que l'on puisse suivre dans les routes obscures de l'histoire de la partie occidentale de l'Europe'.[101]

b. Celtic empire or isolation

The manner in which the Celts and the Greeks or Romans moved around each other's world is the second way in which an engagement with Classics is a necessary element in the pursuits of these Celticists. For Renan, the crucial circumstance of the Celtic world, hemmed in by the sea ('*un cercle d'éternels gémissements*'), was its isolation, its immunity against foreign contaminants: '*jamais famille humaine n'a vécu plus isolée du monde et plus pure de tout mélange étranger.*'[102] This self-containment led to the '*traits principaux du caractère de la race Celtique*': timidity combined with staunch independence, imaginative power combined with an inability to engage in the realities of political life: '*la race celtique s'est usée à résister au temps et à défendre les causes désespérées. Il ne semble pas qu'à aucune époque elle ait eu d'aptitude pour la vie politique…Il ne semble pas aussi que les peuples qui la composent soient par eux-mêmes susceptibles de progrès*.'[103] Their isolation renders them all but useless in the actual affairs of the world; preoccupied with the troubles of the past or with the lamentation of the dead, they are incapable of pragmatic action.

In stark contrast, several *Celtomanes* stress the enormous sphere of influence of the Celt, across wide swathes of the ancient world, envisioning a form of ancient Celtic empire. Thierry, for example, imagines his hero embracing the entirety of '*l'Europe, l'Asie et l'Afrique*.' He describes how the Celtic race '*brûle Rome; elle enlève la Macédoine aux vieilles phalanges d'Alexandre, force les Thermopyles et pille Delphes; puis elle va planter ses tentes sur les ruines de l'ancienne Troie, dans les places publiques de Milet, aux bords du Sangarius et à ceux de Nil; elle assiège Carthage, menace Memphis, compte parmi ses tributaires les plus puissan monarques*

[101] La Tour d'Auvergne, *Nouvelles Recherches*, 39.
[102] Renan, 'La poésie', 376, 380.
[103] Renan, 'La poésie', 381, 383.

de l'Orient.'[104] He then argues for the existence of '*la Méditeranée gauloise*' and of '*Gallo-Grèce'*.[105] Thus the Celts are physically connected with the classical world, bestowing on them a power that crucially contradicts the passivity of Renan's Celts, isolated in their corner of northern Europe.

Similarly, Martin's vision of the ancestors of the French is above all of '*cette brillante race gauloise, qui a sillonné l'ancien monde en tous sens*', '*les hordes conquérantes des Gaulois en Espagne, en Italie, en Grèce, en Asie*'.[106] While Renan extols the pristine purity of the Celtic race, Martin, by contrast, finds the Celt's connectedness – '*fils des Gaulois par la naissance et par le caractère, fils des Romains par l'éducation*' – to be the secret of French success: '*tel devait être le théâtre préparé par la Providence pour une nation destinée à être le lien du faisceau européen et l'initiatrice de la civilisation moderne*'.[107]

With a slightly different approach, *'l'obscur H. Dussauze*' who wrote *La Renaissance du Celtisme* in 1898, argued that when he compares '*l'état misérable des peuples restés purement celtiques avec l'état d'avancement et le haut degré de civilisation de la France*,' he finds that the Roman conquest did much for France: '*grâce à la conquête romaine, nous nous sommes élevés d'un bond au point de développement qu'un peuple avait mis des siècles à atteindre; à l'introduction relativement reculée de la civilisation romaine en Gaule, nous devons d'avoir précédé l'Europe dans le chemin du progrès*.'[108]

Alongside such arguments for Celtic influence based on conquest and migration, La Tour d'Auvergne, who was from Brittany, argued for Celtic power over the rest of Europe through the medium of language. He argued that the 'Celto-Scythian' language was the source of a multitude of other languages of the world, including Greek ('*cette langue si douce, si harmonieuse*'), and that it had been

[104] Thierry, *Histoire des Gaulois*, i. vi-vii.
[105] Thierry, *Histoire des Gaulois,* iii. 20, 347. Cf. Diod. 5.32.5 on Ἑλληνογαλάται, and Strabo on the Celts as φιλέλληνες, Str. 4.4.6
[106] Martin, *Histoire de France*, i. 1-2, 30.
[107] Martin, *Histoire de France*, i. viii-ix.
[108] Viallaneix and Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*, 391; Dussauze, *La Renaissance*, 7-8. Cf. 16.

preserved in perfect relic in the Breton tongue.[109] For the most part, he relied on Caesar for clues into the nature of this Celtic language, establishing Celto-Scythian through a '*Glossaire polyglotte'*, a comparison of etymology which Jean Balcou describes as a '*jeu des monosyllabes à assembler; jeu des patronymes à décomposer*', full of '*confusionnisme et vertige*.'[110]

Brittany is often elected as the sole safeguard of this Celtic-Classical sphere of influence, as evident in La Tour d'Auvergne, as well as the Abbé Pezron (although Renan stressed the isolation of his fellow Bretons, '*une antique race…dans quelques îles et presqu'îles perdues de l'Occident*').[111] Georges Dottin, who was the chair of Greek and Latin literature at Rennes and a translator of Douglas Hyde into French, noted the Celticist tendency to believe that, '*en étudiant la Bretagne du XX^e^ siècle, on reconstituerait sans grand'peine la Gaule du temps de César*'.[112] Crucially, one of the most renowned nineteenth-century scholars working to revive the Breton tradition, Anatole Le Braz, was regarded as a Breton version of d'Arbois, a bridge between the Celtic and the classical.

'*Historien de la littérature, folkloriste, romancier, poète*', Le Braz's work is frequently situated in a comparative framework.[113] His most popular work, for example, and the one which 'established his reputation abroad', was a collection of Breton ghost stories exploring Celtic beliefs about the afterlife, *La Légende de la mort en Basse-Bretagne*.[114] Its first edition, published in 1893, contains an introduction which positions these stories as versions of '*des mythes cosmiques*' or, perhaps, of '*des contes d'aventures analogues aux contes grecs de* Persée *ou de* Jason'.[115] In a new edition of 1902, Georges Dottin focused on the timeworn question of whether the Celts possessed a Pythagorean notion of metempsychosis. He referred the reader to

[109] La Tour d'Auvergne, *Nouvelles Recherches*, 52.
[110] Jean Balcou, 'La Tour d'Auvergne, théoricien breton du mythe gaulois', in Viallaneix and Ehrard eds., *Nos Ancêtres les Gaulois*, 111.
[111] Renan, 'La poésie', 376.
[112] Georges Dottin, 'La Bretagne et le culte du passé', *Rentrée Solennelle de l'université de Rennes* (6 Nov., 1903), 11.
[113] Georges Dottin, 'Anatole Le Braz', *Annales de Bretagne*, vol. 37, no. 3-4 (1925), 459.
[114] Charles A. Bruce, 'Introduction', in Anatole Le Braz, *Contes Bretons* (London, 1935), viii.
[115] Léon Marillier, 'Introduction', in Anatole Le Braz, *La légende de la mort en Basse-Bretagne* (Paris, 1893), lxvi.

d'Arbois, and especially to '*les nombreux rapports qu'il a été le premier à signaler entre la légende irlandaise et la légende hellénique*'. He also cited '*le remarquable ouvrage de A. Nutt*' on Irish-Greek beliefs about the soul.[116]

As the *Washington Post* had done about d'Arbois, Dottin, elsewhere, noted the '*mélanges'* in Le Braz's thought and life between his classical education and his Celtic preoccupations: '*renouvelant le miracle qui s'était accompli lors de l'union de l'âme gauloise avec l'esprit romain, il avait si bien incorporé à sa nature propre les éléments de la civilisation classique, que les critiques à venir ne pourront pas, quelque minutieuse que soit leur analyse, les dissocier*.'[117] Specifically, Dottin used the foundation myth of Marseille, the marriage of the Greek Protis to the Celtic Gyptis, as an emblem of the syncretic work of this '*grand écrivain breton qui avait harmonieusement uni en lui-même la pensée des Anciens et l'imagination celtique*.'[118]

The dissemination and reception of Le Braz's work demonstrate that, by the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, an essential question for French Celtic thinkers, not only in Celtology but also in Celticism, and not only in archaeology but also in revenant antiquarianism, was how the Celtic world was or could be positioned alongside classical antiquity. To be 'Celtic' was, inherently and necessarily, to be angled somehow or other against or alongside what it was to be 'classical.' Crucially, these debates were about to wash up at the shores of the Irish Literary Revival, which was, in large part, a movement to re-calculate the angle between Ireland and the rest of the world.

5. D'Arbois and W.B. Yeats

> *my Crow is Bran of the Tower Ravens. Bran who was Apollo (a Crow God) plus his son, the Crow demi-god Ascelpius [sic] the Healer*

[116] Georges Dottin, 'Introduction', in Anatole Le Braz, *La légende de la mort chez les Bretons armoricains*, two vols. (Paris, 1902), i. xvii.
[117] Dottin, 'Anatole Le Braz', 465, 472.
[118] Dottin, 'Anatole Le Braz', 472.

(whose mother was the white Crow Goddess Coronis), was the god-king, a crow god, of early Britain, where he was also the Ilud who was Llyr who was Lear…

Ted Hughes[119]

The symbols they use are symbols of symbols.

Isaac Rosenberg[120]

'There is indeed no school for literary Ireland just now like the school of folk-lore', argued W.B. Yeats in 1894. He then cited the Müllerian articles of David Fitzgerald from the *Revue celtique*, naming him as one of Ireland's most important teachers.[121] Yeats had also turned to Fitzgerald earlier in the decade, in a review of Hyde's *Beside the Fire*, arguing that 'our new-wakened interest in the impossible has been of the greatest service to Irish folk-literature.'[122] He continued to make frequent use of the journal in several articles and reviews, highlighting the fact that the *Revue celtique*, whatever its rigour, was not only read by scholars interested in critical precision and objective truth, but by poets, artists and activists interested in reviving Ireland's Celtic past.

Yeats himself was particularly alert to the implications of such Celtic scholarship for Ireland. He provides an illuminating example with which to close this chapter, of how such scholarship might find its way into literature, how it forms and is formed by the wider circumstances of a writer's imaginative life. D'Arbois' Graeco-Celtic comparative mythology, his equation of Homeric and Irish heroes and his implication that Ireland was about to enter its dramatic stage, all had a great influence on Yeats's work.

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[119] Ted Hughes, 'Single Vision and Newton's Sleep in John Carey', quoted in Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London, 2015), 470.
[120] Isaac Rosenberg, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*, eds. Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding (London, 1937), 250.
[121] Yeats, 'The Evangel of Folk-lore' (1894), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 327.
[122] Yeats, 'Irish Folk Tales' (1891), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 187.

Yeats declared *Le cycle mythologique* to be 'so important that no right knowledge of Irish legend is possible without it,' placing it in his trilogy of essential reading for Irish legend in the company of Nutt's 'Happy Otherworld' essay and Rhys's Hibbert lectures.[123] Particularly, as Garrigan Mattar has pointed out, 'from the time when Yeats became more specific about de Jubainville's researches, it was his comparison of primitive Celtic and Greek myth that caught his attention.'[124]

For this interest, Garrigan Mattar cites Yeats's essay 'The Tribes of Danu,' published in *The New Review* in November 1897 and the fruit of folklore gathering with Augusta Gregory in Galway. She notices, moreover, that here Yeats 'distorts de Jubainville to give the Celts precedence.'[125] 'The Country of the Young,' Yeats writes, 'as the poets call their country, is indeed the country of bodiless beauty that was among the Celtic races, and of which (if D'Arbois de Jubainville has written correctly) the Greek mythology and all that came of it were but the beautiful embodiment'.[126] In the same essay, Yeats also compares the nomenclature of Greek and Irish supernatural figures – 'the Galway peasant, like the Greek peasant,' he writes, name their gods '"the Others"'.[127] When he reviewed Nutt's *The Voyage of Bran*, he read the significance of d'Arbois' comparatism in a similar way. 'Celtic legends are,' he argues, '…our principal way to an understanding of the beliefs out of which the beliefs of Greeks and other European races arose.'[128]

The solar framework which supported d'Arbois comparisons also appears in Yeats's 1889 essay on 'Irish Fairies, Ghosts, Witches, etc,' in which he describes how 'once upon a time the Celtic nations worshipped gods of the light, called in Ireland Tuath-de-Danan and corresponding to Jupiter and his fellows, and gods of the great darkness corresponding to the Saturnian Titans.'[129] As Yeats wrote in 1890, 'the whole science of folk-lore has grown more imaginative these last twenty years', a movement he ascribed in part to 'Joubainville', who has 'made us see in all these things old

[123] Yeats, 'The Message of the Folklorist', 387.
[124] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 62.
[125] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 62.
[126] Yeats, 'The Tribes of Danu' (1897), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume Two*, 58.
[127] Yeats, The Tribes of Danu', 59.
[128] Yeats, 'Celtic Beliefs about the Soul', 119.
[129] Yeats, 'Irish Fairies, Ghosts, Witches, etc' (1889), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 137.

beautiful mythologies wherein ancient man said symbolically all he knew about God and man's soul'.[130]

Yeats absorbed the ideas of d'Arbois and the other contributors to the *Revue celtique* during the last decade of the nineteenth century, when he was spending much of his time in Paris, in the company of Maud Gonne, devising a system of Celtic Mysteries.[131] He hoped that the Mysteries – devised, as Roy Foster explains, through a combination of reading, 'visionary experiments,' and 'notebooks…filled with evocations and correspondences' – would give him, in Yeats's own words, 'an orderly background to work upon.'[132] In a similar way, Yeats would later strengthen his poetry by means of the intricate framework of *A Vision,* taking advantage of 'those hard symbolic bones under the skin'.[133] Gonne translated d'Arbois' work for the notes to Yeats's *The Wind Among the Reeds* and together, in Paris, they searched for this orderly foundation, by scrutinising d'Arbois' parallelism between Greek and Celtic mythology.[134]

The Symbolists are clearly close to the surface here; the move, as Arthur Symons put it, to 'spiritualise literature' to the point of religion, 'with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.'[135] According to Symons, Yeats was his 'one perfectly sympathetic reader,' and several scholars have since pointed to the interrelation of Celtic themes and Symbolism in Yeats's late nineteenth-century

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[130] W.B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, eds. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer (Basingstoke, and New York, 1989), 29.
[131] For Maud Gonne's circle in Paris, see Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalism Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 2013), 39. The other key figure was the occultist Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, 'a celtic enthusiast who spends most of his day in highland costume', and 'would come down to breakfast one day with his Horace, the next day with his Macpherson's Ossian, and read out fragments'. W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats. Volume II 1896-1900,* eds. Warwick Gould et al. (Oxford, 1997) 215; Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 257.
[132] Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life. I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford, 1997), 186; Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 229.
[133] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London, 1962), 24.
[134] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 130; Gonne in MacBride White and Norman Jeffares eds., *The Gonne-Yeats Letters*, 134. Yeats also sent both Rhys and Nutt's essay in *The Voyage of Bran* to MacGregor Mathers, to suggest 'parallels.' See a letter from MacGregor Mathers (6 Apr., 1898), in Richard J. Finneran et al. eds., *Letters to W.B. Yeats* (London and Basingstoke, 1977), i. 35.
[135] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1899), 9-10.

thought.[136] Scott Ashley, for example, in his important essay on Celticism and the *fin de siècle*, has analysed how Yeats's 'heady mix of symbolist mysticism and the occult' in the 1890s was shot through at the same time with a primitivist Celticism.[137] This led him to search in the west of Ireland for 'the wellsprings of the modern world.'[138] John Brannigan has pointed out that Yeats's other haunt in the 1890s, the meetings of the Rhymers' Club in London, was not only steeped in Celtic enthusiasm but was also, in part through the presence of Arthur Symons, 'a conduit for French symbolism to work its way through to Anglo-American modernism'.[139]

Greek antiquity is the third point in this *fin-de-siècle* constellation of symbol and Celt. As Fiona Macintosh has demonstrated, the Symbolists were deeply interested in Greek mythology, 'with their resistance to scientific clarity and their discovery of what they designated the inner realism of ancient myth.'[140] D'Arbois' mode of comparative Celtic and Greek scholarship was a crucial part of Yeats's 'heady mix' in Paris. More generally, Garrigan Mattar has pointed out that 'there is much to thank de Jubainville for if he authorized the manifold mythological comparativism of Yeats's poetry.' 'Helen', she argues, 'really *should* be seen within the archetype of womanhood to which Deirdre also belonged, if the logic of de Jubainville's comparativism be translated into a literary mythography.'[141]

Yeats's lasting desire to rank mythology and symbol in order 'in his systematic way,'[142] and so make himself a world of thought to move in, is therefore, in large and important part, a drive to understand how Celtic aligns with Greek. His reading of d'Arbois and others bestowed upon his vision of Ireland an angle of incidence against a vision of Greece, allowing not only for his Symbolist reading of mythology, but also his

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[136] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement* (1899), vi.
[137] Scott Ashley, 'Primitivism, Celticism and morbidity in the Atlantic *fin de siècle*', in Patrick McGuinness ed., *Symbolism, Decadence and the* Fin de siècle*: French and European Perspectives* (Exeter, 2000), 181.
[138] Ashley, 'Primitivism, Celticism and morbidity', 180.
[139] Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 28.
[140] Fiona Macintosh, 'The French Oedipus of the inter-war period', in Edith Hall and Simon Goldhill eds., *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition* (Cambridge, 2009), 162.
[141] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 63.
[142] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 501.

creation of a 'series of eccentric, home-made frames', as Louis MacNeice put it, an ordering mechanism through which to view the world and transform it in language.[143]

The zenith of Yeats's comparatism comes, perhaps, in the second half of the year 1896. First of all, he had his famous 'archer vision.' By repeating to himself 'the names associated with the moon in the cabbalistic tree of life,' he saw a vision of 'a galloping centaur, and a moment later a naked woman of incredible beauty', which he then, as Foster writes, 'conflated into the image of a marvellously beautiful woman archer shooting at a star.'[144] He wrote extensive notes on the vision, with the help, as Yeats recalled, of 'a man learned in East Mediterranean antiquities' (Vacher Burch), analysing its symbolism and interpreting it as a manifestation of 'the Mother-Goddess, whose representative priestess shot the arrow at the child, whose sacrificial death symbolized the death and resurrection of the Tree-spirit, or Apollo.'[145]

The vision itself and Yeats's writings about it are a paradigm of a certain type of comparatism, and a certain mode of Graeco-Celtic relations. Images and symbols spiral off between different traditions and ages, by virtue of a perceived similarity or correspondence between them. The notes are a manifestation of what Symons called the 'dutiful waiting upon every symbol', a vertiginous spider web spanning Devonshire apple orchards, Minoan Crete, Scandinavia, the tree of life of the Kabbalah, ancient Athens and Frazer's grove at Nemi. The woman is 'the Mother Goddess,' 'but she is also Artemis'.[146] To borrow a phrase from Walter Pater, the notes create an 'almost visible symbolism'.[147] This expansion, the ability of one symbol to be both itself and another at the same time, is propelled, above all, by Yeats's immersion in the Butlerian

[143] Louis MacNeice, 'Subject in Modern Poetry' (1937), in *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Alan Heuser (Oxford, 1987), 65.
[144] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 280; Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 165. For the vision, see also William F. Halloran, 'W.B. Yeats and William Sharp: The Archer Vision', *English Language Notes*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Jun., 1969), 273-280.
[145] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 485, 486.
[146] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement* (1899), 10; Yeats, *Autobiographies,* 486.
[147] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, two vols (London, 1900), i. 38.

tradition of jigsaw puzzle addicts, of which d'Arbois (notwithstanding his scholarly rigour) was a crucial part.[148]

As Yeats put it later, 'every symbol…has evoked for me some form of human destiny, and that form, once evoked, has appeared everywhere, as if there were but one destiny, as my own form might appear in a room full of mirrors.'[149] There is an echo here of George Eliot writing about Casaubon, as a comparatist for whom, 'lost among small closets and winding stairs,' 'the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible, nay, luminous with the light of reflected correspondences.'[150] This labyrinthine comparatism is what John Pinkerton, encountered in Chapter Two, objected to as 'a kind of phantasmagoria…a dark mirror.' The best term for it is, perhaps, a vortex, according to the definition of Ezra Pound as 'a radiant node or cluster…from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.' 'In decency', Pound says, 'one can only call it a VORTEX.'[151] As part of the same 'radiant node' which was preoccupying French Celticists, negotiating the angle between Celtic France and the classical world, Ireland and Greece are, in Yeats's work and others, connected to one another in a vortex of antiquities.

[148] Cf. Warwick Gould on the importance of Frazerian theory to Yeats's poem 'Parnell's Funeral,' in Robert Fraser ed., *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence* (Basingstoke, 1990), 141-143.
[149] Yeats, *A Vision*, 213-214.
[150] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 214, 23.
[151] Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (London, 1916), 106. See Richard Ellmann on vortex as a Yeatsian word, *The Identity of Yeats* (repr. London, 1968), 152-156.

Chapter Six

Graeco-Celtic comparatism, the Aran Islands and J.M. Synge

1. Introduction

Christ himself must have been one of the followers of Aengus. Has not somebody identified him with Hermes?
W.B. Yeats[1]

Surely your thoughts are of Pan, or of Wotan, or Dana?
Padraic Colum[2]

Five months after his vision of the centaur and the star, Yeats met J.M. Synge, a 'saturnine young fellow-Irishman'.[3] 'William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge', writes Roy Foster, 'were thrown together by circumstance, and remain welded by literary history'.[4] This encounter, as Ann Saddlemyer suggests, 'reads like a fairy tale and has often been turned into one.'[5]

It took place in Paris on 21st December 1896, at the Hôtel Corneille, 'a bohemian resort with Balzacian associations'.[6] 'I was staying in a students' hotel in the Latin Quarter,' Yeats recalled, in his 1905 preface to Synge's play *The Well of the Saints*, 'and somebody, whose name I cannot recollect, introduced me to an Irishman, who, even poorer than myself, had taken a room at the top of the house. It was J.M.

[1] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 444.
[2] Padraic Colum, 'The Plougher', in *Poems* (London, 1932), 81.
[3] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 172.
[4] Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, 195.
[5] Ann Saddlemyer, '"A Share in the Dignity of the World": J.M. Synge's Aesthetic Theory', in Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer eds., *The World of W.B. Yeats: Essays in Perspective* (Victoria, 1965), 242.
[6] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 172.

Synge…He told me that he had been living in France and Germany, reading French and German literature, and that he wished to become a writer.'[7]

W.I. Thompson describes how Yeats, 'forever in a court in his imagination…had a grand way of turning his friends into knights for the crusade.'[8] In the first few years of their acquaintance, this new friend Synge appeared to him under the banner of a scholar, a potential linguist and folklorist who could contribute his learning to the Revival's understanding of the Celtic past; in 1899 he told Gregory that Synge 'works very hard…He will be a very useful scholour [sic].'[9] Yeats's intuition was not wrong. Synge's notebooks from the 1880s and 1890s reveal a focused interest in scholarship, particularly in Classics, Irish history, folklore, mythology and languages.

By the time Yeats first encountered him, a large part of Synge's life had been spent learning languages, including Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Irish and German while at Trinity College Dublin, and, later, Old Irish and Breton. His notebooks contain dozens of quotations from Greek and Latin literature, lists of classical texts he had read – Homer, Pindar, Herodotus, the Greek tragedians, Demosthenes, Lucretius, Cicero, Virgil, Horace and Juvenal – and a catalogue of etymological gleanings from Archbishop Trench's *On the Study of Words.* 'Candidate = candidus, from the white toga,' Synge notes. 'Caprice, from capra, observe its movements…Church = Κυριακή…Fancy from φαντασία…Panic from the god Pan.'[10]

Around this time, as Synge recalls in a draft essay, he was also 'touched by antiquarian passion.' 'I used to wander many miles,' he describes, 'to seek the vestige of some tiny church gloating on its few fragments with more joy than I have felt since at Rome or Amiens.'[11] He also read and made very detailed notes on George Thomas Stokes' *Ireland and the Celtic Church* and William Stokes' *Life of Petrie*.[12] He read Petrie's notorious study of the round towers of Ireland in 1895 and again, it seems, in

[7] Yeats, 'Preface to the First Edition of *The Well of the Saints'*, in *Essays and Introductions*, 298. He retold the story in his 1923 Nobel Prize speech, see Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 415-416.
[8] W.I. Thompson, *The Imagination of an Insurrection* (New York and London, 1967), 47.
[9] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 359.
[10] TCD MS 4373, ff. 23r, 27r, 31r.
[11] TCD MS 4385, f. 3v.
[12] TCD MS 4373 ff. 11v-13r; TCD MS 4375, ff. 58r-46v.

1897 soon after leaving Paris.[13] His notes on the Hebrew lectures at Trinity refer to one of the favoured subjects of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century antiquarianism, as encountered in Chapter One in the context of Vallancey. 'In one of the plays of Plautus,' Synge wrote, 'a Carthaginian is introduced speaking his native tongue, this is found to be Hebrew, the Phoenicians having come from Palestine to Carthage.'[14] The same lecture notes also reaffirm his interest in the multilingualism of Trench: 'stone inscription east of Persia', he writes, 'records the deeds of Darius the Great in the three great languages.'[15]

Synge's pursuit of archaeological and antiquarian enthusiasms provoked the disapproval of his mother, an unyieldingly strict Protestant, who, according to Synge's nephew and biographer, Edward Stephens, regarded 'the reverence of the people for ancient monuments…as superstition.' She 'thought it better to forgo historical research than to awaken, round relics of antiquity, memories which might inspire disturbances of the law and order that the Protestant minority was trying to enforce throughout the country.'[16] They were also, as Declan Kiberd has shown, 'undertaken entirely on his own initiative, for there was no course in archaeology at Trinity College.'[17]

Most importantly of all, Synge had a close and fruitful association with Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville. He was introduced to the French scholar by Maud Gonne and, 'after a while,' as Synge told his friend Stephen MacKenna, 'we became great palls [sic] and he took [me] up often into his room to hunt up hidden roots, or to feed richly and drink champagne with his sons and grandsons' [*Letters I*, 56].[18] In 1902, he would also attend d'Arbois' lectures on Old Irish at the Sorbonne; he wrote that year to Gregory to tell her that d'Arbois had 'come to see me the other day to ask me to go

[13] TCD MS 4373 ff. 13r-18v; TCD MS 4416, f. 92v; TCD MS 4418, f. 44r.
[14] TCD MS 4374, ff. 70v-70r.
[15] TCD MS 4374, f. 71r.
[16] Edward Stephens, *My Uncle John: Edward Stephen's Life of J.M. Synge,* ed. Andrew Carpenter (London, 1974), 48.
[17] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 28.
[18] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 32.

and give them the pronunciation of modern Irish' [*Letters I*, 55]. 'Do you mean,' Synge's cousin asked him, 'to be the first professor of Celtic literature at Oxford?'[19]

In the middle of this scholarly apprenticeship, a year and a half after meeting Yeats, Synge left for the Aran Islands. For a Revivalist like Synge, these islands off the west coast of Ireland, home to a traditional, Irish-speaking community, were, as Scott Ashley explains, 'a trial run for a future Ireland'. In their perceived isolation, they had become 'a magnetic place where some of the possibilities of nationalist dreams were played out.'[20] After this initial visit, Synge would return every year until 1902, in summer or autumn, would set one of his plays on the islands, and write a 'topographical book'[21] about them, which he deemed his 'first serious piece of work' [*Prose,* 47].

Synge's decision to make this journey, which he recorded in his 'diary French' – 'dans le batteau à Arranmore à Hôtel' – has long been seen as a momentous step in the path of Irish and world theatre.[22] 'Synge's visit to the Aran Islands in 1898,' wrote Stephens, 'must be one of the most remarkable examples on record of how a sudden immersion in a new environment converted a man of ostensibly mediocre talent…into a writer of genius.'[23] According to Yeats, it entailed 'an aesthetic transformation, analogous to religious conversion'.[24]

Several scholars have recently qualified this dramatic narrative, and attention has turned to the less abrupt ramifications of Synge's time on Aran. Similarly, although *The Aran Islands*, Synge's 'topographical' account, was valued on its eventual publication in 1907 for what it could tell about his growth into a playwright – as early as 1911, Mary Colum saw it as the 'notebooks of his plays' – it is now attracting attention among scholars as a significant work in its own right.[25] What has not been

[19] Letter from Emily Synge, quoted in Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 29.
[20] Ashley, 'Primitivism, Celticism and morbidity', 189.
[21] TCD MS 4405, f. 8r.
[22] W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge* (London, 2000), 198.
[23] David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, *J.M. Synge. 1871-1909* (New York, 1961), 83.
[24] Yeats, *A Vision*, 167. Cf. Synge's most recent biographer, who argues that 'the Abbey Theatre would have been unthinkable without his decision', McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 193.
[25] Mary Colum, 'John Synge', *The Irish Review*, vol. 1 (Mar., 1911), 40.

fully appreciated, however, either in scholarship on Synge's Aran or in the effort to gradate the stark, Yeatsian picture of his island experience, is that Synge was journeying to an archipelago that had been, and would continue to be, defined, judged and marginalised by means of comparisons with ancient Greece.[26]

By the time Synge visited the Aran Islands in the last years of the nineteenth century, they had become, according to John Brannigan, 'the most over-signified, symbolically loaded location in Ireland, and perhaps even the British Isles.'[27] A great deal of their symbolic load, and their 'over-signification' by this period, was their aptness for Hellenic parallels. And Synge was primed to be alert to this potential. During his Aran years, he pursued a determined course of reading in Graeco-Celtic comparatism, of which his association with d'Arbois is just the beginning. As a result, the notes and manuscripts of *The Aran Islands* display a consistent interest in this school of thought. In the final published version, however, Synge all but eliminated this comparative lens. Such a deliberate and unexpected absence is worth scrutinising.

In order to demonstrate, and to a certain extent explain, Synge's elusive technique in *The Aran Islands* (a technique which will reappear in his plays), this chapter will investigate the prevalence of Greek comparisons in the intellectual and literary history of Aran Island identity, outlining the key ways in which the islands are defined in relation to Greece. It will then explore Synge's immersion in the scholarly tradition of comparing Greek and Celtic traditions. The next chapter will build on these foundations. It will investigate the unexpected, laconic technique with which he puts all this to use in *The Aran Islands*. It will argue that Synge here transforms many centuries of Graeco-Celtic comparatism into a new mode of using the ancient past in modern literature.

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[26] For studies of *The Aran Islands*, see especially Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 420-439; Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London and Basingstoke, 1975), 19-40; Ashley, 'Primitivism, Celticism and Morbidity', 175-193; Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 142-148; David Fitzpatrick, 'Synge and modernity', in Cliff and Grene eds., *Synge and Edwardian Ireland*, 121-151; and Allen, 'Synge, reading and archipelago', 159-171.

[27] Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 37. For another study of Synge's work from this archipelagic perspective, see Allen, 'Synge, reading and archipelago', 159-171. Cf. Güthenke's account of the use of 'the archipelago model' in comparisons between ancient Greece and Germany in the eighteenth century. Güthenke, *Placing Modern Greece*, 68. Cf. 64-65.

2. Greece and the Aran Islands

The man who cast an ember from the bonfire
Into the garden outside his door
…fulfilled the dictate of a custom
That made one clan
Of all the tillers of the soil
From India to Sruthán
Máirtín Ó Direáin[28]

Homer, whose geography may be said without hesitation to have been related to the regions of the Atlantic Ocean and in no sense whatever to the Mediterranean
Comyns Beaumont[29]

I made a tour to Ithaca (which you will take to be Ireland)
Lord Byron[30]

a. Aran and Homer

'I have had a breathless autumn,' declared Yeats, as he looked back at the final months of 1896.[31] Before moving to Paris and meeting Synge for the first time, and immediately after his archer vision, he had set out 'in a fishing boat' bound for the Aran Islands, 'determined to be impressed by Celtic glamour.'[32]

[28] Máirtín Ó Direáin, 'The Yoke of Custom', in *Selected Poems*, trans. Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy (Newbridge, 1984), 115.
[29] Comyns Beaumont, *Britain – The Key to World History* (London, 1949), 27.
[30] Byron, letter to Augusta Leigh from Cephalonia (12 Oct., 1823), in R.G. Howarth ed., *The Letters of George Gordon 6th Lord Byron* (London, 1936), 359.
[31] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 72.
[32] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 47; Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 164.

Yeats was trying to write a novel about the islands, *The Speckled Bird,* but it was causing him great trouble. He was struggling to find a structure: 'helpless', he described in his autobiography, 'to create artistic…order'. 'I outrun my strength', he complained. 'It is not so much that I choose too many elements, as that the possible unities themselves seem without number'.[33] It remains unfinished, but in the draft versions there are a few, tantalising comparisons of these Irish islands with Homeric Greece. As Kiberd explains, Yeats was a writer 'capable of looking at the west of Ireland and seeing – Greece.'[34]

In one version of the novel, its protagonist Michael, a thinly-veiled version of Yeats, admires the Aran fishermen because 'they talk of the same things the shepherds talked of before there was a town in all Europe.' 'To do that', he proclaims, 'is to have the wisdom of Odysseus'.[35] In another, he recognises 'the unclouded eyes of the ancient people who…died gladly for Helen or for Deirdre.'[36] He then describes the islanders, 'whose own grave gestures and solemn footsteps had a mournful and ancient dignity'.[37]

As Yeats wrote in a letter to Fiona Macleod, *The Speckled Bird* is 'a novel, which moves between the Islands of Arran & Paris'.[38] Yeats's use of Homer is, most of all, an application of what he learnt in the French capital to what he experienced on the remote Irish archipelago. As he writes of Michael, mythology had always 'interested him deeply', but 'this interest had changed in quality since he had come from Paris.'[39] It is this new outlook which induces Michael to view the Aran islanders as offcuts from Homeric Greece, in a version of the Homeric-Irish analogy that has already been drawn by William Ridgeway, d'Arbois and Alfred Nutt. It causes Michael to 'accept', in the words of his occult mentor, 'the whole tradition of antiquity.'[40]

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[33] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 283.
[34] Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 553.
[35] W.B. Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (new edn, Basingstoke and New York, 2003), 37.
[36] Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, 86.
[37] Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, 87.
[38] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 75.
[39] Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, 23.
[40] Yeats, *The Speckled Bird*, 49.

When Yeats writes about the islanders in this way, looking at the west and seeing Homer, he is writing as part of a long tradition of comparing the Aran Islands to Homeric Greece. One of Yeats's travelling companions on the islands, Arthur Symons, for example, wrote a series of articles for the *Savoy* on 'The Isles of Aran', in which, no doubt under the poet's influence, he responded to the islands from squarely within the Homeric framework. 'We know from the Bardic writers', Symons wrote, as he described their visit to Dun Aengus, the prehistoric fort on Inishmore, 'that a civilisation, similar to that of the Homeric poems, lived on in Ireland almost to the time of the coming of St. Patrick'.[41] He sees it still living on Aran: 'it was something also of the sensation of Homer – the walls of Troy, the heroes, and that "face that launched a thousand ships" – which came to me as we stood upon those unconquerable walls, to which a generation of men had been as a moth's flight, and a hundred years as a generation of men.'[42]

For Symons, the view of the Aran islanders as Homeric was tied to a vision of the melancholic, hapless Celt. He wrote a poem, for example, 'On Inishmaan', full of regret and decay:

> Here, about these twilight ways,
> When the grey moth night drew near,
> Fluttering on a faint flying
> I would linger out the day's
> Delicate and moth-grey dying.[43]

During the crossing to Aran, as Symons recalls in his *Savoy* articles, he and Yeats had 'found time to read all that needed reading of "Grania," Miss Emily Lawless's novel, which is supposed to be the classic of the islands' (as well as 'to study our maps and to catch one mackerel').[44] In this novel set on Aran, 'those small epitomes of desolation,' Lawless, like Symons, forces the islanders into a desolately Homeric cast.[45] 'A queer old ragged Ulysses this,' she writes of one of her characters, Peter Durane, 'whose

[41] Arthur Symons, 'The Isles of Aran', *The Savoy*, vol. 8 (Dec., 1896), 81.
[42] Symons, 'The Isles of Aran', 81-82.
[43] Arthur Symons, 'On Inishmaan', in *Images of Good and Evil* (1899), 145.
[44] Symons, 'The Isles of Aran', 74.
[45] Emily Lawless, *Grania: The Story of an Island* (new edn, London, 1897), 215.

Ithaca was that solitary islet set in the bleak and inhospitable Atlantic! Far out of sight, and rarely now to be stirred by anything modern'.[46]

As Yeats had observed in an 1895 essay on Irish national literature, Lawless pursues the stereotype of the imaginative Celt – 'something charming, irresponsible, poetic, dreamy, untrustworthy, voluble, and rather despicable'.[47] The Homeric comparisons help Lawless to shore up that characterisation, as they helped Symons and, arguably, Yeats himself.

Interestingly, outlying Irish islands play a significant role in Homeric scholarship. George Thomson, the author of the Marxist study *Aeschylus in Athens*, famously reported that his study of Homer was struck into life by his encounter with the remote Blasket Islands (another traditional community off the west coast of Ireland). 'The conversation of those ragged peasants…electrified me', he wrote. 'It was as though Homer had come alive.' 'Returning to Homer,' he proclaims, 'I read him in a new light.'[48]

In the 1960s another classicist, John V. Luce, compared the characteristics of 'those ragged peasants' to those of Homeric Greeks. 'Like Homer's Phaeacians,' he observed, 'the Blasket islanders are very fond of gossip.'[49] They display 'a most attractive gusto and *joie de vivre*', and 'make no attempt to hide their emotions…They are quick-tempered and prone to strike a blow'.[50] Like Symons, Luce saw in this survival the pathos of a dying world, 'a way of life', he writes, 'quite remote from the city-civilization of our time [which] found voice before it vanished for ever...there is no "bright laughter" in the boreens'.[51]

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[46] Lawless, *Grania*, 212.
[47] Yeats, 'Irish National Literature, II' (1895), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 369.
[48] George Thomson, *The Prehistoric Aegean* (new edn, London, 1978), 540.
[49] J.V. Luce, 'Homeric Qualities in the Life and Literature of the Great Blasket Island', *Greece and Rome*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Oct., 1969), 163.
[50] Luce, 'Homeric Qualities', 152, 162.
[51] Luce, 'Homeric Qualities', 168. Cf. Kevin O'Nolan's comparisons of formulae in Homer and Irish hero tales, 'Homer and the Irish Hero Tale', *Studia Hibernica*, no. 8 (1968), 7-20; 'Homer and Irish Heroic Narrative', *Classical Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1 (May 1969), 1-19. See Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, xvii.

For Luce, the Blasket Islands were the remnant of 'the high style and grand manner of an ancient and more aristocratic world.'[52] Foster has identified these 'rhythms and dignity' in the ways of life of the Aran islanders as suggesting 'classical parallels to literary-minded visitors.'[53] This is certainly the case for Agnes O'Farrelly, one of 'Ireland's leading female academics' and a devoted member of the Gaelic League, who first published her *Thoughts on Aran* in Irish in 1901.[54] She watched people dancing at a *feis* and, remembering perhaps the first revival of the Olympics five years earlier, mused that 'when the young, strong men step out, it is not surprising that we think now and again of the Olympic games, which were played in Greece long ago.' 'Watching them,' she writes,

> it is not difficult to picture them as the ancient Greeks – the green crown that they preferred to the gold crown raised above their heads…We see before us the long neck and bright eye and black hair and fine mouth and almost every part of their bodies like the statue images of heroes of old.[55]

'In this lonely island in the middle of the ocean,' O'Farrelly claims, 'the olden times are back with us again.'[56] Andrew McNeillie, similarly, in his memoir of Aran published in 2001, writes of 'the Pan-Aran Games…the Galway Bay Olympics',[57] while a nurse called B.N. Hedderman, who worked on Inishmaan at the beginning of the twentieth century, compared the island to the epitome of Hellenic ease. 'Was this the Arcadia my imagination had pictured –' she asked, 'the solitude I sometimes yearned for? For here was solitude indeed!'[58]

[52] Luce, 'Homeric Qualities', 153.
[53] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 167.
[54] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, 20.
[55] Agnes O'Farrelly, *Smaointe ar Árainn*, ed. and trans. Ríona Nic Congáil (new edn, Dublin, 2010), 103.
[56] O'Farrelly, *Smaointe ar Árainn*, 106.
[57] Andrew McNeillie, *An Aran Keening* (Dublin, 2001), 200.
[58] B.N. Hedderman, *Glimpses of My Life in Aran: Some Experiences of a District Nurse in these Remote Islands, off the West Coast of Ireland. Part One* (London, 1917), 8.

b. Ancient insularity

As examined in Chapter One, several antiquarians argued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the Irish identity of those islands envisioned, by the Greeks, to lie in the remote north: Atlantis, Ogygia, or the home of the Hyperboreans. In 1778, Sylvester O'Halloran, for example, having proved Ireland to be the land of the Hyperboreans, 'a country peculiarly blessed by nature – Ὑπερ βόρεαν – beyond the northern blasts,' found Ireland also to be the original of the mysterious Atlantis, as well as various other shadowy islands.[59] 'Thus Orpheus called it Ἰέρνε, or the Holy Island;' he writes, 'Homer, Ogygia, or the most Ancient Island; Solon, and Plato, Atlantis, or excelling all other islands in that immense ocean; and Hecateus, Hyperborea, or the most temperate of islands! all poetical and figurative appellations, and all evidently alluding to the same country.'[60]

This identification of remote islands with the islands of Greek mythology still has aesthetic as well as, occasionally, historic force in the twentieth century. Significantly, Hubert Butler explained in an essay that he came up with the theory behind *Ten Thousand Saints* while on the Aran Islands in the 1960s, before developing it 'when I got back to my library in Kilkenny'.[61] He then diagnosed a classical memory in the water that runs between the islands and the mainland. By means of his 'pun-craft', he traced the root of Gregory's Sound to 'Grecus…the ancestor of the Greeks as well as of the Grecraige,' arguing that 'it is not surprising therefore that Achadh Greg (Greek-field) should be one of Ireland's many names.'[62] He also cites the theory that 'Aran might well be the tail-end of Hy Brasil, the wonderful island which, like Plato's Atlantis, is lost beneath the sea'.[63]

Similarly, John Hewitt, in his 1942 poem 'Minotaur,' reimagines a journey over the Sound to Inishmore as a journey to Crete:

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[59] O'Halloran, *General History,* i. 75.
[60] O'Halloran, *General History,* i. 75-76.
[61] Butler, 'Influenza in Aran', 156. For Butler on Aran, see Tim Robinson, 'Butler among the Saints', in Chris Agee ed., *Unfinished Ireland: Essays on Hubert Butler* (Belfast, 2003), 172-174.
[62] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 154.
[63] Butler, 'Influenza in Aran', 146.

what savage world is this when folk to live
must lace their boots and walk across the sea,
or gut their summers with the herring fleet,
spending their senses, wearing bone and hide
on the hard harvest beds or hefts of picks
and posting life in little packets home?[64]

Andrew McNeillie, in turn, overlays his own journey to the islands upon the islands of the *Odyssey*. He imagines his fellow travellers full of 'the pleasure of completing their voyage home to Ithaca.'[65] 'When Odysseus went again to Ithaca he was aided there in his subterfuges by Pallas Athene', he writes. 'I was aided by a deity too.'[66]

c. The Fir Bolg

Alongside the Homeric undertones of Aran, the Hellenic serenity, and this overlaying of Greek and Irish islands, it is, finally, the prevalence of material remains – 'ruins of old druidic institutions', as the Aran novelist Liam O'Flaherty put it, '…stone forts, built by unknown people' – that tie the islands most firmly to Greece.[67] More specifically, in an intensified version of the material comparisons studied in Chapter Three, it is the traditional account of the origin of these ruins that endows them with their ancient Greek hue.

In their renowned ethnographical survey of Aran in the 1890s, Haddon and Browne explain that the islands 'may not inaptly be described as a unique museum of antiquities.'[68] Mary Banim, the daughter of the Kilkenny writer and postmaster Michael Banim, similarly declared 'these islands' to be 'a very paradise for

[64] John Hewitt, 'Minotaur' (1948), in *Collected Poems*, 32-33.
[65] McNeillie, *An Aran Keening*, 124.
[66] McNeillie, *An Aran Keening*, 219.
[67] Liam O'Flaherty, *Skerrett* (London, 1932), 93.
[68] A.C. Haddon and C.R. Browne, 'The Ethnography of the Aran Islands, County Galway', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1889-1901)*, vol. 2 (1891-1893), 821. For Haddon and Browne, see Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (New York, 2001), 102-108.

archaeologists,' as she travelled to Aran in the same year as Yeats and Symons.[69] Many of these celebrated antiquities were believed to have been built by the mythological Fir Bolg. Dun Aengus in particular, 'a large fortified place, on the brim of a high clifft [sic], a hundred fathoms deep,' was supposed, as William Wilde proclaimed when he was banqueting on its ruins, to be 'the stronghold prepared as the last standing-place of the Firbolg aborigines of Ireland, here to fight their last battle if driven to the western surge'.[70]

These Fir Bolg, who were touched on in Chapter One, are one of the waves of inhabitants of Ireland in medieval origin myths, as recorded in the eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála*. Together with several of the other settlers – the Túatha Dé Danaan who were meant to be resident in Athens, for example, and the Milesians who are on occasion taken to be from Miletus[71] – the Fir Bolg are associated with the Greeks. As Sylvester O'Halloran records, they went from Ireland to Greece, 'where they encreased [sic] greatly, insomuch as to become formidable to the natives; so that in their own defence they reduced them to a severe bondage.' The Fir Bolg 'were compelled', he continues, 'to dig in the low deep soil, and carry this earth in leathern bags to cover and improve more barren places.'[72] This Greek enslavement is then immortalised in the popular etymology of their name, with 'bolg' thought to refer to 'bag,' and so to commemorate their hard labour in Greece. Mary Ferguson, the wife of Samuel Ferguson, for example, envisions them in northern Greece or Thrace, 'compelled, under the lash of task-masters, to cultivate the terraces on the steep sides…of Pindus or Haemus. Each man was provided with a leathern bag, in which he carried up soil to these hanging gardens. Hence, say the Irish traditions, the name of Firbolg, men of the bag.'[73]

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[69] Mary Banim, 'The Arran Islands' (1896), in Breandán and Ruairí Ó hEithir eds., *An Aran Reader* (Dublin, 1991), 73.
[70] Roderick O'Flaherty, *A Chorographical Description of West or H-lar Connaught* (1684), in Ó hEithir eds., *An Aran Reader*, 16; William Wilde, quoted in Martin Haverty, 'Ethnological Excursion to the Aran Isles (1857)' (1859), in Ó hEithir eds., *An Aran Reader*, 45.
[71] For this confusion, see Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, 23-25.
[72] O'Halloran, *General History,* i. 8.
[73] M.C. Ferguson, *The Story of the Irish Before the Conquest. From the mythical period to the invasion under Strongbow* (London, 1868), 5. Another antiquarian explanation for their name can be found in Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, 9, who argues that '"bolg" in Keltic [sic] means a

The Fir Bolg then managed to escape and make their way back to Ireland – 'from the lands of the Greeks they came,' says the *Lebor Gabála*, 'fleeing from the impost which the Greeks had laid upon them'.[74] After a struggle with the Túatha Dé Danaan, they headed, in the words of the Canon Ulick Bourke, 'to the Islands of Aran in the west, where to this hour are to be seen the work of their hands, those stupendous barbaric monuments, the admiration of antiquaries and historians, the most extensive and the oldest structures of their kind in Europe.'[75] The legacy of the Fir Bolg, closely associated with Greece, is therefore seen to be living in its most tangible form on the Aran Islands, in these, as William Wilde puts it, their 'litanies of stone.'[76]

d. Walking antiquities

'Traces of the Firbolgs remain,' Mary Ferguson declares of these stone ruins. She then goes further, connecting the Fir Bolg to the contemporary islands by a bond of racial heritage.[77] After being enslaved in Greece for some time, she writes, the Fir Bolg 'conspired, rose, and fled together, and a new infusion of Greek characteristics was thus imparted to the Isle of Destiny.'[78] 'The Firbolg blood to this day, exists to an appreciable extent', Ferguson argues, 'in...the outlying isles of the west. They were a dark-haired and dark-skinned race, small in comparison with their fair-haired foemen,

cow-herd or drover', and the Fir Bolg 'were a pastoral people.' Or see O'Brien, *Round Towers* (1834), 428: '*bolog*…in the Irish language, signifies a *paunch*; and *fir*, a *man*; so that Fir-Bolg means the *big-bellied man*, being an evident allusion to their bodily configuration.' Alternatively, the Fir Bolg are emphatically not Celtic, but rather 'Belgae' – for Ledwich, they are 'Belgic men, viri Belgici, or Belgae', Ledwich, *Antiquities*, 23; Pinkerton claims them as the ruling class of Ireland in around 300 BC, 'and such was their superiority that to this day *Bolg* in Irish implies *a noble man*, and also a *man of science*', Pinkerton, *Dissertation*, 122.

[74] Macalister, *Lebor Gabála*, iv. 15.

[75] Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, 35.

[76] Wilde in Ó hEithir eds., *An Aran Reader*, 45.

[77] Ferguson, *Story of the Irish,* 5.

[78] Ferguson, *Story of the Irish,* 5.

whose superior *physique*, no less than their higher civilization…assured them a speedy supremacy.'[79]

'Several authors', Haddon and Browne explain, 'regard the existing Aranites as descendants of the Firbolgs.'[80] Mary Banim, also, connects the Fir Bolg to the contemporary islanders, by means of the style of their traditional boats: 'the Firbolgs…rebelling under the yoke of slavery in Greece', she writes, '...made boats of the leather wallets, and in these ships and boats the Firbolgs sailed until they landed on the coasts of Ireland. It is supposed that the corrachs in use to-day scarcely differ in construction from those in which these early colonists came over the waves from the south.'[81] In Samuel Ferguson's account, the Fir Bolg's labour of 'carrying earth in leather bags to form the artificial terrace-gardens of Boeotia', is visible in contemporary agricultural practices on Aran, in the creation of artificial, stepped fields. 'If any portion of the existing population of Ireland can with propriety be termed Celtic,' Ferguson adds, 'they are this race.'[82]

Similarly, in a collapsing of historical time and distance, William Wilde rebukes the contemporary islanders for not looking after the legacy of their ancestors, 'the Firbolg aborigines of Ireland'. 'Remember, above all,' he condescended to tell them, 'that these were the works of your own kindred, long, long dead…You have a great right to be proud of them; they are grand monuments of the brave men your forefathers were, and of how they laboured…Do you defend them in peace as they built and defended them in war, and let your children's children see strangers coming to honour them, as we have done today.'[83]

As a result of the Greek-Irish connections in these accounts, the islands and their inhabitants are situated in many ways in closer relation to ancient Greece than to contemporary Ireland. They are characterised as ill-suited to the modern world. For Mary and Samuel Ferguson and others, there is only a small leap from the antiquity of

[79] Ferguson, *Story of the Irish,* 7.
[80] Haddon and Browne, 'Ethnography', 825.
[81] Banim, 'The Arran Islands', 76.
[82] Samuel Ferguson, *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 41 (1853), quoted in Haddon and Browne, 'Ethnography', 782.
[83] Wilde in Ó hEithir eds., *An Aran Reader*, 45.

the islands' ruins to the antiquity of their inhabitants, offspring of exiles from Greece. Similarly, for Yeats, Symons and Lawless, the living islanders are miraculous survivals of the lost aristocratic world of Homer, or, for Agnes O'Farrelly, of the athletic, serene and supremely-aesthetic Athenians. This entails that they must also remain what Leerssen has termed, in his study of the 'pattern of imagination' by which Gaelic Ireland was constructed, 'walking antiquities.'[84]

The Aran islanders are primed to receive, as a contributor to *The Celt* put it, 'unquestionably an inheritance of vision,' set apart from the rest of the contemporary world.[85] The Greek parallels are a vital part of this discourse; they propagate the limitations of 'contemporary ancientness', which Majeed identified in eighteenth-century British attitudes to India (as examined in Chapter Four). Almost all the ingredients of Graeco-Celtic research so far – classical sources on the people of the north, the origin of Ireland's material remains, the equation of Ireland and Homeric Greece – are employed in the characterisation of the Aran Islands. Their result is to position the islanders firmly in the ancient past.

The question arises here of whether all these writers are using Greek connections as a metaphor, treating the Fir Bolg tradition, for example, as myth and using it to characterise the longevity of tradition in remote communities, or simply as local colour. However, even if the treatment here is on the level of illustration, it is significant that the myth's connection to the present is so well-known as to be available to these writers almost as a cliché, and certainly as a literary trope. Furthermore, while it is true that several of these accounts do acknowledge the uncertain status of the Fir Bolg, they nevertheless still recruit them as useful historical evidence when making an ethnographical point. This allows Mary Ferguson, for example, to declare that 'we must remember we are still in the region of tradition,' at the same time as making statements about 'the Firbolg blood.'[86] When it comes to the Greek connections on Aran, to borrow a phrase from the antiquarian Louise Beaufort,

[84] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 5, 37.
[85] Anon., 'Introduction', *The Celt: A Magazine Devoted to Irish Interests*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Sept., 1903), 3.
[86] Ferguson, *Story of the Irish*, 12.

in her investigation of Dun Aengus, 'tradition discretely employed may be looked upon as a handmaid to history'.[87]

These late nineteenth-century visions of Aran had, by the time of the Revival, a political as well as a literary function, which gives Greek comparisons, however metaphorical, great weight. The practice of comparing Irish and Greek is more than a descriptive or rhetorical tool; it is a politically-effective strategy, a way to keep the contemporary rural Irish at a safe distance. These islanders are convenient illustrations for a nationalist dream but must remain, to rephrase Emily Lawless, anything but modern.[88] 'The world looks on', as the poet Patrick Kavanagh writes, 'And talks of the peasant'.[89]

3. J.M. Synge and Graeco-Celtic comparatism

The Irish, like the Greeks, are passionately fond of traditional fictions, fables and romances.
Sydney Owenson[90]

What is unique is incomparable.
Maurice Olender[91]

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, J.M. Synge's visits to the Aran Islands came at a time when he was immersing himself deeply in linguistic, antiquarian and mythological scholarship. 'With Synge,' as Garrigan Mattar argues, 'the threads of connection between the Irish Revival and the comparative mythologists, philologists, and folklorists of Continental Celtology become a verifiable cat's-cradle.'[92] 'More than

[87] Beaufort, 'Essay upon the State of Architecture', 176.
[88] Lawless, *Grania*, 212.
[89] Patrick Kavanagh, 'The Great Hunger' (1942), in *Collected Poems,* ed. Antoinette Quinn (London, 2005), 85.
[90] Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, 106.
[91] Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 40.
[92] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 131.

any figure of his generation', argues W.J. McCormack in his study of Anglo-Irish literature, 'Synge was aware of the bearing…of Herder, Renan, the Revue Celtique, and *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie'* on the work of the Revivalists in Ireland.'[93] In preparation for the following chapter on how Synge's own account of the Aran Islands navigates Graeco-Celtic relations, the final section of this chapter will demonstrate that these various scholarly endeavours can be unified and defined by an interest in comparison, and in Graeco-Celtic comparisons more specifically.

Although the importance of scholarship to Synge has been explored in much interesting and valuable work (after a long period of denial, an effort to lessen, as Shaw put it, the sense that his work 'did not come out of Irish life… [but] out of that life which a man learns a good deal about in Paris'[94]), the unifying Graeco-Celtic comparative thread which runs through Synge's determined course of reading has not been acknowledged. This has meant that the nature of his crucial role in the Irish reception of Classics has been persistently undervalued and misread. The following chapters aim to redress this imbalance.[95]

Synge's first trip to the Aran Islands occurred immediately after he had attended d'Arbois' lecture course on the similarities of Homeric and Celtic society, which would eventually be published as *La civilisation des Celtes*. 'To Cours de Jubainville sur la civilization irlandaise comparée avec celle d'Homere [sic]', Synge wrote, in his 'lapidary style of diary-keeping'.[96] Synge then paraphrased several of

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[93] W.J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork, 1994), 228.

[94] George Bernard Shaw quoted in anon., 'Mr G. Bernard Shaw and Irish literature. His Advice to Irishmen', *The Irish Times* (28 Oct., 1918), n.p. Cf. Synge's early biographer lamenting that 'it is part of the legend created in Dublin for the purpose of discrediting Synge's work to say he was far too much of a foreign scholar…a sort of literary Frankenstein', Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* (London, 1913), 61.

[95] For Synge and scholarship, see Gérard Leblanc, 'J.M. Synge in Paris', in Patrick Rafroidi et al. eds., *France-Ireland: Literary Relations* (Lille, 1971), 191-213; Toni O'Brien Johnson, *Synge: the Medieval and the Grotesque* (Gerrards Cross, 1982), 5-13; Mary C. King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge* (London, 1985), 7-14, 59; Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 19-37; and Macintosh, *Dying Acts,* 3, 10. There has since been a resurgence in interest, in particular of Synge's interest in anthropology, see McCormack, *Fool of the Family,* 82-99, 138-146; Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*, 98-125; Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 161-172; Allen, 'Synge, reading and archipelago', 159-171; and Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 37-49.

[96] TCD MS 4419 f. 18v; McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 150.

d'Arbois' arguments about Homer and the Celts in various essays and reviews. In a 1902 article for *L'Européen*, for example, he characterised Cuchulain as '*l'Achille de l'Irlande*' [*Prose,* 353]. In a 1906 piece, he described Emain Macha as 'a sort of Irish Troy' [*Prose,* 387].[97]

He also read and took detailed, conscientious notes on d'Arbois' other major Graeco-Celtic study, *Le cycle mythologique.* He transcribed its central hypothesis, that the resemblances between Greek and Irish mythology come from a wellspring of '*légendes gréco-celtiques,'* and took great trouble to understand the twisted logic of d'Arbois' argument about Balor and Lug.[98] 'Βελλερ-φοντης = killer of the monster,' he notes, 'Βελλερος (βαλλω) = Balor, who is killed by Lug…Perseus (son of Danae kills grandfather as Lug) and Medusa same legend.'[99] When he reviewed the English translation of *Le cycle mythologique*, by Richard Best (who was one of his closest friends in Paris), Synge declared such comparative mythology to belong to 'one of the most entrancing branches of scholarship.' [*Prose,* 366]. 'The Greek kinship of these Irish legends,' he wrote, 'is of a nature to interest many who are not mythologists' [*Prose,* 365].

As indicated above, Synge also went to d'Arbois' Old Irish lectures in 1902. His notes on these read like an echo of his much earlier notes on the Archbishop Trench, pointing out parallels between Irish and other languages: 'arg = ἀρχός = chief', he notes, for example, or 'Vet-tha – tu sais – Foῖσθα – in Latin didisti'.[100] 'From these notes', Kiberd comments, 'it is clear that Synge…was obsessed with the European parallels to Irish grammar and vocabulary', and, he argues, this was a 'passionate commitment to fitting Gaelic culture in the larger European design…maintained by Synge all his life.'[101]

Straight after finishing *Le cycle mythologique* in 1898, Synge read, in quick succession, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, Alfred Nutt's essay in *The Voyage of Bran*, John

[97] Cf. Synge's review of Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* at 367-70.
[98] TCD MS 4378, ff. 65v-65r, 63r-62v.
[99] TCD MS 4378, ff.63r-62v. For all Synge's notes on d'Arbois, see TCD MS 4379, ff. 19v-20r, 72v; TCD MS 4378, ff. 66v-60v.
[100] TCD MS 4390, f. 52r, 63v.
[101] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 33.

Rhys's Hibbert lectures and E.S. Hartland's *The Legend of Perseus* (all scholars encountered in Chapter Four). His notes on these works continue to centre on a particular interest in the balance of Celtic and Greek traditions. Reading Rhys's lecture on the culture hero, for example, he lined up various heroes as part of the same fundamental conception: 'Heracles = Ogmios = Greek Λογος…Dagda father of Aengus = Kronos…Gwydion = Hades = Heracles = Hermes, Prometheus, Ulysses, Orpheus, Jason.'[102] He was particularly interested in Nutt's work, referring to it in his 1902 article on d'Arbois. *'Le livre,'* he writes, '*forme un chapitre extrêmement intéressant de la mythologie comparée*' [*Prose,* 354].[103] At the end of the year, he also read Max Müller's *Chips from a German Workshop,* which includes the famous essay of 1856, 'Comparative Mythology.'[104]

Synge also had a close association with Anatole Le Braz, the Breton scholar who was seen in the previous chapter to be, like d'Arbois, a broker between Celtic and classical traditions. Synge first encountered Le Braz at a lecture in 1897, 'and was so excited about it' that he approached the scholar afterwards.[105] 'Conference de M. Le Braz sur la Bretagne,' he wrote in his diary. 'Parle avec lui.'[106] From then on he became his 'avid student,' as Kiberd puts it, reading his major works on folklore and theatre, and writing an article about him at the end of 1898 [*Prose*, 394].[107] He also started learning Breton and travelled to Quimper in April 1899, 'invited by one Dr Picquenard, an amateur geologist and fervent Celticist' who also wrote about druidism.[108] When Le Braz toured Ireland – '*la Thulé des Gaules, la patrie archiceltique'* – his guide was one

[102] TCD MS 4378, ff. 44r-43v. It is interesting to remember that Gerard Manley Hopkins, while teaching Classics in Dublin in the 1880s, corresponded with John Rhys about Celtic-Classical connections, see for example Hopkins, *Correspondence*, 775-777.
[103] For Synge and Nutt, see Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 159-161; and Anthony Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama* (Dublin, 2013), 17-18. For Synge, Frazer and Hartland, see Deirdre Toomey, 'Killing the Da: Synge and *The Golden Bough*', in Fraser ed., *Sir James Frazer*, 154-171.
[104] In 1897, he had also read Paul Decharme's comparative *Mythologie de la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1886).
[105] Greene and Stephens, *J.M. Synge. 1871-1909*, 73.
[106] TCD MS 4418, f. 29v.
[107] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 101. Note that at 156-157, Kiberd observes the influence on Synge of Léon Marillier's introduction to *La légende de la mort* (see Chapter Five).
[108] Leblanc, 'J.M. Synge in Paris', 197.

of Synge's close friends, the Breton teacher, traveller and scholar Henri Lebeau.[109] He also spent time with Synge in Dublin, sketching a vivid if severe portrait of him in his travel journal.[110]

What is arguably the same comparative tendency, or structure of thinking, can be glimpsed in other works read by Synge in 1898, this seminal year of his first trip to Aran and his first encounter with d'Arbois. These include several esoteric and occult studies (such as Edouard Schuré's *Les Grands Initiés*, which Synge read in March). Although they are not, strictly speaking, a part of this comparative discourse, they do display the same thought process: different traditions exhibit striking similarities between each other, and an explanation for those similarities must be found. Schuré's work, for example, is an investigation of '*la continuité et l'unité essentielle de la doctrine ésotérique*', split across figures from multiple traditions: '*Krishna, Bouddha, Zoroastre, Hermès, Moise, Pythagore, Jésus*'.[111] In an intriguing echo of Nutt, Schuré also identifies *'les Bacchantes primitives*' as '*les druidesses de la Grèce*.'[112]

Similarly, four days before he first attended d'Arbois' Homer lectures, 14th February 1898, Synge began to read Flaubert's *Salammbô*. On the face of it, these two events are unrelated, embodying different categories of thought: an historical novel against a scholarly lecture; comparative mythology against fiction; Celtic Studies against the mercenary revolt of Carthage. However, in fact there is much in common between d'Arbois' theories about Homer and the Celts, and Flaubert's novel about mercenaries in Carthage, in the third century BC. The novel is comparative antiquarian scholarship translated into historical fiction.

In this book, Flaubert presents a cast of various '*barbares*' – barbarians from the point of view of the Carthaginian masters – including Greeks and Romans. Celtic mercenaries, '*ces bêtes brutes*,' are prominent among them.[113] He then reels off the

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[109] Anatole Le Braz, *Voyage en Irlande au pays de Galles et en Angleterre*, ed. Alain Tanguy (Rennes, 1999), 86. For Synge's friendship with Lebeau, who travelled in Greece and wrote about Mount Athos, see McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 283-284.
[110] Le Braz, *Voyage en Irlande*, 86-87.
[111] Édouard Schuré, *Les Grands Initiés: Esquisse de l'histoire secrète des religions* (6th edn, Paris, 1921), xvii, xii.
[112] Schuré, *Les Grands Initiés*, 228.
[113] Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô* (Paris, 1863), 11.

variety of their antiquities; as Arthur Symons described, 'it is like a fresco…a procession of Barbarians, each in the costume of his country, passes across the wall'.[114] Most importantly, as implied by Symons' description, Flaubert pays close attention to the various minutiae of these passing tribes. He describes their languages, for example, side-by-side, clashing and crossing over each other – '*on entendait, à côté du lourd patois dorien, retentir les syllabes celtiques bruissantes comme des chars de bataille, et les terminaisons ioniennes se heurtaient aux consonnes du désert âpres comme des cris de chacal*.'[115] He sets their customs in parallel too, as for example in a scene of the mercenaries burying their dead, simultaneously and together, but with the distinctions of each local tradition.[116] Taking in the vast spectrum of the ancient world with 'omnivorous' attention, the novel reads like an antiquarian 'collection of miscellaneous antiquities.' [117] Flaubert, as Symons wrote, 'chose his antiquity wisely'.[118]

4. Conclusion

Across disparate genres, then, Synge's reading in the late 1890s can be unified by a comparative thread, running through Flaubert and Schuré as well as through d'Arbois, Frazer, Rhys, Hartland, Müller and the rest. In the period of his Aran visits, he was actively interested in coincidence and similarity, in the manifold different forms such connections can take, and in how different writers (antiquarians, linguistics, mythologists, occultists and writers) have observed such crossovers and explained them, often according to their own purposes. When combined with what this chapter has revealed about the tradition of Aran literature, the unified thrust of Synge's

[114] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (rev edn, New York, 1919), 107.
[115] Flaubert, *Salammbô*, 3.
[116] Flaubert, *Salammbô*, 322-323.
[117] Roger Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism* (Minneapolis and London, 1996), 118; 'collection of miscellaneous antiquities' is the subtitle to Ledwich, *Antiquities*.
[118] Symons, *Symbolist Movement* (1919), 105. In 1895, Synge had read another historical novel with an ancient setting, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's, *The Last Days of Pompeii,* see TCD MS 4416, f. 168v.

intellectual life permits a fairly solid expectation that his own 'topographical book', *The Aran Islands*, will employ an Irish-Greek comparative approach.

What is more, John Brannigan's recent study of *Archipelagic Modernism* points to some other intriguing pages in Synge's notebooks, which contain notes on an 1887 lecture by Haddon (the co-author of the landmark ethnological survey of Aran). This was a discussion, in Synge's words, of 'the supposed Atlantis or submerged continent which he proved never existed'.[119] Brannigan concedes that Synge's notes are hard to follow, and the argument of the lecture is largely lost, but it seems to have been a rejection of contemporary interest in locating the original of Plato's Atlantis in existing islands of the Atlantic (such as Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* of 1882).[120] This observation offers a highly-suggestive glimpse into Synge's interest in islands and island scholarship. While Brannigan himself focuses on what it reveals about Synge's engagement with 'contemporary discourses of cultural and moral evolution' – the search for some pristine starting-point for civilisation – what is equally compelling is the possibility that Synge was interested in and aware of, from very early in his life, the way that Atlantic islands have (or have been seen to have) some connection with ancient Greece.[121] This only enhances, still further, the expectation that Synge's own island narrative will employ an Irish-Greek comparative angle.

It is vital to recognise, finally, that such a conjecture is strengthened by the archival material that lies behind *The Aran Islands*. In his notes, Synge draws frequent parallels between Irish and Greek traditions, consistently and in keeping with the other Aran accounts studied in this chapter. As the drafts of *The Aran Islands* advance, however, such comparisons are gradually but determinedly weeded out. While all the Aran descriptions studied in this chapter make comparisons in the narrative voice – the speaker notices a parallel and uses that parallel for their own purposes – Synge's narrator almost never does this. But he does something else with these connections.

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[119] Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 43; TCD MS 4370, ff. 43v-45v.
[120] Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 43.
[121] Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism*, 44. Note also Brannigan's discussion of Louis MacNeice quoting Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* while touring the Hebrides in 1937 (*I Crossed the Minch*), as designed 'to suggest resonance between the seafaring communities of ancient Greece and those of the Hebrides', at 192.

The next chapter will turn to what Synge himself does with this tradition, armed with all his comparative reading. It will argue that, in relation to these other Aran accounts, he has invented a substantially different comparative technique. He has developed an authorial strategy that faces up to the relationship between Graeco-Celtic comparison and 'walking antiquities'. The final two chapters, Chapter Eight and the Conclusion, will then investigate what he did with this technique, when it came to writing his famous, controversial plays.

Chapter Seven

Synge's Aran Islands

1. Classical comparisons in *The Aran Islands*

Unless you are capable
Of forgetting completely
About Atlantis, you will
Never finish your journey.
W.H. Auden[1]

the labyrinth is safe but endless, and broken
is Ariadne's thread
W.H. Auden[2]

In the first part of *The Aran Islands*, Synge's narrator meets a storyteller on Inishmaan, Pat Dirane, who tells a long story combining many folktale elements, about the Lady O'Conor and a pound of flesh. Afterwards, the narrator comments that 'it gave me a strange feeling of wonder to hear this illiterate native of a wet rock in the Atlantic telling a story that is so full of European associations.' He also unrolls some of these connections, pointing to possible parallels with other folk traditions. 'The incident of the faithful wife,' he explains, 'takes us beyond Cymbeline to the sunshine on the Arno…It takes us again to the low vineyards of Würzburg on the Main, where the same tale was told in the middle ages'. 'The other portion dealing with the pound of flesh,' he continues, 'has a still wider distribution, reaching from Persia and Egypt to the *Gesta Romanorum*, and the *Pecorone* of Ser Giovanni, a Florentine notary' [*Prose*, 65].

This is the narrator as comparative folklorist. However, Synge has excised an additional paragraph from an earlier version, which yielded much more information,

[1] W.H. Auden, 'Atlantis', in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London, 1976), 245.
[2] Auden, 'Casino', in *Collected Poems*, 124.

taken directly from his reading of d'Arbois and Alfred Nutt. 'There is little doubt that our heroic tales which show so often their kinship with Grecian myths,' he had originally continued, 'date from the pre-ethnic period of the Aryans…Further, a comparison of all the versions will show that we have here one of the rudest and therefore, it may be, most ancient settings of the material' [*Prose,* 65]. When he published this section of *The Aran Islands* as an independent article in *The New Ireland Review* in November 1898 (three days after he had completed reading Nutt's essay in *The Voyage of Bran*), he included this paragraph. He cut it out when he came to publish the full text of *The Aran Islands* in 1907.

Still more elusive is Synge's treatment of another of Dirane's stories. This is the tale of a young cowherd who encounters three giants on three consecutive days, killing each one of them in turn. He then hears about a king's daughter, who is to be left out on the rocks as prey for a sea-serpent. After fighting the monster three times over three days, the cowherd eventually kills it, and marries the princess [*Prose,* 84-87]. In his diary, on 27th May 1898, Synge recorded that he had heard this 'histoire de P. Dirane,' and noted a possible Greek comparison on the basis of what he had learnt from E.S. Hartland's *The Legend of Perseus.*

In his 'exhaustive application of folklore science to one mythic tale' – 'the classical myth of Perseus' – Hartland had identified that 'from Persia to Italy, from cultured Greece to the barbarous shores of the Red Sea, a tale was told, a hero was celebrated, identified by Greek and Roman writers with the son of Danae'.[3] He then set out to track its progress. With its ambitious scope – 'the story of Perseus', Hartland warns, 'opens a thousand vistas to the student' – and its tendency towards the tangential, it is, as Deirdre Toomey states, 'a work written very much in the shadow of *The Golden Bough*,' and it is also indebted to Rhys and d'Arbois.[4] Lured by Hartland's labyrinthine system, then, Synge noted Dirane's story to be a possible 'Jack the Giant Killer and Perseus melanges'.[5] Later in the same year, he also read William Larminie's

[3] Dorson, *The British Folklorists*, 243; Edwin Sidney Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus: A Study of Tradition in Story, Custom and Belief*, three vols (London, 1894-1896), i. v, 9-10.
[4] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 184; Toomey, 'Killing the Da', 159.
[5] TCD MS 4419, f. 66v.

1893 collection of *West Irish Folk-tales and Romances*, and similarly noted possible analogues to 'the worm of Pat Dirane?'[6] However, in the published text of *The Aran Islands*, the story ends with the common storytelling formula, 'that is my story.' It is then left without comment [*Prose,* 87].

Synge displays a similar reluctance to engage with the Greek presence contained within the legend of the Fir Bolg on Aran. He would have known about this tradition from several sources, from the *Lebor Gabála*, for example, as well d'Arbois' *Le cycle mythologique*.[7] He was interested in the idea, recording in his notes on d'Arbois 'that the fir-bolg were actual people.'[8] Similarly, he had noted from Stokes's *Life of Petrie* that the stone forts on Inishmore 'were built by colonists whose bronze weapons are similar to those of the Greek heroic age…The historic legends of Erin point to the same origin.' Here, Synge adds, Petrie is arguing for 'the Pelasgic origin of the Firbolg.'[9] In a letter to Yeats, sent from the Aran Islands, he wrote about the Fir Bolg, as preserved in Yeats's report to William Sharp.[10] He also drafted a section entitled 'Dun Aengus' in a notebook dated Aranmore/Inishmaan May 1898, writing about 'the antiquarian treasures of the islands' and musing about their makers, 'these races who raised the three great circles of concentric walls'.[11]

Synge's narrator also visits the fort in another draft version – 'the rabbits came out and nibbled round me, as if I were a spirit of the Fir-Bolgs' – and claims that the ruin gives materiality to the ancient legend: 'the tissue of history and myth that is connected with the name of Aengus seemed to gain a reality among these walls, and to re-create the old atmosphere of the world'.[12] Synge also referred to the ledges of a cliff as 'a flight of cyclopean steps'.[13] However, by the final, reworked version of *The*

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[6] TCD MS 4378, ff. 40v-40r. See William Larminie, *West Irish Folk-tales and Romances* (London, 1893), 152. Cf. Chapter Three on James O'Laverty's similar observation.
[7] D'Arbois, *Le cycle mythologique*, 134-135.
[8] TCD MS 4378, f. 64r.
[9] TCD MS 4375, ff. 50v-50r, 53v-52v.
[10] Yeats, *Collected Letters II*, 251. He also cites Synge as an informant on this in an essay on 'Irish Witch Doctors' (1900), in *Later Articles and Reviews*, ed. Colton Johnson (New York, 2000), 34.
[11] TCD MS 4385, ff. 52v-53r.
[12] TCD MS 4344, f. 348r.
[13] TCD MS 4344, f. 243r.

Aran Islands, the only reference to this myth gets rid of almost all its ancient connectedness. 'One of the largest Duns, or pagan forts, on the islands,' Synge writes simply, 'is within a stone's-throw of my cottage, and I often stroll up there…to smoke drowsily on the stones…If no one comes I prop my book open with stones touched by the Fir-bolgs, and sleep for hours in the delicious warmth of the sun' [*Prose,* 69].

The narrator does not hesitate, however, from drawing frequent comparisons between the islands and the *modern* world. He has a tendency to describe things he observes on the islands by means of a comparison with phenomena from the rest of Europe, for example, whether likening the landscape to 'the country near Rome' [*Prose,* 51] or 'the groups of scattered cottages on each side of the way' to 'places I have sometimes passed when travelling at night in France or Bavaria' [*Prose,* 127]. Likewise, he compares a custom of naming on the island to 'other countries where the names are in a somewhat similar condition, as in modern Greece' [*Prose,* 135] and the intonation of a girl's voice to 'the voices of German and Polish women' [*Prose,* 143]. Often these comparisons are with Brittany, and show clear signs of his reading in Le Braz, Frazer and others [*Prose,* 80, 102]. It appears that only comparisons with *antiquity* are prone to be weeded out by Synge as he redrafts his work.

In his biography of Synge, McCormack has deemed the comparisons of Aran and the Campagna 'conventional framing', 'a symptom of [Synge's] inadequate assimilation'.[14] But arguably they are in fact another manifestation of the interest in overlap and recurrence, so evident in his notes on etymology, mythology and folklore (as demonstrated in the previous chapter). Similarly, Synge draws attention to his own status 'as a revenant' on the islands, as McCormack acknowledges.[15] He stresses, for example, that he was not the first Synge to visit the islands, having been preceded by his uncle, the Reverend Alexander Synge [*Prose,* 53]. He also marks his place in a long stream of scholarly visitors to the islands, reporting that the Aran storyteller Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghaile), who became his guide and Gaelic teacher, 'had known Petrie

[14] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 200.
[15] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 26.

and Sir William Wilde, and many living antiquarians, and had taught Irish to Dr. Finck, and Dr. Pederson, and given stories to Mr. Curtin of America' [*Prose,* 50].[16]

Finally, it is worth recalling two other references to classical antiquity, which Synge cut out from his published work. First, there is a scene in the published version of *The Aran Islands* when the narrator is surrounded by a tumultuous crowd of women, 'shrieking at me because I am not married.' 'I could not make myself heard,' he writes, 'so I sat down on the slip and drew out my wallet of photographs' [*Prose*, 138]. In a draft version of this encounter, he adds that, by doing this, he successfully avoided 'the fate of Orpheus.'[17] In addition, when Synge visited the Great Blasket Island and, as an islander recalled, 'wrote about everything which he witnessed with his own two eyes…the first stranger ever to holiday on the Island,'[18] he reported that his host, Shawn Keane, told him about 'the people who go away to America, and the younger generations that are growing up now in Ireland.' 'I am not as good a man as my father was,' he says, 'and my son is growing up worse than I am' [*Prose I,* 250]. In a draft version, Synge noted that Keane was 'almost quoting Horace.'[19] He cut the observation from the final article.

It should be clear by now that a reference to Orpheus or to Horace is anything but unusual when writing of the Aran Islands or of Ireland in general. In fact, it is almost normative practice to imagine Orpheus on Aran, or to transpose the words of a Latin poem into the mouth of an islander. To do this has both discursive and scholarly precedent, a fact of which Synge was not only aware but actively interested in. All this makes his elusiveness when it comes to ancient parallels still more surprising and still more worthy of exploration.

[16] In the manuscripts, he writes that Ó Conghaile was 'one of the Aran Islanders I read of in Petrie's notes', TCD MS 4385, f. 3v.
[17] TCD MS 4344, f. 395r.
[18] Pádraig Tyers ed., *Blasket Memories: The Life of an Irish Island Community* (Cork, 1998), 78.
[19] TCD MS 4334, f. 99r.

2. Perseus on Aran

Not unjustifiably was this island called
'Ogygia' by Plutarch, i.e. *most ancient.*
William Camden[20]

Can it be that never more
Men will grow on Islands?
Ithaca and Eriskey,
Iceland and Tahiti!...
Must it be that never more
Men will flower on Islands?
Crete and Corsica, Mitylene,
Aran and Iona!
Padraic Colum[21]

Compare legend of the Minotaure.
J.M. Synge[22]

A first glimpse of the strategy behind Synge's apparent evasion of ancient Greece can be seen in the moment when Mourteen talks to the narrator 'of Diarmid, who was the strongest man after Samson'. In the published text, Mourteen 'says that Diarmid was killed by the druids, who put a burning shirt on him,' after which the narrator comments that this is 'a fragment of mythology that may connect Diarmid with the legend of Hercules'. However, the narrator goes on to qualify this statement; the connection may be there, but only 'if it is not due to the "learning" in some hedge-school master's ballad' [*Prose,* 57].[23] A typescript draft is more resolute: this is 'a

[20] William Camden, *Britannia* (1586), quoted in Keating, *History*, 45.
[21] Colum, 'Men on Islands', in *Poems*, 142.
[22] TCD MS 4378, f. 65v.
[23] Compare the similar caution expressed in a book Synge brought with him to Aran (Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 314), Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*: 'there is as much more in this piece, but I am certain that it is not by the same man. It is full up of names taken out of the Greek and Roman authors, and no doubt it is only showing his own learning and knowledge that the poet is.' Douglas Hyde, *Love Songs of Connacht* (Dublin, 1905), 129.

fragment of mythology that seems to connect Diarmid directly with the legend of Hercules.' Synge corrected the sentence by hand, changing 'seems to' to 'may,' crossing out 'directly' and adding 'if it is not due to the "learning," in some hedge-school master's ballad.'[24] Here Synge can be seen at work, deliberately and methodically qualifying the comparative approach to Irish and Greek mythology.

However, the positing then undermining of the Hercules-Diarmid connection is followed directly by a question of Mourteen's: 'did ever you hear what it is goes on four legs when it is young, and on two legs after that, and on three legs when it does be old?' The narrator provides the answer, and in response the old, blind Mourteen compares his own predicament with that of an even older man, living on Inishmaan: 'I'm on three legs this minute, but the old man beyond is back on four; I don't know if I'm better than the way he is; he's got his sight and I'm only an old dark man' [*Prose,* 57]. The section ends there, with no narratorial comment. This 'fragment' of conversation, however, tacitly 'connects' Mourteen with Oedipus, faced with the riddle of the Sphinx and now old and blind. Crucially, the one who insinuates this connection is not the narrator, but Mourteen himself.

It must be, then, that Synge is applying the standards established in the passage about Hercules to his own comparative practice. The Greek presence is there but only, to employ a phrase Synge used in a draft piece (to describe the way water catches the light in Wicklow), in a 'singular, half-interpreting way' [*Prose* 195]. In *The Aran Islands*, Synge is not going to fall into the trap of the 'learned hedge-school master' and insist on parallels. To do this is to run the risk, encountered several times in the previous chapter, of collapsing time, and characterising the contemporary Aran islanders as Homeric Achaeans, Fir Bolgic slaves, Boeotian farmers, or Olympian Greeks.

A more substantial and significant illustration of what Synge is doing with his apparently eroded comparisons can be found, however, by returning to Pat Dirane's story of the sea-serpent, which Synge noted as a version of the Perseus myth, on the basis of his reading of Hartland. As has already been pointed out, there is no explicit

[24] TCD MS 4344, f. 18r.

comment after this story, despite the many which presented themselves to Synge as he drafted his work. There is, though, an account of an event on Inishmaan which should be seen as functioning as a comparandum to the myth.

This is a scene of the eviction of some of the residents of the island and the attempted eviction of others [*Prose,* 88-92]. Immediate parallels between the two narratives are established by, for example, Synge's use of the trope of three. Dirane's sea-serpent story stresses that the young cowherd only manages to kill the monster and rescue the girl on the third attempt; the monster arrives twice before but manages to escape only wounded. Synge picks up Dirane's folkloric technique and mirrors it, beginning his account of the arrival of the evicting bailiff, straight after Dirane's story ends, with the line 'two recent attempts to carry out evictions on the island came to nothing, for each time a sudden storm rose...This morning, however, broke beneath a clear sky of June' [*Prose,* 88].

Synge thus sets up the expectation that in this third attempt the tension will break and a dénouement of some sort will finally arrive. The trope is then repeated throughout the narrative, tightening the links with Dirane's stories. The 'three policemen lying in the dust' and the others 'driving three lean cows before them,' for example, are connected to the three giants come to steal the cows in Dirane's tale [*Prose,* 91].[25] Similarly, there is a parallel between the girl left out for the serpent, who is viewed as a momentous spectacle by the locals – 'a great curiosity to be seen…sitting on the shore in a golden chair' – with the crowd of Aran islanders awaiting the arrival of the bailiff and 'showing a lurking satisfaction at the thought of the dramatic pageant that was to break the silence of the seas' [*Prose,* 86, 88]. There are many other parallels of this sort. Synge even connects the colours of the two scenes, with the black and gold of the cowherd's horse and the princess's throne reappearing in the gleaming rifles on the dark uniforms of the policemen.

This tactic of attending to echoes between the two stories is indebted to Mary King's study of Synge's work, published in 1985. King argues that, when considering

[25] Synge would have read in d'Arbois that *'trois est un nombre divin*', in *La civilisation des Celtes*, 257. Cf. Macintosh on the 'threefold' death pattern of Irish saga, Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 50-51.

the inclusion of folk stories in *The Aran Islands*, it is vital 'to attend to their contextualisation' and not just their content, whether as folkloric transcripts or as raw material for plays.[26] Her own study focuses on 'the symbolic interactions between the tales the people told, the ways they told them, and the social and historical forces at work on their daily lives.'[27] Synge's 'contextualisation' of the stories, she argues, asks the reader to 'relocate [them] in history'.[28] The function of the sea-serpent story, therefore, is the acute and revealing contrast between it and the actual social reality of the islanders. The islander who has turned bailiff, Patrick, is presented as a reversal of the cowherd in the story, bringing danger and loss into the community rather than protecting it. This contrast allows the cowherd story to offer, King argues, 'an alternative happy ending to their sad tale of sorrow, holding out the possibility of freedom and victory.'[29]

The theory behind this reading of the stories is valuable and has been borrowed here. However, if the question of Synge's scholarship and, in particular, his interest in comparatism, is inserted into such an argument, it can be developed in a new way. It can become a question about the use of the past, as well as a question about social or political critique, and it can answer the question of why Synge prevents his narrator from drawing comparisons.

3. Synge's silence

You didn't listen to the tale of the stones,
Greatness lived in the tale of the hearth…
The book was always in your hand –
You brought the words in it to life
Máirtín Ó Direáin[30]

[26] King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 28.
[27] King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 28.
[28] King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 29.
[29] King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 30.
[30] Máirtín Ó Direáin, 'Homage to John Millington Synge', in *Selected Poems,* 41.

those
Who when we speak proclaim us barbarous
Douglas Dunn[31]

I will be silent.
J.M. Synge [*Prose*, 36]

It is not uncommon for Synge to withdraw himself, or his narrator, out of his work in this elusive way. To adapt one of his own expressions, used to describe the *History* of Geoffrey Keating, Synge's work is 'curiously remote' [*Prose,* 361]. He often appears to be at a partial or total remove from what he is writing. This silence has been noticed by others from the very beginning of his career, with a variety of recurring interpretations (it is also a quality he observes in the Aran Islanders: 'they are usually silent' [*Prose,* 75]). 'Synge gave one awfully little', wrote Constance Masefield in her diary in 1915, '…I don't think anyone who hadn't known him could imagine him at all.'[32] 'He was different from the others in the Abbey,' recalled Mary Colum, 'in that he did not talk much to anybody.'[33] For Yeats, he was 'a furious impartiality, an indifferent, turbulent sorrow', and 'an unintelligible creature'.[34] A journalist reports asking the poet in an interview if he could 'tell me anything about Mr. Synge?' In response, 'Mr. Yeats walked up and down the room. "There is little to say," was the reply.'[35]

For some critics this taciturnity was a display of an admirable reserve, designed to wrong-foot those searching for clear answers. L.A.G. Strong, a friend of Yeats, warned that 'the critics who sit aloof in an ivory tower, and haughtily summon such of the world's literature as will approach for judgment, are not going to make much of

[31] Douglas Dunn, 'In the Grounds', in *Barbarians* (London, 1979), 15.
[32] Diary of Constance Masefield (1915), quoted in Constance Babington Smith, *John Masefield: A Life* (Oxford, 1978), 78.
[33] Colum, *Life and the Dream*, 94.
[34] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 384; W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV 1905-1907,* eds. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford, 2005), 819.
[35] From an interview in T.P's Weekly, quoted in anon., 'Our Scrap-Book', *The Irish Book Lover*, vol. 5, no. 6 (Jan., 1914), 108.

Synge'; 'he solves no problems.'[36] More recently, Nicholas Allen has argued that 'if Synge will not give the answers it is because his theatre is explorative, not declarative.'[37] Terry Eagleton, similarly, has praised the 'under-stated, anti-heroic' nature of *The Aran Islands.*[38]

For other scholars, however, in what is arguably the chief concern of Synge scholarship at present, Synge's silence presents a fraught problem. In *The Aran Islands*, it entails a contentious claim to knowledge of and intimacy with the islanders themselves, along the lines of the fallacious objectivity and omniscience of the early anthropologists. David Fitzpatrick, for instance, argues that, in his 'impartial tone,' Synge is in fact displaying a 'reticence amounting to deception', in the face of the deprived realities of the islanders.[39] Scott Ashley identifies a 'shift in theoretical approach' in *The Aran Islands* towards naturalness, ascribing it to Synge's status as 'an apostate Decadent…taking strong and primitive medicine as a cure for the degenerate city'.[40] Garrigan Mattar puts this apparent 'capacity for unbiased observation' down to Synge's primitivist ethnographical project, his 'view of himself as the soul-mate of the primitive hunters.'[41] Several other scholars have laid the same charges at Synge's feet; the primitivism of Synge's approach is, by far, the most frequent sticking point in scholarship on Synge's Aran.[42] Gregory Castle, for example, argues that 'Synge's anthropological modernism' in *The Aran Islands* is 'undermined by an unscientific intersubjectivity – a desire to enter into an intimate, reciprocal rapport with the

[36] L.A.G. Strong, *John Millington Synge* (London, 1941), 11, 42.
[37] Allen, 'Synge, reading and archipelago', 165.
[38] Terry Eagleton, *Scholars & Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), 152.
[39] Fitzpatrick, 'Synge and modernity', 135, 137. Fitzpatrick's chapter has a helpful overview of other studies of Synge's text, at 121-124.
[40] Ashley, 'Primitivism, Celticism and morbidity', 190.
[41] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 131, 130.
[42] It is also one of the central questions in scholarship on his plays and their representation of 'peasant' culture. It is the subject of the chapter on Synge in the recent *Oxford Handbook to Modern Irish Drama*, for example. See Mary Burke, 'The Riot of Spring: Synge's "Failed Realism" and the Peasant Drama', in Grene and Morash eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, 87-102.

islands'.[43] He argues that this was a mark of 'the observer's own consciousness', and part of a wider, pervasive 'Revivalist project of cultural redemption'.[44]

If, therefore, Synge's elisions of comparative comment are not to be seen as a disingenuous and harmful abstraction, this objection needs answering. Such an answer will have two further benefits. First, it will suggest a way out of this impasse in Synge studies. Second, it will deal with the fact that the objection of primitivism is in fact *strengthened*, as it stands, by the only other interpretation so far of Synge's *The Aran Islands* as classical. This is Richard Martin's study of Synge and Homer, in Graziosi and Greenwood's collection of essays on *Homer in the Twentieth Century*. Following Martin's theory, Synge does turn the Aran islanders into 'walking antiquities,' through his use of Homer.

Having noted the significance of Synge's first Aran trip occurring straight after d'Arbois' Homer lectures, Martin points out several 'Homer-tinged' episodes in *The Aran Islands*.[45] He sees, among other things, the blind Mourteen as a Homeric figure; the description of the opening of the cottage doors according to the wind or sun as a reference to the 'oxen-loosing hour' of Homer; the keens as Homeric funeral laments; the mother of the bailiff as the mother of Meleager; the ugly man on Inisheer as Thersites; and a passage about outrages to the hearth as 'the *xenia* theme, Odysseus in Phaeacia'.[46] These are, however, never made explicit. Martin sees them as 'vignettes that one who had read the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* will pause over'.[47] The reason for this allusiveness, for Martin, is that it allows Synge to become an Aran Homer, unfettered by scholarly or cultural distance, 'a wandering Homer whose Ithaca was Aran.'[48]

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[43] Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival,* 99.
[44] Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival,* 99, 100.
[45] Richard Martin, 'Homer among the Irish: Yeats, Synge, Thomson', in Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood eds., *Homer in the Twentieth Century: Between World Literature and the Western Canon* (Oxford, 2007), 81.
[46] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 81-83.
[47] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 82.
[48] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 85.

For Martin, Synge's 'silence is itself significant' because Synge requires 'that the traditions he cites be anonymous, the voice of the folk, coming from the soil'.[49] He is also, by writing about them in the guise of a Homer, 'heroizing the men and women of Aran, through an implicit but constant comparison with the world of Homeric epic.'[50] 'Synge,' Martin argues,' imported the heroic ideal of Homer and implicitly framed the lives of the Aran islanders within it.'[51] It is crucial that a classicist has looked to Synge, when considering the reception of Homer, and has noted Synge's interest in Homeric comparisons. However, as might be expected for this breaking of ground, there is a slight superficiality about the engagement with Synge himself. For example, Martin works largely from secondary sources – he is particularly reliant on Macintosh's *Dying Acts*, and, as he acknowledges, only cites the manuscript catalogue for archival evidence – and he has a few factual slips, such as asserting that Synge reviewed d'Arbois' translation of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, which was actually a book by Augusta Gregory.[52] More importantly, however, Synge's function in this essay is primarily as a foil to James Joyce and George Thomson, which, though part of an interesting argument, further qualifies Martin's conclusions about Synge's use of Greece.

'The poet *imports*', Martin writes, '– he takes Homer to Ireland and bestows him like a blessing on the select few'.[53] It has been seen, however, that taking Homer to Ireland would be anything but an importation. Martin's argument is that to be 'rooted' in Ireland must entail being uprooted from other traditions. Synge must be silent about his Homeric parallels, according to Martin, because they would prevent him from true contact with the islanders themselves. However, there is more to Synge than this, and more to Homer on Aran. Whether or not it is boosted by the silent Homeric parallels, however, the objection about the falseness of direct contact between the narrator and the islanders still stands. It can be met, though, and a new

[49] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 83.
[50] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 81.
[51] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 85.
[52] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', n.16.
[53] Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 77.

interpretation of Synge's silence can be found, by returning to King's theory and adjusting it in the light of the intellectual history explored so far in this study.

The comparative folklorist, E.S Hartland, described his research into the overlaps between the Perseus legend and stories from other traditions, as a process of 'tracing the legend in its wanderings and modifications.' 'A tale,' he explains, '…in its passage through the world is susceptible of almost infinite modifications.'[54] In the pairing of the sea-serpent and eviction scenes, Synge is dramatizing this wandering. He is putting into writing the process by which traditional stories collide into and inform one another, the process which nineteenth-century mythologists and folklorists were seeking to unravel, in their attempts to find a lost whole.

By placing different stories side-by-side and leaving it up to the reader to connect them (as King suggests), Synge can, therefore, be seen as giving the reader the raw material with which a comparative mythologist, folklorist or antiquarian would work. To understand the text, the reader can then undertake the activity of the comparatist: the noticing of striking similarities and the probing of them, stepping into the role of the comparative scholar. This is why Synge writes the narrator out of the comparisons of the text – to put the reader in.

This technique can be clarified through reference to James Joyce's effort, in his coinages and puns, to manifest the laws of linguistic development in his own writing. As Seamus Heaney put it, part of Joyce's interest in the English language was in 'making it lie down where all its ladders start, in the rag-and-bone shop of Indo-European origins and relationships'.[55] By embedding the slow-moving evolution of language within his words, the writer could therefore, Joyce claimed, 'effect in a few minutes what may have taken centuries to bring about.'[56] Similarly, Declan Kiberd has identified 'the core of Joyce's notion of tradition' as the idea that it is 'less…a set of canonical texts than…the very transmissibility of ideas'.[57] Kiberd argues that tradition, for Joyce, 'is a medium rather than a set of contents, a way of handing down rather

[54] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 10.
[55] Seamus Heaney, 'Tradition and an Individual Talent' (1972), in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London, 1980), 196.
[56] Joyce quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (new and rev. edn, 1983), 716.
[57] Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 479.

than the things handed.'[58] This Joycean example is an illuminating parallel. It is the key to understanding Synge's use of Greek echoes in *The Aran Islands*, and to countering the charges of his critics.

Synge's reader can be modelled as a Joycean, armed with the materials they need to compare Irish and Greek, but left to do the rest of the work (it is crucial that he *gives* the reader the materials for Greek-Irish comparison; he does not demand any specialised prior knowledge or expertise). By transplanting the techniques he has learnt from his reading in comparative scholarship, Synge does not erase the connectedness of the Irish tradition to Greek, nor does he deny or disguise it, but he allows the reader to find and interpret it for themselves. To borrow Kiberd's formulation, he includes ancient Greece on Aran as 'a way of handing down' rather than as 'things handed.' This is in direct contrast to the tradition of Graeco-Celtic comparatism seen so far, in which the connections are always made by the writer themselves, fixed and immovable.

It could be said, however, that the same technique can be applied to any text, in the light of modern reception theory. The reader is in charge, necessarily. However, what is truly important about Synge's deliberate relinquishing of responsibility for comparatism to the reader, is that he had himself devised a theory of reading that accounted for this task. Synge himself theorised a model of reading that placed the interpretive burden upon the reader of a text, long before reception theory was thought up. He then worked to put that into practice in his own writing.

4. The reader as artist

> *a vital element in all literature is indistinctness…The reader…not only can but must come to some kind of accommodation with the indistinctness in order to take meaning from the*

[58] Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 479. Kiberd also links this to comparative mythology, at 44: 'the effect of aligning *The Odyssey* and *Ulysses* is rather like that achieved by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*.'

text. For that, the imagination must operate.
John Carey[59]

I follow Goethe's rule, to tell no one what one means in one's writings. I am sure that you will agree that the rule is a good one.
J.M. Synge[60]

Doubt is often a more imperative duty than belief.
E.S. Hartland[61]

Synge's theorising can be found in three unpublished essays, written in all probability in that crucial year, 1898. The first, on 'The Duality of Literature,' argues that 'in drama, music and literature, the work of art has a twofold existence.' 'First,' he explains, 'as it is created by the artist, then as it is rendered by the actor, reader, or performer.' Modifying Mallarmé's view that the reader is 'the equivalent of the spectator in a theatre,' he argues that 'the reader of a book' should rather be considered 'as a real actor or performer.'[62]

The second essay restates this thesis. 'Poetry,' Synge writes, 'is a form of music and like all music has so to say [sic] a double existence one of which is given by the composer and the other by the interpreter.' 'When we read', he continues 'we are in reality performing a musical composition of great intricacy.'[63]

Crucially, Synge then applies his theory explicitly to the Irish Revival, via comparative scholarship. He argues that the Revival, 'the interest which cultivated people in Ireland are beginning to take in the legends and folk songs of their country,' should be acknowledged not as 'the mark of any isolated progress,' but rather as the outcome of the application of comparative mythology and folklore onto these legends,

[59] John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (Oxford, 2006), 214.
[60] Synge, letter to one of his correspondents, quoted in E.H. Mikhail ed., *J.M. Synge: Interviews and Recollections* (London and Basingstoke, 1977), xi.
[61] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 189.
[62] TCD MS 4349, ff. 3r-4r.
[63] TCD MS 4382, f. 47v.

which has already 'attained results of extraordinary interest such as are given in Frazer's Golden [Bough] or Hartland's Perseus.'[64]

For the third essay, Synge drafts an argument on the 'rate at which scientific theories are absorbed by literature.'[65] 'A not uninteresting study,' he points out, 'might be made to show how long a new scientific or philosophical idea takes, in the average, to find its way from its first limited scene of life to the broader plain where it is used by writers who seek art rather than science.'[66] 'Can it be doubted', he asks, 'that a view of life such as is seen in Huxley's 'Place of Man in Nature,' will tend to change the root notes of litterature [sic] nearly as thoroughly as eccliastical [sic] ideas changed pagan ideas of antiquity'?[67] He stresses the importance of paying attention not only to the facts of scientific discoveries, but also to 'the atmosphere of human emotions that are certain to group around them in the course of their reception by wide masses of people.'[68]

In other words, these three essays reveal that Synge is interested in the theory of reading, in the history of scholarship, and in the relationship between scholarship and art. It can now be appreciated, that what is ground-breaking about Synge's reception of antiquity in *The Aran Islands* is his combination of comparative scholarship with a literary theory about reader response. By applying comparative scholarship to his account of the Aran Islands, informed by an aesthetic theory developed in Paris in 1898, Synge creates a text which requires its reader to construct its meaning for themselves.

The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first century saw a resounding crisis in the practice of comparison, with shockwaves felt in several comparative disciplines. It was caused by the legacy of the comparative strategy in nineteenth-century ideas of race and canon-formation (as encountered in Chapter Four, in the comparisons drawn by Nutt and William Ridgeway). Modern comparative literature then inherited and displayed, as Susan Bassnett explains, a 'failure to consider the political implications of

[64] TCD MS 4382, f. 50v.
[65] TCD MS 4393, f. 24v.
[66] TCD MS 4393, f. 25v.
[67] TCD MS 4393, f. 25v.
[68] TCD MS 4393, f. 29r.

intercultural transfer processes'.[69] As a result of this crisis, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak declared 'the death of a discipline'; 'comparative literature', wrote Bassnett, '…has had its day.'[70]

To circumvent this crisis, however, scholars have been increasingly transferring the burden of comparison to the reader, away from anything inherent in the thing being compared. Comparison becomes, instead, a way or method of reading.[71] It should be acknowledged that Synge began to work towards this conclusion from 1898 onwards. He did so by absorbing, challenging and transforming the Graeco-Celtic comparative thinkers of the preceding centuries, making room for the reader (or, as will be seen in the following chapters, the audience).

5. Conclusion

In the Aranmore/Inishmaan notebook of 1898, Synge observes that 'everything in Aran has its own delicate distinction'.[72] The islands are unique whilst also being connected to the rest of the world; the people belong in modernity rather than as the 'walking antiquities' implied by the strident, systematic comparison of them or their way of life to the ancient Greeks. In Synge, such connections are 'curiously remote' [*Prose,* 361].

This gains vital significance given the hectic closeness that had been sought between the Irish and the Greek in the centuries leading up to Synge, and that would continue to be sought right up to the present day. To return to Yeats on Aran, it avoids the 'breathlessness' displayed in other attempts to connect antiquities, to find

[69] Susan Bassnett, 'Reflections on Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century', *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 3, nos. 1-2 (2006), 6.
[70] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York, 2003); Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, 1993), 161.
[71] See for example, Matthew Reynolds, Mohamed-Salah Omri and Ben Morgan, 'Guest Editors' Introduction', *Comparative Critical Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2015), 148. For a helpful overview of comparatism, see David Damrosch, Natalie Melas and Mbongiseni Buthelezi eds., *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Oxford, 2009), ix-xvi.
[72] TCD MS 4385, f. 5v.

'possible unities' between disparate places, traditions and symbols, or to yoke the past to the present in the search for 'a model of the nation...some moral diagram'.[73] In contrast to these spiralling radiances, or these 'vortices' of antiquity, Synge presents rather, in a phrase he applies to a Wicklow valley at twilight, a 'timorous radiancy' of the connection between Celtic and Greek traditions [*Prose*, 200].

[73] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 364.

Chapter Eight

Synge's Graeco-Celtic tragedy

1. Introduction

Let it be the work of the literary societies to teach to the writers on the one hand, and to the readers on the other, that there is no nationality without literature, no literature without nationality. In the old days when Davis sang there was no need to teach it, for then Apollo struck his lyre with a pike-head, but now he has flung both pike-head and lyre into the sea.

W.B. Yeats[1]

Cuchulinn, son of Lug, the Irish Apollo-Dionysus

Alfred Nutt[2]

The Irish Apollo had not yet entered into the sun.

Standish O'Grady[3]

On 8th October 1903, Synge saw a play of his own performed on the Irish stage for the first time, a one-act drama entitled *The Shadow of the Glen*.[4] Its protagonist was Nora Burke, a woman living in a remote corner of County Wicklow, whose husband pretends to be dead in order to eavesdrop on her conversations with other men. At

[1] Yeats, 'The Irish Intellectual Capital: Where Is It?' (1892), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One,* 224-245.
[2] Nutt, 'Fairy Mythology', 49.
[3] O'Grady, *History of Ireland*, ii. 79.
[4] Or, in the 1904 edition of the play, *In the Shadow of the Glen*. The 'In' was omitted in 1905.

the end, he wakes up, throws her out of the house, and Nora Burke takes to the road with a passing tramp.

The play was staged by the Irish National Theatre Society, which had come into being earlier that year, a collaboration between the Irish Literary Theatre, founded by Yeats, Gregory and Edward Martyn, and a small dramatic company in Dublin, run by two brothers, William and Frank Fay. Theatre had been a crucial part of Yeats's vision of Irish cultural independence since the 1890s; 'the truth is,' he wrote, 'that the Irish people are at that precise stage of their history when imagination…desires dramatic expression.'[5] In 1904, the National Theatre Society became the Abbey Theatre, and Synge became one of its triumvirate of directors, alongside Yeats and Gregory. According to Dawson Byrne, an actor and chronicler of the Abbey, the 'ambitious dream' was 'a distinctively Irish drama played by native actors.'[6]

This first play of Synge's, however, threw the appropriateness of the new 'Irish Theatre for Ireland' into controversy, by challenging the validity of its 'national' title.[7] Maud Gonne and fellow members of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (a nationalist women's organisation) walked out of *The Shadow of the Glen*'s first performance, which *The Irish Times* records was met with 'mingled cheers and hisses', protesting 'against the displacement of the woman-nation's troubles by the personal distress of…Nora Burke.'[8] Douglas Hyde left his post as Vice-President of the National Theatre Society a few months after the production.[9] The play also caused a long controversy to unfold in the pages of *The United Irishman*, lasting until January 1905. Its most vocal detractor was Arthur Griffith, the paper's editor and the founder of Sinn Féin.

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[5] W.B. Yeats, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran (New York, 2003), 4.
[6] Dawson Byrne, *The Story of Ireland's National Theatre: The Abbey Theatre, Dublin* (New York, 1971), 2.
[7] Byrne, *The Story of Ireland's National Theatre*, 10.
[8] Anon., 'The Irish National Theatre', *The Irish Times* (9 Oct., 1903), in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy eds., *The Modern Irish Drama II: Laying the Foundations 1902-1904* (Dublin, 1976), 74; Antoinette Quinn, 'Staging the Irish Peasant Woman: Maud Gonne versus Synge', in Nicholas Grene ed., *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School, 1991-2000* (Dublin, 2000), 127.
[9] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 238.

Griffith's objection was that *The Shadow of the Glen* should not be called an Irish play, as it was in fact 'a corrupt version' of an ancient Greek folktale called 'The Widow of Ephesus' (retold in Petronius' *Satyricon*). 'Mr. Synge', Griffith claimed, 'has turned a Greek lady into an Irish peasant woman and Ephesus into Wicklow'.[10] This was dishonest artistic practice, he argued – 'Norah [sic] Burke is a lie' – and 'it is not by staging a lie that we can serve Ireland or exalt Art.'[11] Griffith then published his own version of Synge's play, giving it the title *In a Real Wicklow Glen*. In 1905, when Yeats reported that Synge had in fact heard the story of the play from Pat Dirane on the Aran Islands, Griffith replied that 'it is…astonishing that Mr. Synge should have to journey from Paris to the Aran Islands to hear a story which is a stock one in the Quartier Latin.'[12] He objected, again, to Synge's technique of 'taking a Greek story, dramatizing it, and changing the names of the characters into Irish names'.[13]

It would be easy to brush Griffith's objections aside as extreme and even absurd; Yeats for one had little patience with them – 'you have wasted some of my time', he wrote.[14] However, they deserve further attention. They are based on many things, including moral and artistic puritanism and suspicion against foreign influence more generally, as well as particular qualms about Synge as playwright. Mary Burke has emphasised the notion that Synge's Protestant, middleclass upbringing 'precluded him from understanding the nuances of rural Irish life', while Ben Levitas has demonstrated the significance of both the Irish and the comic characterisation of Synge's adulterous figures to Griffith's reaction.[15] But Griffith's complaint is also, specifically, about the perceived presence of Greece in Synge's play. 'Norah Burke', he wrote '…is a Greek – a Greek of Greece's most debased period, and to dress her in an Irish costume and call her Irish is not only not art, but…an insult to the women of

[10] Arthur Griffith, 'All Ireland', *The United Irishman* (17 Oct., 1903), in Hogan and Kilroy eds., *The Modern Irish Drama II*, 78.
[11] Griffith, 'All Ireland', 79.
[12] For Dirane's story, see *Prose*, 70-72.
[13] Arthur Griffith, 'J.M. Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen*', *The United Irishman* (28 Jan., 1905), in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy eds., *The Modern Irish Drama III: The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909* (Dublin, 1978), 11.
[14] W.B. Yeats, letter in 'All Ireland' column, *The United Irishman* (4 Feb., 1905), in Hogan and Kilroy eds., *The Modern Irish Drama III*, 12.
[15] Burke, 'The Riot of Spring', 94; Levitas, 'The Abbey and the Idea of a Theatre', 49.

Ireland.'[16] Griffith, as David Greene observed, perceived the 'corrupting' influence of classical mythology in Synge's Irish play, and took issue with the whole notion of turning what should be an Irish artefact into a 'foul echo from degenerate Greece.'[17] This is an objection encountered many times so far in the context of Graeco-Celtic relations.

As Leerssen points out, the long-running *United Irishman* controversy 'very quickly became a debate around Yeats.'[18] The poet rose to the occasion, arguing against Griffith on his own terms. He identified alternative versions of the 'Widow of Ephesus' to allay the idea that Synge straightforwardly copied one he had read in Petronius. The story of the 'Widow of Ephesus' 'was not invented by the decadent Greeks', he argued, but is 'one of the oldest of Eastern tales. It is in that most ancient book of fables, *The Seven Wise Masters*, and is extant in a very vivid form in old Chinese writings'. He also pointed to parallels in Hyde's *The Love Songs of Connacht* (the story of 'The Roman Earl,' who feigns death to test his wife's fidelity) and in a ballad from Tory Island.[19]

Yeats's response to Griffith was a resurrection of his desire to map the connections between elements, to establish an 'orderly background' for his life and work, out of Pound's 'vortex' of antiquity. 'He was growing into his life', Roy Foster observes, as he worked through this debate.[20] Synge's public response to Griffith could not have been more different. As Anthony Roche puts it, 'as a student of comparative literatures, Synge would only have been too aware of the debt of the *Shadow* to the Widow of Ephesus story, but he had to keep silent in the face of Arthur Griffith's charge.'[21] He simply sent Griffith the story he had heard from Dirane, claimed that he had used it 'in a modified form' in his play and asserted that 'it differs essentially from

[16] Griffith, 'J.M. Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen*', 12.
[17] David H. Greene, '*The Shadow of the Glen* and the Widow of Ephesus', *PMLA*, vol. 62, no. 1 (Mar., 1947), 235; Griffith, 'J.M. Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen*', 12.
[18] Leerssen, *Remembrance*, 218.
[19] Yeats, 'All Ireland', in Hogan and Kilroy eds., *The Modern Irish Drama III*, 12. For Synge's use of 'The Roman Earl', see Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 136-138.
[20] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 302.
[21] Anthony Roche, 'Forward', in Patrick Lonergan ed., *Synge and his Influences: Centenary Essays from the Synge Summer School* (Dublin, 2011), xvi-xvii.

any version of the story of the "Widow of Ephesus" with which I am acquainted' [*Letters I*, 106]. As Greene and Stephens write, this letter was 'factually too chaste to be vulnerable' and left room for Yeats, instead, to respond.[22]

Privately, however, Synge also began to draft a play, at the beginning of 1905, about a committee debating 'the Possibility, Origin, and Future of an Irish National Drama' [*Plays I*, 222]. The committee members propose and reject various theatrical models, including Molière, Ibsen and Shakespeare, until finally someone asks whether they could 'take the Greeks?' The answer is distinctly Griffith-like – 'is it more Ephesian drama you want?' [*Plays I*, 223].

This debate with Griffith was just the beginning of what Eimar O'Duffy satirically referred to as the phenomenon of 'the Synge-divided Gael'.[23] As is well-known, Synge's plays caused several controversies – the riots after his *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 are the most famous – and the particular debate on 'the authenticity' of *The Shadow*'s source has continued, as Anne Markey explains, with several folklorists arguing for the rooted existence of the base-story of Synge's play in the Irish tradition.[24] These assertions come in response to the detection, by others, of further 'echoes' of Greece.[25] This is a pattern of criticism that reappears in the reception of several of Synge's plays, having begun, in intensified form, in this controversy about *The Shadow.*

Synge himself, however, charted a middle ground. In opposition to the debate over 'The Pedigree of the Widow of Ephesus [*Plays I*, 221], in his draft play, a character called Jameson argues for a more democratic approach to tradition, claiming that 'in the little brotherhood of western nations that are thinking and living together everything is common that you controversialists claim for their own' [*Plays I*, 225]. As Kiberd points out, this is a view clearly 'endorsed by Synge'.[26] It also exists somewhere between the responses of Yeats and Griffith. Similarly, William Fay recalls discussions

[22] Greene and Stephens, *J.M. Synge. 1871-1909*, 182.
[23] Eimar O'Duffy, *The Wasted Island* (London, 1929), 127.
[24] Anne Markey, 'The Price of Kelp in Connemara: Synge, Pearse, and the Idealization of Folk Culture', in Cliff and Grene eds., *Synge and Edwardian Ireland*, 218.
[25] See for example, Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 121, for a comparison with Euripides' *Alcestis.*
[26] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 235.

with Synge in which they shared other versions of Dirane's story and considered a European provenance. In particular, both he and Synge 'were puzzled to know' how the word 'gallery' got into Dirane's version, for 'you don't find galleries in Irish cottages, but you might find something of the sort in a peasant's house in the south of Europe.'[27]

This chapter will investigate the shape of responses to another of Synge's early plays, *Riders to the Sea*, as influenced by Greece. It will argue that they have taken two predominant forms, which exist in opposition to one another. To do this will necessitate a detailed analysis of Synge's engagement with Greek tragedy, both in terms of later scholarship on the question, and of Synge's own knowledge of Greek drama (also providing a useful survey of this broad subject). With that done, controversies about Synge and Greece should be laid to rest and space cleared for a reading of the play itself. The chapter will then put forward a different reading of the relation of *Riders to the Sea* to the Greek world, suggesting a more appropriately Syngean method of viewing Greece and Ireland at one and the same time. It will be informed by the tradition of Graeco-Celtic scholarship in which Synge himself was so immersed, as explored in Chapters Six and Seven, and as intimated by his response to the controversy over *The Shadow of the Glen*.

2. *Riders to the Sea* and Greek tragedy

> *The strange survivals of classical stories, if indeed they are survivals and not parallels, in the peasant tales which Mr. Synge heard are full of interest.*
>
> *The Irish Times*[28]

> *a proper name speaks to him of the past in contemporary language. Squeeze it a little and*

[27] William G. Fay, 'In the Shadow of the Glen', in Mikhail ed., *J.M. Synge*, 27-28.
[28] Anon., '*The Aran Islands*', *The Irish Times* (7 Jun., 1907), 9.

a story, a choice of stories, will drop out of it.
Hubert Butler[29]

Neglect nothing, for God is in the earth and not above it.
J.M. Synge [*Plays I*, 164]

a. Synge and tragedy

Synge's *Riders to the Sea* was the first of his plays to be published, and is often considered his masterpiece; as Nicholas Grene writes, it appeared on the scene as 'the first accomplished work of a master craftsman.'[30] Written in the year of Synge's last visit to Aran, 1902, it is set on 'an island off the West of Ireland' [*Plays I*, 3] and is about the toll the sea takes on a family of islanders. As the play builds, its protagonist, Maurya, becomes convinced, through omens and premonitions, that her two sons will soon be reported drowned. By the end of the play, Michael is indeed found washed up in Donegal, while Bartley is knocked into the sea by his horse and swept onto the rocks. His body is laid out on the stage and the play closes with the lament of Maurya and the other island women.

As Declan Kiberd states, 'many of the play's greatest admirers have found in it traces of the Greek classics.'[31] This observation goes back to the play's earliest reception. Yeats, for example, identified the 'mood of Greek tragedy' in the play, though argued it was also 'too passive in suffering'.[32] When he read it in its first publication, Stephen MacKenna, a life-long ambassador for Graeco-Celtic relations, saw it as 'somewhat Gaelic-Greek of the kind I always thought should come out of Ireland.'[33] L.A.G. Strong declared it to be 'a Greek tragedy'; while Mary Colum noted

[29] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 87.
[30] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 41.
[31] Kiberd, 'Introduction', x.
[32] Yeats, 'Synge and the Ireland of his Time', 336.
[33] MacKenna, quoted in Greene and Stephens, *J.M. Synge. 1871-1909*, 159. For MacKenna's interest in Greek-Irish crossovers, see for example, his plans to translate Pindar into Irish – '"the best of all things is water" – how real and significant that might become in Gaelic!' – as

'the Greek quietness and stateliness' of the characters, arguing that the play ended with 'the high grave note which the ancient dramatists thought the true ending of a tragedy.'[34] T.R. Henn, similarly, argued that it had in it 'the simplicity in depth of much Greek drama' and compared the sisters, Nora and Cathleen, to Antigone and Ismene.[35] 'In the play', he wrote, 'there are in miniature elements of the Greek tragic pattern: the foreboding of Maurya, the ritual elegies for the single and the many dead; the keening woman as a chorus; the release of tension in the resigned acceptance of defeat.'[36]

More recently, Robin Skelton compared the death of Bartley to the death of Hippolytus in Euripides, as well as arguing that 'the form of the play has much in common with Greek theatre'.[37] D.S. Neff, on the other hand, identified parallels with Euripides' *Hecuba*.[38] David Clark deemed that 'it has that effect of tragic catharsis which Aristotle described as the specific effect of tragedy'.[39] More recently still, Michael Lloyd pointed out other features of the play which 'recall Greek tragedy', such as the importance of offstage action, while McCormack styled it as 'veritably Greek in its generic perfection.'[40] Fiona Macintosh has identified a tragic structure as the framework behind the play, with the action divided into prologue, *parodos*, odes and episodes.[41] Frank McGuinness, one of the most prominent contemporary Irish playwrights to work with Greek tragedy said, in a discussion 'about the Irish and the

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well as *Antigone,* Epictetus and Plato. Stephen MacKenna, *Journals and Letters of Stephen MacKenna*, ed. E.R. Dodds (London, 1936), xvi, 253. Richard Martin argues that MacKenna's trip to Greece to volunteer for the Graeco-Turkish War in 1897 was an influence on Synge's trip to Aran, 'a model for how one puts into action a scholarly love.' Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 79.

[34] Strong, *John Millington Synge*, 30; Colum, 'John Synge', 40-41.

[35] T.R. Henn ed., *The Plays and Poems of J.M. Synge* (London, 1963), 37.

[36] Henn ed., *Plays and Poems*, 38.

[37] Robin Skelton, *The Writings of J.M. Synge* (London, 1971), 49, 43.

[38] D.S. Neff, 'Synge's Hecuba', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 19 (1984), 81-86.

[39] David R. Clark, 'Synge's "Perpetual 'Last Day'": Remarks on *Riders to the Sea*', in S.B. Bushrui ed., *Sunshine and the Moon's Delight: A Centenary Tribute to John Millington Synge 1871-1909* (Gerrards Cross and Beirut, 1972), 50.

[40] Michael Lloyd, 'Playboy of the Ancient World? Synge and the Classics', *Classics Ireland*, vol. 18 (2011), 54; McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 23.

[41] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 64. King, similarly, relates *The Aran Islands* to the structure of a symphony, King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 21-24.

Greeks', that 'the closest thing that we have in English to the density and immediacy and subversiveness of Greek writing is *Riders to the Sea*, Synge's play.'[42]

All in all, as Roche puts it, the play has been seen to exhibit a 'profound awareness of ancient Greek…tragedy.'[43] And it is indeed true that Synge had a serious interest in tragedy. His university notebook from 1889 contains quotations, in Greek, from several classical texts (including Euripides' *Hecuba*) alongside notes from T.K. Abbot's lectures on *Medea*, with a particular focus on metre.[44] Although critics tend to view Synge's university studies as somewhat cursory (McCormack points to the notion that he was 'a nondescript undergraduate'), Edward Stephens regarded his 'discovery of Greek drama' while at Trinity as a significant watershed.[45] After leaving Trinity, while in Paris, he brought copies of Sophocles and Euripides.[46] In addition, as late as December 1907 (just over a year before he died of Hodgkin's disease, aged thirty-seven) he appears to have asked MacKenna for advice on getting copies of Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus and Aristophanes delivered either from Paris or London.[47] A translation of part of the *Alcestis* was also found among his papers, in what looks like the handwriting of his brother.[48]

Synge's interest in tragedy as a genre was even more thorough, perhaps, than his reading of tragic texts. He engaged with questions of metre and the musicality of tragedy – its posited development from communal singing – as well as the function of the chorus. A notebook from 1898, for example, contains an intricate diagram of the development of different art forms, with art existing, at first, 'for the artist' and later 'for the viewer' (an echo of his essays on the reader as artist). According to this schema, 'Olympic or funeral games' and 'simple singing and declamation' lead to the 'genre of drama'.[49] Synge also included an oblique reference to the possible etymology

[42] Frank McGuinness in conversation with Fiona Macintosh (Oxford, 2009) [https://www.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/frank-mcguinness-conversation-fiona-macintosh]
[43] Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 6.
[44] TCD MS 4373, ff. 3v, 19r-20v.
[45] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 83; Stephens, *My Uncle John*, 66.
[46] TCD MS 4349, f. 24r.
[47] Letter from Stephen MacKenna to J.M. Synge (9 Dec., 1907), TCD MS 4425/391, unfoliated.
[48] TCD MS 4368, ff. 17r-30v. See Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 121.
[49] TCD MS 4349, f. 21v.

of τραγῳδία in his 1907 account of Puck Fair in Killorglin, observing, when a ballad is sung in honour of the goat Puck, that it makes 'one think of the early Greek festivals' [*Prose*, 266].

The same notebook in which Synge wrote his lengthy notes on d'Arbois' *Le cycle mythologique* and Nutt's essay in *The Voyage of Bran* (which are both, themselves, concerned with the origin of Greek tragedy) contains a substantial, considered summary of the chapters on drama, including satyr plays and comedy, in Gilbert Murray's *History of Ancient Greek Literature*.[50] These were added, according to Nicholas Grene, at some point around 1902, after he had read d'Arbois and Nutt.[51] In 1904, Synge wrote to MacKenna to ask him what he thought of the 'method of chorusing' in Granville-Barker's production of *Hippolytus* at the Lyric Theatre in London, in a translation by Gilbert Murray [*Letters I*, 88].

Most interesting of all, though, is Synge's study under Louis Petit de Julleville. On his first visits to Paris, in 1895-1896, he took Julleville's courses at the Sorbonne on medieval French literature and it was in his *L'Histoire du Théâtre en France* that Synge came across the initial inspiration for his play *The Well of the Saints*.[52] In this book, Julleville, who also wrote on Greek history, draws several comparisons between the French and Greek theatrical traditions. He notes, for example, that both French and Greek theatre arose out of religious cult, and compares a thirteenth-century French satire to Aristophanes.[53] Crucially, he argues for a close kinship between medieval French drama and Greek (a similarity that had been obscured by the apparent classicism of French Renaissance theatre, '*le théâtre classique*'). '*Il est curieux d'observer*', he writes, '*que le théâtre du moyen âge…ressemblait bien plus au théâtre des Grecs que le théâtre classique lui-même, qui l'a dépossédé et détruit au nom des*

[50] TCD MS 4378, ff. 38r-34r. D'Arbois discusses the origin of Greek tragedy in *La civilisation des Celtes*, 134-135.
[51] Nicholas Grene, *The Synge Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin: A Catalogue Prepared on the Occasion of the Synge Centenary Exhibition 1971* (Dublin, 1971), 40-41.
[52] See TCD MS 4393, ff. 36r-35r. For Synge's use of the medieval tradition, see O'Brien Johnson, *Synge: the Medieval and the Grotesque.*
[53] Louis Petit de Julleville, *L'Histoire du Théâtre en France: Les Mystères*, two vols (Paris, 1880), i. 2, 4.

Grecs…La Renaissance…en prétendant suivre les pas des Grecs…créa ce que les Grecs n'eussent jamais admis, une littérature d'imitation.'[54]

Julleville thus criticised drama which recreates Greece by means of 'imitation', at the same time as presenting a vision of Greece as wilder and more grotesque than the 'classical' archetype. As well as informing Synge's attitude towards Griffith's criticism of his own 'degenerate echo', this would have enhanced Synge's awareness of the Dionysiac and 'Aristophanesque' view of Greek drama (as outlined in Chapter Four) that he also encountered in Alfred Nutt's essay, in Gilbert Murray and in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*.[55]

b. Synge and tragedy: the response

Despite the sophisticated engagement with tragedy so evident in Synge's intellectual life, there have been several valid arguments against the idea that he reworked Greek tragedy in *Riders to the Sea*. They come in the form of a subdued echo of the immediate storm of controversy about the Widow of Ephesus that greeted the first production of *The Shadow of the Glen*, stemming from Griffith's worries about Synge's indebtedness to Greece.

In *The Poet in the Theatre*, Ronald Peacock praised the 'unpretentious heroism' of *Riders to the Sea* while insisting that it 'has nothing whatever of the complexity of the tragic processes in human life that we find…mastered by the greatest writers.'[56] Peacock denied the validity of a Greek comparison: '*Riders to the Sea*', he argued, 'is a fine piece of tragic art precisely because it does *not* compare with *Oedipus Rex*…It is

[54] Julleville, *L'Histoire du Théâtre*, i. 12-13.
[55] According to McCormack, it is 'unlikely' that Synge did not encounter Nietzsche's theory of tragedy, considering how much other Nietzsche he read, *Fool of the Family*, 199. Note that several scholars draw parallels between Nietzsche and Synge himself, see Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London, 1993), 196; and Dwan, *The Great Community*, 180-182. For Synge and Nietzsche's Dionysus, see Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 17-18.
[56] Ronald Peacock, *The Poet in the Theatre* (London, 1964), quoted in Clark, 'Synge's "Perpetual 'Last Day'", 46.

elemental but also bare and excessively simple.'[57] Similarly, in his study of the play, Denis Donoghue referred to the pervasive conception that *Riders* is a tragedy, only to assert the need 'immediately to limit and define the term in this context.'[58] Donoghue argued that the play 'is not built on the "classic" lines of tragedy', which, in his view, underlie a play like Sophocles' *Oedipus*. '"Riders to the Sea" is not a tragedy', he concludes.[59]

More substantial still is the response of Nicholas Grene, one of the great Synge experts, in his invaluable study of Synge's plays. Grene points to the fact that 'again and again critics have compared the effect of the play's ending to that of classical tragedy', and objects strongly to this comparison. 'There seems to be a danger here', he writes, 'of establishing *Riders* as an imitation Greek tragedy in little, dressed up in peasant outfit' (thus echoing the terms in which Henn viewed *Riders* as Greek, replicating Greek elements 'in miniature').[60] 'In a play written in dialect,' Grene continues 'any hint of literary influence tends to suggest artificiality, and…the ending of the play can come to seem too perfect an instance of "catharsis", a text-book application of the Aristotelian principles.'[61] He argues that Synge's play should not be seen as a version of Greek tragedy, because the model does not fit. While 'the Greek tragic pattern involves a gradual process of understanding', *Riders to the Sea* presents, by contrast, 'a single powerful instant of revelation'.[62] If *Riders* were to be viewed as inspired by Greek tragedy, in Grene's view, then its autonomy would be threatened by an artificiality fatal to the play's success. It would become what Julleville saw as '*une littérature d'imitation*.'

Finally, when Synge showed James Joyce the manuscript of *Riders to the Sea*, in Paris in 1903, the young Joyce elided a Greek influence from his reading of the play.

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[57] Peacock in Clark, 'Synge's "Perpetual 'Last Day'"', 46.
[58] Denis Donoghue, 'Synge: *Riders to the Sea*: A Study', *University Review*, vol. 1, no. 5 (Summer, 1955), 56.
[59] Donoghue, 'Synge: *Riders to the Sea*', 56, 58.
[60] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 56.
[61] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 56.
[62] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 57.

'Thanks be to God', he wrote in a letter to his brother Stanislaus, 'Synge isn't an Aristotelian.'[63]

c. Yeats, Synge and Greece

Notoriously, on first hearing *Riders to the Sea* read aloud, Yeats is supposed to have exclaimed that Synge was the inheritor of Aeschylus. Oliver St. John Gogarty then glossed Aeschylus as 'the man who is like Synge.'[64] This anecdote became a stock-joke, frequently retailed, as Anne Fogarty explains, in order to undermine Yeats and 'the pretensions of the Literary Revival.'[65] It is retold in several contexts, with several variations. In George Moore's parodic version, for example, Yeats cries 'Sophocles! across the table,' before, 'fearing that he was not impressive enough,' exclaiming 'No, Aeschylus!'[66] Joyce retold the fable in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode of *Ulysses*, in the context of an extended parody of Synge's Hiberno-English dialect.[67]

Yeats's idea of Synge as Aeschylus was part of his wider, pioneering vision for a Greek-inspired Revival, and a Greek-inspired theatre in particular. By staging his own plays at the Abbey, for example, he hoped 'to hear Greek tragedy, spoken with a Dublin accent.'[68] He aimed at the 'nobility of Greek sculpture' when it came to acting, which contributed to the famous Abbey style of performance.[69] In a 1904 issue of the Abbey's in-house journal, he plotted an extensive Greek map for the theatre: describing his idea for a touring theatre on the Greek model; positing a nationalist role for the chorus, as a representation of 'the people'; and hinting at the possibility of

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[63] Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 124.
[64] Oliver St. John Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* (London, 1937), 289.
[65] Anne Fogarty, 'Ghostly Intertexts: James Joyce and the Legacy of Synge', in Cliff and Grene eds., *Synge and Edwardian Ireland*, 239.
[66] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Ave, Salve, Vale*, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Gerrards Cross, 1985), 556. See also, for example, Oliver St. John Gogarty, *William Butler Yeats: A Memoir* (Dublin, 1963), 7; Padraic Colum, 'My Memories of John Synge', in Mikhail ed., *J.M. Synge*, 63; Richard Best, in Mikhail ed., *J.M. Synge*, 120; Joseph O'Connor, *Ghost Light* (London, 2011), 80.
[67] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford, 2008), 190. See Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 126-127.
[68] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 331.
[69] Yeats, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, 13. Cf. his discussion of the role of the voice in 'Greek acting', at 28.

staging *Oedipus* in Dublin, as well as a plan to write choruses 'somewhat in the Greek manner.'[70] Later, he would also attempt to recreate Greek theatre in its ritual aspect, in his search for 'a mysterious art…a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture'.[71]

However, Roche has suggested that Joyce's reaction to the manuscript of *Riders*, his judgement of Synge against what he saw as the standard of tragedy, was a direct response to Yeats's Greek 'pretensions,' particularly his infamous pronouncement about Aeschylus. Yeats's comparison of Synge to the Greek tragedian, Roche argues, 'goaded Joyce' into proving that *Riders to the Sea* was not in fact Greek at all.[72] 'By demonstrating that Synge's play is not Aristotelian, and hence not "quite Greek",' Joyce could 'refute Yeats as being less than knowledgeable in such matters.'[73]

This sort of pattern can be detected elsewhere. As Kiberd states, 'excessive rhetorical claims have been made for Synge by Yeats and others', and these go some way to explain 'the vehemence against his work.'[74] It is important to note that the Greek element of Yeats's claims has been particularly productive of retaliation. His vision of Synge as Greek has rung down the decades, clearly demonstrated, in intensified form, in the double-edged popularity of his Aeschylus comparison. George Moore, for instance, insisted that 'Yeats's stories that Synge read the classics…is [sic] a piece of Yeats's own academic mind.'[75] Moreover, Roy Foster has shown how carefully

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[70] Yeats, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, 42, 43, 45, 50. NB also the importance of John Todhunter's plays as a model for this Greek-inspired theatre. See Yeats, 'Plays by an Irish Poet' (1891), *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 190-194; Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 59-60; Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 107; and Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 85-86.

[71] Yeats, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, 131-132. See Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 62-63, 155-156, for the importance of Greek theatre to Yeats's dance plays. It is worth noting that other theatre companies in Dublin were similarly preoccupied with Greek drama, at a slightly later period. See for example, the Greek tragedies staged by the Dublin Drama League, and its later incarnation, the Gate Theatre, see Brenna Katz Clarke and Harold Ferrar, *The Dublin Drama League 1918-1941* (Dublin, 1979).

[72] Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 127. Joyce eventually became far more sympathetic to the play, see his Programme Note to a production of *Riders* in 1918, James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford, 2000), 209.

[73] Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 105.

[74] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1996), 181.

[75] Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, 559. Macintosh has also linked this counter-response to the idea of Greek influence in the Revival to the 'Unionist taint' given to the classical tradition by scholars such as John Pentland Mahaffy, *Dying Acts*, 6. For Mahaffy's 'frequent tendency to compare the ancient with the modern worlds', see Rachel Mairs, 'Ulster on the Nile: Irish

Yeats curated the persona of Synge 'for his own purposes' – Yeats had 'a tendency to turn him into part of the Yeatsian myth', he explains – and it is worthwhile to add that the association of Synge with ancient Greece was an essential ingredient to this process of myth-creation.[76] He was a living version of Yeats's myth of the Greek-Irish bard, a writer who has 'to deal with things large and simple rather than subtle'.[77]

Yeats's explanation for the riots that met the first performances of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* epitomises his characterisation of the Grecian Synge. Synge 'has got a standard of morals and an intellect', he explained, which were inscrutable to the members of the Abbey's audience. 'They shrink', he declared, 'from Synge's harsh, independent, heroical, clean, wind-swept view of things.'[78] This Yeatsian Synge belongs firmly to a Greece both bracing and heroic, whose poets, as Yeats writes later, 'wrote while poetry was still pure.'[79] Yeats was impressed, as Foster puts it, by Synge's 'unique, laconic, uncompromising personality', 'a certain saturnine self-centredness'.[80] This is strikingly similar to the characterisation of Oedipus in Yeats's translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.[81] In Yeats's work, both Oedipus and Synge appear as aloof, Nietzschean heroes, existing somehow apart from the world and, ultimately, with their 'standard of morals', above it.[82]

Critics have since continued to view Synge's relationship to the Greek tradition as something almost instinctive, as 'large and simple' rather than subtle and, often, as

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Analogies in the Classical Scholarship of J.P. Mahaffy (1839-1919)', *Classics Ireland*, vol. 17 (2010), 58.

[76] Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, 196, 195. Cf. Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 400.

[77] Yeats, 'The Poetry of R.D. Joyce' (1886), in *Uncollected Prose. Volume One*, 109.

[78] Yeats, letter to John Quinn (4-6 Oct., 1907), in *Letters IV*, 733.

[79] Yeats, 'Modern Poetry' (1936), in *Essays and Introductions*, 495.

[80] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 399, 401.

[81] For Yeats's Oedipus plays, see Stanford, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*, 98-99; David R. Clark and James B. McGuire, *W.B. Yeats: The Writing of Sophocles' King Oedipus* (Philadelphia, 1989); Brian Arkins, *Builders of My Soul: Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats* (Gerrards Cross, 1990), 125-141; Anthony Roche, 'Oedipus at the Abbey', *Classics Ireland*, vol. 8 (2001), 106-108; and Fiona Macintosh, 'An Oedipus for Our Times? Yeats's version of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*', in Martin Revermann and Peter Wilson eds., *Performance, Iconography, Reception: Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford, 2008), 524-547.

[82] Foster points out that the way in which Yeats responded to Synge must 'be read in terms of what Yeats was making of Nietzsche', *Paddy and Mr Punch*, 196.

distinctly suspect in moral and artistic terms. This can be seen in Richard Martin's idea of Synge as a bardic hero, importing the classical world onto Aran, for instance, or the observation that the basic plot of a Greek tragedy is recreated in his *Riders to the Sea*. Alternatively and in response, critics have resisted Yeats's lofty, inaccessible, heroic vision – Synge as Oedipus – and either argued against any presence of Greece in Synge's work (as in Grene or Joyce) or taken it as an unwelcome, intrusive feature of his plays (as in Griffith).

The contentiousness of this issue, and, more importantly, the terms on which the argument has been waged, is perhaps the reason why Synge's relationship with Greek tragedy is not examined in one of the few full-length studies of Irish theatre's use of Greece, *Amid our Troubles*, despite Kiberd having referred in its Introduction to 'Synge's tactical use of the classics'.[83] When Synge's work *is* included as part of a wider examination of the Irish reception of Classics, the focus is, almost exclusively and usually somewhat perfunctorily, the designation of his plays (usually his *Playboy*) as 'versions' of Greek tragedies. Kelly Younger for example, who does not study Synge in the main body of his book, simply states in the Introduction that Synge 'did incorporate Greek themes and plots into his own dramas'.[84]

More specifically, the nature of this critical approach to Synge, post-Yeats, has had one important ramification. It has obscured the use of comparative scholarship about Greece and Ireland which lies behind the use he made, or did not make, of Greece in his Irish theatre. Studies of his plays in the light of Greek drama will always, therefore, remain only half the picture. They will not address the essential relationship between Synge's interest in Greek tragedy, on the one hand, and his equally instructive interest in comparative scholarship, on the other. Both can be seen working

[83] Kiberd, 'Introduction', ix. The essays themselves refer to Synge only in reference to other playwrights, or, in one instance, to the 'links that have been seen' between his plays and Greek tragedies on the level of similarities in plot, McDonald, 'The Irish and Greek Tragedy', 44.

[84] Younger, *Irish Adaptations of Greek Tragedies*, 7. See also the cursory glance at Synge's use of a tragic plot in Arkins, *Irish Appropriation of Greek Tragedy*, 54-55; and Brian Arkins, *Hellenising Ireland: Greek and Roman Themes in Modern Irish Literature* (Newbridge, 2004), 12. For problems in the study of Irish Reception more generally, see above, Introduction 14-16.

in tandem in his plays. This means that Synge's technique of classical engagement explored in the previous chapter – his use of comparative scholarship in *The Aran Islands* – has a greater bearing on his use of Greece in the plays than a focus on Greek tragedy would suggest. Synge was less interested in the presence of Greek tragedy in the Irish theatre, and more interested in the presence of Greece in Ireland, in the overlap of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean that is at the heart of other thinkers in this study.

Furthermore, the existing, predominant approaches to the question of the presence of Greece in Synge's work run the risk of treating Greek and Irish with asymmetry. As so often in the history of Graeco-Celtic relations, the two poles are unequally balanced. They are counterconcepts, with one outweighing the other. Either Greek dominates, and the Irish play is a reproduction of Greek elements 'in miniature', or, in response, the Irish original context is favoured and the Greek aspect becomes an unnecessary and alien intrusion.

d. An alternative approach

When attention is paid to the sort of scholarship about the past in which Synge immersed himself (a scholarship that this study has identified as Graeco-Celtic comparatism), then a picture of the 'science of tradition' emerges, which makes it both unhelpful and unnecessary to attempt to ascertain whether one element of his play is Greek or another is Irish.[85] The nature of a myth, according to the scholarship Synge read, is that it belongs to a breadth of traditions, that it spreads across time and space and encounters variation and change along the way, but keeps a strange hold of certain elements: certain etymological roots, or story patterns, or the attributes of gods or heroes. The origin or development of these shared, residual elements cannot

[85] Hartland, *Folklore*, 7.

be untangled; they can only be recognised and retold. This allows Synge to treat Greek and Irish symmetrically.

In the conclusion to *The Legend of Perseus*, E.S. Hartland defines the role of the 'tale-teller' – the teller of a story of the Perseus-type – as 'more or less of an artist'. 'Every tale he tells', he explains,

> is a work of art. It is formed of his recollections of other tales told by other tellers, joined and cemented together as best he can by the aid of his own invention…Often the tale-teller forgets one, patches the story with another from his stock, or inserts an additional incident at pleasure. The new element thus introduced may or may not unite with the old. The character of the tale will be modified, and may be entirely changed, by the substitution or addition…Every time the tale is passed through the memory it is exposed to the risk of variation, not only in its main lines, but also, and still more, in its details.[86]

As an articulation of Synge's attitude towards antiquity (how it resurfaces in the present, or how the new 'unites with the old'), this could not be more apt. And it also contains, of course, a distinct echo of Synge's own formulation of the role of the reader-as-artist. What is more, it is a precise description of Hubert Butler's jigsaw puzzle addict, joining pieces of the past side-by-side, with the aid of both memory and forgetfulness, in, as Butler put it, an 'immense ebullience of…guessing and counter-guessing'.[87] The Syngean notion of the reader-as-artist therefore takes on a new dimension: the reader becomes an artist who is also a myth-maker, in the sense of being a teller of ancient tales passed down through the networks of tradition, with all the overlap, alteration and residue that entails.[88] That reader can also be imagined, perhaps, as an audience member, watching an Irish play about a Wicklow glen, noticing overlaps with a Greek story set in Ephesus, then creating, Griffith-like, their own narrative from that interaction.

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[86] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 182-183.
[87] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 76.
[88] Cf. Colin Burrow's examination of the importance of 'the thick distorting medium of memory' in the process of classical reception, particularly the creativity of 'mishearing' in Shakespeare, 'Shakespeare and humanistic culture', in Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor eds., *Shakespeare and the Classics* (Cambridge, 2004), 15-16.

The approach to the question of Synge and antiquity should therefore focus, not on what mythologies he knew – what Greek stories he adapted or drew from – but rather on what he read *about* mythology, about its crucial characteristics, its development and its relation to language. Hartland in his study of Perseus, and Synge in his plays and prose, advocate looking at myths as conglomerations, or fractured constellations of parts. 'It is impossible', Hartland writes, 'to predicate the order of succession, or to say why this line of development has been followed rather than that.'[89] It is worthwhile, therefore, to follow Synge in this, and to regard his plays as a comparative scholar, such as Hartland, would regard a story pattern like that of Perseus.

To this end, and in order to illustrate this approach to Synge's Graeco-Celtic theatre, this chapter will now analyse how a crucial detail of Hartland's science of tradition makes its way into Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. It will argue that an essential aspect of the mythological method, according to Hartland's model, informs the dramatic power of Synge's play.

3. *Riders to the Sea* and Greece

> *one of our troubles is that they always want the whole legend and nothing else.*
>
> W.B. Yeats[90]

> *There is no such thing as the isolated mythical event, just as there is no such thing as the isolated word. Myth, like language, gives all of itself in each of its fragments.*
>
> Roberto Calasso[91]

[89] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 183.
[90] Yeats, letter to Karel Mušek (24 Aug., 1906), in *Collected Letters IV*, 480.
[91] Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, trans. Tim Parks (London, 1994), 136.

a doggedly determined digression
Roberto Calasso[92]

a. Props

In order to structure his monumental research, Hartland identified certain key elements to the Perseus story-type. These allow him to track the progress of the tale 'in its wanderings and modifications.' They are 'the supernatural birth,' 'the rescue of Andromeda,' 'the Quest of the Gorgon's Head,' and 'the Life-Token.'[93] It is this life-token that interested Synge.

Like Frazer's totem, Hartland's life-token is an earthly object that is somehow tied to the hero's fate. If it is damaged then the hero will be too, and vice versa. It is an object (or an animal – the hero's horse or dog, for example) which, according to Hartland, 'is then inseparably connected with the hero whose well-being it indicated'. It speaks of a belief in 'the mysterious connection of a man's life and health with some object external to himself.'[94] The second volume of Hartland's study is devoted to an exploration of these life-tokens, demonstrating the prevalence of the trope. 'A Sicilian story', he writes, 'presents the token as a cut to be made in a certain fig-tree: if milk flow out, the hero is living; if blood, he is dead.'[95] Similarly, he recounts a folk story from Pisa, in which a 'bone tied to a beam in the kitchen…sweats blood when anything untoward happens to either of the fisherman's three sons.'[96]

Close attention to detail is one of the most marked features of Synge's brief, one-act play, and several critics have pointed to the great importance he attaches to props.[97] The dramatic tension of the opening scene, for example, comes from the build-up to Maurya's two daughters, Nora and Cathleen, opening a parcel given to them by the priest – 'a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in

[92] Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus*, 138.
[93] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 10, vi.
[94] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 27, ii. 51.
[95] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, ii. 3.
[96] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 41.
[97] See for example, Grene, *A Critical Study*, 42-48; King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 49-55.

Donegal' [*Plays I,* 5] – to see if the clothes belong to their brother Michael, who has been missing for nine days.

Synge puts off the moment of examination through various techniques. The play starts in silence, with the rhythmic motions of a single on-stage character – '*Cathleen, a girl of about twenty, finishes kneading cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire; then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel*' [*Plays I*, 5]. Cathleen's sister then begins to enter, but does so only partially ('*Nora, a young girl, puts her head in at the door*'). In general, Synge carefully choreographed the entrances and exits of his characters, in parallel to the comparable technique of tragedy (see, for example, the opening of Euripides' *Trojan Women*), and he enhances the effect of Nora's hesitant, incomplete entry here, through the broken and jolting rhythm of the first lines of dialogue about the whereabouts of their mother: 'where is she?' / 'She's lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able' [*Plays I*, 5].

When Maurya eventually enters, she again prevents them from opening the parcel. Her entrance is then closely followed by Bartley's, whose haste – 'he's coming now, and he in a hurry' – and urgent, practical questions increase the play's pace abruptly [*Plays I*, 7]. When both Bartley and Maurya leave the stage, the tension is broken and the scene set for the moment of discovery.

However, the examination of the parcel is then further delayed by a stiff knot tying the clothes together – 'the string's perished with the salt water, and there's a black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week'. At last, however, Nora and Cathleen cut the string and recognise that Michael is dead.[98] They know this through the stitching on one of his socks: 'it's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?' [*Plays I*, 15]. After this long, intense build-up of suspense, therefore, Synge locates the confirmation of the death of their brother Michael in the inconsequential and the everyday. He emphasises the banality of detail, in contrast to the dead man's worth:

[98] Mary King argues that 'the action of cutting the string relates the sisters to the Moirae', *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 54.

'isn't it a pitiful thing', Nora says, 'when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?' [*Plays I*, 17].

Other props are used throughout this first part of the play, which similarly either augur or confirm the death of one of the characters. Bartley takes a piece of rope to use as a halter, for example, despite Maurya's insistence that it be saved in case she needs to dig Michael a grave. This forebodes both his and his brother's death; 'you'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley,' Maurya warns, 'hanging by the boards' [*Plays I*, 9]. Roche observes that this rope 'serves to bind together the figures and fates of the two brothers, blurring the absolute distinction between their two identities', but it also draws their lives together with the material presence of the rope itself.[99] When the rope is taken off-stage, the audience know that both brothers will die. After Bartley leaves '*taking the halter*', Maurya pronounces his death: 'he's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again' [*Plays I*, 11]. As Hartland writes in his study, 'the brothers and the token are one body'.[100]

When both Michael and Bartley are confirmed dead, Synge returns to this emphasis on objects. A lack of nails to make the coffin and an empty cup placed upside down on the table, signify the death of the brothers, exactly as they would in a Perseus-legend as characterised by Hartland [*Plays I*, 25].[101] Alongside the tide-like rhythm of Synge's language – as Katherine Worth observed, Synge writes 'by making words function like music' – it is this focus on props that gives his play its tension, its ominous undertones and its dramatic power.[102] This is, in turn, a highly direct and effective translation of a stock mythical motif – the presence of the life-token – into a dramatic technique. Synge is putting an ancient belief he had encountered in Hartland, as evidence of the widespread reach and surprising spread of the Perseus story-type, onto the stage.

For the first performance of *Riders to the Sea*, on 25th February 1904, Synge took great pains to source 'authentic' props from the Aran Islands. An islander sent

[99] Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 139-140.
[100] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, ii. 444.
[101] For the Irish folk significance of these small details in *Riders*, see Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 163-168.
[102] Katherine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London, 1978), 123.

him pampooties and patterns in the mail, while Synge worried about the colours of the fabric [*Letters I*, 76-78]. This has brought with it the charge of primitivism, the objection that Synge undertook an urban, second-hand recreation of some kind of 'authentic' rural life. Kiberd quotes a retrospective critique in a 1906 edition of the Irish-language journal of the Gaelic League, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, for example, which proclaimed that *Riders* was 'not a drama at all'. The reviewer objected that 'apart from their new leather shoes, the folk on the stage bore no closer relation to the people of Inis Meán than to the inhabitants of Hong Kong.'[103] The objection is that the props in *Riders* – these 'new leather shoes' – are intended as an easy link between the reality of the islands and the Dublin stage, with its artificiality and remove. In precisely the same way, as examined in Chapter Seven, critics have viewed the elusiveness of *The Aran Islands* as an attempt to elide any gap of subjectivity or experience between the narrator and the islanders.

However, just as the charge against *The Aran Islands* was met in the previous chapter, this charge can be met by a consideration of Synge's use of mythic and folkloric scholarship. According to Hartland, lasting superstitions around objects or clothing are remnants of this ancient belief in the life-token. 'Symbolism', he writes, 'is the offspring of an earlier practice; it is the form which remains when the real practice can no longer be repeated.'[104] Following Hartland, Synge's use of theatrical props bears the same relation to the 'reality' of the Aran Islands, as superstitions bear to ancient beliefs. The props are 'the form which remains when the real practice can no longer be repeated.' When viewed as employing the techniques of myth, Synge's theatre can be seen as moving from reality to performance, or practice to symbol, across what Hartland would call 'a wide tract of borderland' between magic and superstition.[105] After this move, the objects involved retain their power, but the power is transformed from a ritual to a theatrical one, and therefore removed from any claims to authentic representation.

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[103] *An Claidheamh Soluis* (3 Feb., 1906), quoted and translated in Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 243. Cf. Burke, 'The Riot of Spring', 93: 'the "peasant" of the Abbey stage was, to a large extent, a Dublin fantasy'.
[104] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, ii. 106.
[105] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, ii. 106.

As with responses to *The Aran Islands,* therefore, Synge's elimination of intermediaries in his contact with the west of Ireland – writing himself out of comparisons between Aran and Greece, for example, or sourcing props directly from the islands – need not be seen as problematic primitivism. Furthermore, Macintosh has demonstrated the correspondence between Synge's use of Michael's clothes in the play and the use of objects in the portrayal of death in Greek tragedy (either in scenes of lament, as emblems of the dead figure, or in death scenes, as symbols of the dying character's changing relation to the world – Ajax's sword, or Cassandra's prophetic trappings in the *Agamemnon*, for example).[106] But this does not mean that Synge's play need be seen as a *version* of Greek tragedy (as Macintosh indeed emphasises). If this use of props is also seen in the light of his engagement with Hartland, it becomes part of a wider engagement with antiquity, with the processes and patterns of myth. Following Hartland – and it should be clear by now that Synge *did* follow Hartland, and decidedly closely – the attitude to objects and their relation to individuals, in both Greek tragedy and in Aran Island folklore are substantially related to one another, in ancient and surprising ways.

b. Language

As Nicholas Grene's critique suggested, much of the debate around the Greek model behind *Riders to the Sea* has focused on the play's ending, when Bartley's body, wrapped in a sail, is carried onto the stage amid a 'chorus' of mourning women, '*keening softly and swaying themselves with a slow movement*' [*Plays I*, 23]. Having performed her lament and ritual actions, which critics have linked to both pagan and Christian symbolism, Maurya makes a final speech full of resignation and acceptance.[107] 'They're all together this time,' she says, 'and the end is come' [*Plays I*,

[106] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 162, 104.
[107] See for example, King, *the Drama of J.M. Synge*, 62-63; Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 167; Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 26.

26-27]. While Maurya speaks, the women continue the keen; it '*rises a little…then sinks away*' towards the end [*Plays I*, 27].

The role of the Irish ritual lament (the keen, or *caoineadh*) in Synge's work is a much-studied one. David Fitzpatrick explains that Synge's accounts of keening in both his plays and prose are 'not only consistent with independent reports of Aran folklore but reminiscent of Gaelic literary renderings', such as 'The Lament of Art Ó Laoghaire' or the oral compositions of Caitilín Dubh.[108] Synge was particularly insistent on perfecting the keen for the first performance of *Riders*, sending the actors to learn from a woman who had come to Dublin from the Aran Islands.[109] He also gives descriptions of two funeral scenes in *The Aran Islands*, one of an old woman, the other of a young man, which both align closely with the scene in *Riders* [*Prose*, 75-75, 160-1].[110]

Alongside studies, like Fitzpatrick's, of Synge's keens as embedded in the Irish tradition of female lament, some also regard them on Greek lines. Skelton saw the mourners in *Riders* as a Greek chorus; Richard Martin compared the keens in *The Aran Islands* to funeral laments in Homer; and Macintosh likens the young man's funeral on Aran to the close of Euripides' *Trojan Women*.[111] It is, again, possible to see the evidence of Synge's interest in tragic metre and form in the way he crafts the mournful ending of *Riders*. Despite writing in spoken prose throughout the play, he manages, for example, to recreate the effect of the Greek *epirrhematic amoibaion* (a combination of shared song and speech in tragedy, as at E. *Tro*. 239-291), and Macintosh has analysed the scene closely in these rhythmic terms.[112]

[108] Fitzpatrick, 'Synge and modernity', 131. See also, Angela Bourke, 'Keening as Theatre: J.M. Synge and the Irish Lament Tradition', in Grene ed., *Interpreting Synge*, 67-79.
[109] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 248-249.
[110] For studies of these passages in *The Aran Islands*, see for example, Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism*, 152.
[111] Skelton, *The Writings of J.M. Synge*, 49; Martin, 'Homer among the Irish', 82; Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 35-36. Interestingly, Sydney Owenson (see above, Chapter Three), compared Irish funeral customs to those in modern Greece, *The Wild Irish Girl*, 182-183.
[112] Macintosh, *Dying Acts*, 167-170.

The final line of Maurya's final speech is the most contentious, however, when it comes to the question of Greek influence: 'Michael has a clean burial in the far north,' Maurya says,

> by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely….What more can we want than that?...No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied' [*Plays I*, 25-27 [Synge's ellipses]].

As Kiberd notes, 'this stoic utterance has been repeatedly traced to Sophocles by many critics.'[113] It has been interpreted as an echo of the (corrupt) ending of Sophocles' *Oedipus*: 'since every man is mortal let no one praise his fortune until the last day has come and he has suffered nothing' [S. *OT.* 1528-30]. However, Kiberd points out that they also echo a letter written to Synge, in Irish, by his friend Martin McDonough from the Aran Islands in 1902.[114] In Kiberd's translation, McDonough wrote to Synge to tell him that 'it fell out that the wife of my brother Seaghan died...look! that it is a sad story to tell, but if it is itself, we must be satisfied because nobody can be living forever….'[115]

Again, as with the scandal over the source of *Shadow*, there is an apparent division between Greece and the Aran Islands. Nicholas Grene also addresses this conflict. He accepts the view that 'the source of the play's famous last line is to be found' in Martin McDonough's letter, arguing that 'to say that the final line of *Riders* recalls…[Sophocles] makes it look as though the character has been spuriously manipulated by her creator to achieve a literary effect.'[116] However, bearing in mind Synge's interest in comparative scholarship and his technique, drawn from comparatism, of placing traditions contiguously in his writing, any definitive division between Greece and Aran is rendered unnecessary. Indeed, Kiberd points to the presence of Synge's reading of Nutt's comparative essay on 'the Irish Otherworld' in

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[113] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 205. He quotes Donna Gerstenberger's *John Millington Synge* (New York, 1964).
[114] Roche observes that Synge also echoed this phrase in a version of *When the Moon has Set*, an apprentice, unpublished play, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 102.
[115] Martin McDonough to J.M. Synge (1 Feb., 1902), quoted and translated in Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 206.
[116] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 55, 56.

this speech. Nutt's theory of the remote, lifeless afterlife, preserved in the memory of Greek and Irish traditions, 'explains a great deal', he argues, 'about the world-view implied in Maurya's closing lines – a vision of a life which can assert a belief in an all-powerful God but not in a life to come.'[117]

Both Synge and Nutt share a comparatist view of Greek-Irish relations – the logic of the jigsaw puzzle addict – and according to this logic the last lines of *Riders* can be both Aran words and Sophocles at the same time. In fact, their power and substance can be located in the fact that they *do* contain this shared echo. Synge wrote in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World,* that 'all art is collaboration' [*Plays II*, 53]. The 'collaboration' that Synge looked for as he wrote is revealed in the fact that these words can belong to both Sophocles and the Aran Islands. This overlapping of Greek and Irish can therefore be analysed in the terms not of artistic plagiarism but of a comparative framework.

4. Comparison and recognition

Tradition loves to be pictorial, dramatic.
E.S. Hartland[118]

Tradition is always the same.
W.B. Yeats[119]

In a way, then, Arthur Griffith got it right. It is indeed, as he wrote of *The Shadow*, 'astonishing' that Synge found the same story in the Latin Quarter, the Aran Islands, Petronius and ancient Greece. But unlike for Griffith, who baulked at this overlap and sought to explain it (by means of Synge's dishonest practice), for Synge, the astonishment is the point. By employing the techniques of myth (by endowing objects

[117] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 168.
[118] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 69.
[119] Yeats, 'Irish Wonders', in *Letters to the New Island*, 97.

with a supernatural significance, for example), Synge's plays encourage the audience to recognise the presence of another tradition in an Irish context, and be astonished by it.

That crucial year, 1898, contained Synge's first prolonged immersion in Graeco-Celtic comparative thought, as has been seen, as well as his first visit to the Aran Islands. It was when Synge began to theorise about reading as an act of performance, and the importance of scholarship to art. It also saw him preoccupied with the importance of shock as an aesthetic and emotional experience, an interest that helped refine his comparative technique.

In May 1898, Synge wrote in his diary about the surprise that would be felt were someone to know everything theoretical about music and then to hear it, suddenly, for the first time. 'I doubt', he wrote, 'his brain would ever recover from the shock.'[120] In his notes on Nutt's Otherworld essay, in the same year, he recorded the theory that heroic myth develops in the violence of one tribe's first encounter with another: 'Heroic Saga product of shock and stress', he wrote.[121]

In the first part of *The Aran Islands*, during the eviction scene, the narrator emphasises the 'shock' which this 'outrage to a hearth in Inishmaan gives to the people' [*Prose*, 89]. He also describes 'their grey poteen, which brings a shock of joy to the blood', and voices a combination of distance and proximity in his relation to the islanders: 'there is hardly an hour I am with them', he writes, 'that I do not feel the shock of some inconceivable idea, and then again the shock of some vague emotion that is familiar to them and to me' [*Prose*, 73, 113]. Yeats, finally, recalled Synge saying to him on his return from the islands that style was 'born out of the shock of new material'.[122]

This shock of the familiar and the unfamiliar, the new and the old, is a version of that same jolt of recognition of Greek in Irish – of the fact that 'our heroic tales…show so often their kinship with Grecian myths' – that filled the narrator of *The*

[120] McCormack, *Fool of the Family,* 198.
[121] TCD MS 4378, f. 45r. See Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 250.
[122] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 391. Deirdre Toomey interprets this 'shock' as the revelation of anthropology, 'Killing the Da', 154.

Aran Islands with a 'strange feeling of wonder' [*Prose*, 65]. It recalls the same puzzlement with which Synge and Fay discussed the presence of the word 'gallery' in Dirane's story, with its trace memory of southern Europe. It is the same 'striking similarity' that was both the inspiration and the evidence for so many of the comparative antiquarians and mythologists investigated in the previous chapters. For Hartland, for example, the surprising reappearance of the idea of the life-token, in a folk story from Sicily, a legend from Greece, and so on, caused him to diverge from his main point and write a whole volume on the phenomenon. Hartland's astonishment would have increased, could he have seen the same motif at work in a set of superstitions on Aran, and a play at the Abbey in Dublin.

Synge clothes his play *Riders to the Sea* in the atmosphere and trappings of myth, in order to encourage the audience to watch it as a comparative mythologist like Hartland might, alert to the traces of a variety of traditions. He primes the audience to receive the shock of comparison. It was seen in Chapter Seven that Synge suggested parallels and overlaps between the Perseus story and the eviction scene, but left it up to the reader actually to draw them, nudged into doing so by the apparent similarities. He thus avoided the perils of comparatism. In a development of this technique, Synge combines a laconic elusiveness in *Riders to the Sea* with an effort to empower the audience through the shock of recognition.

This provides an answer to the obvious objection here, namely that Synge is characterising Maurya and the other islanders as 'walking antiquities.' 'Who can say', as Fay writes in his account of discussions with Synge, 'where the story came from originally?...for folk tales are like thistledown for travelling'.[123]

5. Conclusion

Lebeau a voyagé en chemin de
fer avec le chef maçon du
British Museum qui venait à

[123] Fay, 'In the Shadow of the Glen', 27-28.

Sligo chercher les fragments
d'une colonnes qui ornaient
une des portes de Mycènes.
Anatole Le Braz[124]

One of the ghost stories collected by Synge's Breton mentor, Anatole Le Braz, is about another 'Celtic' family living in unforgiving isolation by the sea. It was a story told to Le Braz in 1891 by one Marie-Hyacinthe Toulouzan, called '*L'intersigne des rames*,' or 'The Omen of the Rowers.'[125] It was read, around 1898, by Synge.[126]

The narrator tells Le Braz how she and her mother were waiting at home one night while her two brothers were away at sea, when she heard the sound of oars in the water outside, but could see no boat: '*j'entends le bruit de quatre rames qui frappent l'eau en cadence*'. She then heard, from this ghost ship outside the window, four oarsmen speak: '*les voix venaient de la mer dont notre maison…n'était séparée que par la route. C'étaient évidemment les voix des quatre rameurs*.'[127] However, there was something '*bizarre*' in the voices:

> *chacun d'eux avait l'air de parler dans une langue différente. Quelques mots arrivèrent jusqu'à moi. Je les ai retenus; les voici:*
> *…Hourra… Sinemara… Dali… Ariboué…*
> *Anglais, espagnol, italien, il y avait peut-être là-dedans de tout cela à la fois. Il me sembla aussi que l'un des hommes du canot mystérieux s'exprimait en breton.*[128]

Afterwards, various other omens accumulate, until, inevitably, the narrator and her mother hear that one of the brothers has died at sea.[129] The story then closes with an expression of resignation: '*en ce monde, il ne faut s'étonner de rien. Tout s'y fait par la seule volonté de Dieu*.'[130] There are several interesting overlaps with Synge's *Riders to*

[124] Le Braz, *Voyage en Irlande*, 84-85.
[125] For the importance of Le Braz to Synge's development as a writer, see Chapter Six. For a suggestion of how successive editors of *La légende de la mort* have situated this work within the framework of comparative mythology and folklore, see Chapter Five.
[126] TCD MS 4384, ff. 59r-57r.
[127] Le Braz, *La légende de la mort* (1893), 44.
[128] Le Braz, *La légende de la mort* (1893), 44-45.
[129] Le Braz, *La légende de la mort* (1893), 45.
[130] Le Braz, *La légende de la mort* (1893), 48.

the Sea: the atmosphere and sound of the sea, the use of omens, the acceptance of death at the end.[131] But what is most interesting is the fact that the story itself is *about* overlap, about four ghostly rowers speaking a strange combination of four different languages off the remote coast of Brittany.

At the end of his story 'Eveline,' James Joyce famously included 'nonsense' words, which were also evocative of Gaelic: 'Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!'[132] The power of this phrase comes, as McCormack explains, because 'words of one language are recalled within another', informed by Joyce's deep interest in comparative philology and the mechanisms of linguistic change.[133] In a strikingly similar way, the mystery of the Breton story lies in the shock of '*ce charabia de langues*' ('this babble of languages').[134] This recognition of ghostly multilingualism, in apparently impenetrable speech, gives the stories of both Le Braz and Joyce their uncanny power. The same could be said for Synge's plays.

Synge's particular engagement with comparative philology, comparative mythology and comparative folklore allows him to stage a multitude of stories at once. His plays not only contain the presence of a shared antiquity – shared languages, shared beliefs about objects and individuals – but also dramatize the processes by which such communal traditions morph, move apart from one another, and return. He stages what could be called, perhaps, the track record of a story. Moreover, he draws the audience's attention to this habit of recurrence. As Synge wrote in his article on Le Braz's work, such 'survivals of the old', in language or mythology, or in drama, can then present themselves as 'the incitement of a thing that is rare and beautiful' [*Prose*, 394].

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[131] Scholars have pointed to the influence of *Pêcheur d'Islande,* Pierre Loti's story of Breton fishermen, on these elements of Synge's writing. See for example, King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*, 197-200.
[132] James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London, 2000), 33.
[133] McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett*, 262.
[134] Le Braz, *La légende de la mort* (1893), 45.

Conclusion

The Playboy of the Western World

1. Balor and Lug

Many structures are so intimately related that when one part varies so does another.
J.M. Synge/Charles Darwin[1]

The antiquities of a nation are indissolubly linked together
J.M. Synge/George Petrie[2]

The solar theory of myth has been a recurrent method of connection for the thinkers in this study. Its relationship with Indo-European researches and its role in the development of the folkloric attitude to myth were highlighted in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five investigated its significance to d'Arbois' influential yoking of Greek and Celtic in his analysis of the Greek myth of Hermes and Argos and the Irish myth of Balor and Lug, the father of Cuchulain. 'Lug is the Celtic Hermes', as Best wrote in his translation of d'Arbois, 'like the Greek Hermes, he personifies the dawn…Balor…is the Celtic Argos, that is to say, a personification of the powers of evil.'[3] 'These two myths,' he concludes, 'one Celtic, the other Greek, spring from a common source.' 'As fortune strangely has it,' he continues, each retains the memory of the other.[4]

It was then noted, in Chapter Six, that Synge paid special attention to d'Arbois' vertiginous argument about Balor and Lug, when reading *Le cycle mythologique* in 1898. When he reviewed Best's translation, he also gave a summary of d'Arbois' account, as an illustration of 'the Greek kinship of these Irish legends' [*Prose*, 365].

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[1] From Synge's notes, c. 1894-1895, on Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, TCD MS 4379, f. 74r.
[2] From Synge's notes, c. 1892, on William Stokes' *Life of Petrie*, TCD MS 4375, f. 58r.
[3] D'Arbois, *The Irish Mythological Cycle*, 113-114.
[4] D'Arbois, *The Irish Mythological Cycle*, 115.

Synge would also have encountered the idea of a Greek-Irish kinship preserved in this myth in Hyde's *Literary History of Ireland*, and in Nutt's essay on the Otherworld.[5] Standish O'Grady, similarly, compared 'Balor of the mighty blows…with his Gorgon eye', to 'the shield of Pallas Athéné'.[6] All this goes to show that Synge was deeply aware of the refraction of this solar belief across a spectrum of different traditions. He would have read the story again in Hartland's *Legend of Perseus* and indeed, in his notes on *Le cycle mythologique*, he observed that the Perseus and Medusa story was a version of the 'same legend' (with Perseus, also, as Hartland writes, being 'no other than Gilgameš', and Christ').[7]

As the reviewer of *Le cycle mythologique* declared, Müllerian solar theory plunged d'Arbois into 'the abyss of comparative mythology'.[8] Synge, on the other hand, treats the labyrinth of comparison with a light touch. Both d'Arbois and Best claim Lug as '*the* Celtic Hermes' and Balor as '*the* Celtic Argos,' in a formulation employed by most comparatists encountered so far ('Deirdre was the Irish Helen,' writes Yeats, for instance).[9] Synge, on the other hand, and with characteristic economy, loosened the rigidity of this statement. In his review he wrote, instead, that 'Lug is *a* Celtic Hermes, and…he kills, with a stone, *a* certain god of night' [*Prose*, 365]. By contending that 'relationships of this sort…are perhaps open to criticism' at the same time as being 'always suggestive,' he then further opened up and made available this connection [*Prose*, 365]. In a similar way, when he referred to the Homeric-Irish theories of Nutt and d'Arbois, he stepped back from the claim, writing that Emain Macha 'is a sort of Irish Troy' [*Prose*, 387]. To paraphrase Kiberd's description of his use of the Gaelic tradition, Synge transforms these connections 'from something museumized to something modifiable, endlessly open.'[10]

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[5] Hyde, *A Literary history of Ireland*, 292; Meyer and Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 184.
[6] O'Grady, *History of Ireland*, ii. 93.
[7] TCD MS 4378, f. 63r; Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 6. For Hartland on Balor, see Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 15-17. Hubert Butler has an interesting chapter on 'Who was Lug?', *Ten Thousand Saints*, 35-38.
[8] Anon., 'The Irish Mythological Circle and Irish Mythology', 24.
[9] Yeats, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, 184.
[10] Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*, 187.

Synge then used this loosened, ambiguous solar connection between Greek and Irish myth in the last work he ever completed, *The Playboy of the Western World*. This play caused havoc at its first performances at the Abbey in 1907, as is well-known. It 'is responsible', said Strong, 'for the wilder things that have been said about Synge' and it made the theatre famous. 'After *The Playboy*', wrote Robert Lynd, the Abbey 'was seen to be an institution serious enough to set men fighting about it.'[11] It is the story of Christy Mahon, who arrives in a village '*on a wild coast of Mayo*', claiming to have killed his father, Old Mahon [*Plays II*, 55]. In the eyes of the villagers, Christy rises to the status of a hero for this feat and, through slow shifts in characterisation and an increasing vanity, grows into his true heroic identity. Eventually it transpires that he has not killed his father after all; Old Mahon enters the stage and disrupts the community's new balance. This recognition of not being guilty of patricide demolishes Christy's heroic stature.

Despite being set explicitly in contemporary Ireland, the entire work retains a mythical dimension alongside its immediate setting. Synge repeatedly mixes the high and the low, for example, the mythical and the contemporary, the Irish and the other, referring in one breath to 'the loosed khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead' [*Plays II*, 75]. Elsewhere, Christy describes himself 'wandering like Esau or Cain and Abel on the sides of Neifin or the Erris plain' [*Plays II*, 109]. One scene, in particular, is especially redolent of myth; it has, as Deirdre Toomey writes, 'a ritual dignity'.[12]

It comes at the opening of Act Two, when Christy recounts the dramatic story of the fight between him and his father, apparently fatal, while they were 'digging spuds in his cold, sloping, stony divil's patch of a field' [*Plays II*, 101]. According to Christy's version of events, Old Mahon suggested that he should marry the Widow Casey, 'a walking terror from beyond the hills' [*Plays II*, 101]. The two then argued fiercely and, as Christy declaims,

> with that the sun came out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green in my face. 'God have mercy on your soul,' says he, lifting a scythe; 'or on your own,' says I, raising the loy…He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to

[11] Strong, *John Millington Synge*, 34; Lynd, *Ireland A Nation*, 174.
[12] Toomey, 'Killing the Da', 161.

> the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet [*Plays II*, 103].

With its cosmic scale, heightened language and solar imagery, it is not hard to hear this description as a version of the solar myth. In his own eyes at least, Christy appears as a version of the sun god (Lug or Hermes), with his description of the sun 'shining green in my face', his leap upwards and towards the east, and his blow directed to the south. Old Mahon, with his scythe and his 'cold… divil's patch of a field' is, in turn, given a demonic stature, intensified by the way Christy's description of his body turns him into a chthonic giant: sprawled 'stretched out' across the hill, the use of the word 'ridge' to describe his skull makes him part of the landscape (cf. Clytemnestra's description of Geryon, A. *Ag.* 870-3).

In 1879, d'Arbois posited Balor as a Celtic god of the dead, arguing that his name came from a root meaning 'to die,' and Synge strongly characterises Old Mahon, elsewhere in the play, as a god of darkness and death.[13] Early on, for example, Christy pictures his father, and justifies his murder, as rising in the dark before dawn, 'going out into the yard as naked as an ash tree in the moon of May, and shying clods against the visage of the stars' [*Plays II*, 83-85]. In a draft version of the fight description, Synge also gave Old Mahon 'a great thorn branch,' like a god's attribute, or the thunderbolt carried by Balor [*Plays II*, 102].

An entire antiquarian Graeco-Celtic theory could, in other words, be built on the echoes contained within this scene. A true jigsaw puzzle addict, adhering to Butler's method of pun-craft, could even detect a linguistic trace presence in the surface echo of 'Lug' and 'loy', the 'weapon' Christy repeatedly refers to in his bragging: 'it was a loy the like of that I killed my father', he says, and that Mahon recalls when he reappears: 'do you think I look so easily quenched with the tap of a loy?' [*Plays II,* 107, 161]. Although this would be going too far, perhaps, Synge's interest in the surprising residues of language is certainly at work throughout the play. Toomey has hazarded the suggestion that the choice of the word 'green' to describe the sun, in Christy's description of the fight, might be 'a rather odd bilingual pun' on

[13] D'Arbois, *Le Dieu de la Mort*, 8-9.

'*grian*,' an Irish word for the sun.[14] Kiberd has shown, moreover, how Synge recycles the language of Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*, especially in the lines delivered by Christy.[15] In its reuse of Gaelic culture, the play is, Kiberd argues, 'essentially an act of translation'.[16] It is as if Synge is inviting a comparative response to *The Playboy*, a consideration of how the words of one speaker, and of one language, somehow end up in the mouth of another.

The echoes between Lug and loy, then, like the refractions of Balor and Lug, or Hermes and Argos, or Perseus and Medusa, or Christy and Old Mahon, are indications of the sort of alert, open-minded connection that Synge invites his audience to make, when he establishes his play as a shard from a fragmented myth. It is the way that the tradition of jigsaw puzzle addicts, in which Synge was so immersed, would approach the question of Graeco-Celtic relations.

Part of Synge's response to the *Playboy* debacle was 'A Letter to the Gaelic League', in which he voiced his own opinion on the League and the Revivalist movement more generally. What the movement required, according to Synge, was someone to 'teach Ireland again that she is part of Europe' [*Prose*, 400]. *The Playboy* can be seen as Synge's own effort to link Ireland to the rest of Europe, by means of his comparative technique. 'There are', Synge wrote in a letter to *The Irish Times*, 'it may be hinted, several sides to "The Playboy"' [*Letters I*, 286]. This multifaceted identity is the theatrical equivalent of the spectrum of myths contained within the story of Balor and Lug, or Hermes and Argos. This is what drives what Foster calls, 'the brilliant kaleidoscope of the *Playboy*…turn by bewildering turn'.[17]

The dominant subject of existing scholarly debate on Synge's engagement with Greece is, without doubt, whether or not this play is a version of Sophocles' *Oedipus*, with the tropes of patricide and incest reappearing as the main points of comparison. D.J. Conacher, for example, has positioned the play as a reversal of 'the parricide

[14] Toomey, 'Killing the Da', 170. Alternatively, she suggests it might be 'a half-conscious reminiscence' of a passage in Frazer's *Golden Bough*, where he describes the mistletoe as 'an emanation of the sun's fire', 162.
[15] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 129-139.
[16] Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 303.
[17] Foster, *W.B. Yeats*, 358.

theme of the *Oedipus*'.[18] He also pointed to the possible identity of an old villager, the Widow Quin, as 'a Jocasta-figure'.[19] W. Akin IV analysed the play's engagement with *Oedipus* from a psychoanalytic perspective, while Anthony Roche has a valuable feminist interpretation.[20] Michael Lloyd also points to the influence of d'Arbois' discussion of patricide as a legitimate act among the Celts and Homeric Greeks (Strabo also claims this as customary in Ireland, as Hartland discusses), while Mary Rose Sullivan mapped both 'the theme' and 'the action' of the play onto Sophocles, to follow 'Christy's advance toward genuine self-knowledge.'[21] *Oedipus*, writes Roche, in summary, is 'a peculiarly Irish affair.'[22]

As might be expected, however, given the response to *The Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea*, there is considerable backlash against the idea of *The Playboy* as *Oedipus.* Nicholas Grene, for example, argues that the notion that 'Christy the parricide is a mock Oedipus' is 'one of the most inflexible and unhelpful critical attitudes'.[23] 'What is wrong with this sort of criticism', he writes, is that it 'involves the detection of concealed analogies.' Rather, it should be recognised that 'the action of the play is rooted in a substantial and immediate reality, without mythical or literary *arrière-pensées*.'[24]

It has been one of the aims of this study to demonstrate that there is another approach to the question of Synge and Greece, more suited to Synge's particular

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[18] D.J. Conacher, 'Some Profane Variations on a Tragic Theme', *Phoenix*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring, 1969), 33.
[19] Conacher, 'Some Profane Variations', 35. The same has been said for the Widow Casey. See for example, W. Akin IV, '"I Just Riz the Loy": The Oedipal Dimension of *The Playboy of the Western World*', *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 45, no. 4 (Nov., 1980), 59.
[20] Akin IV, '"I Just Riz the Loy"', 55-65; Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 215-224.
[21] Lloyd, 'Playboy of the Ancient World?', 58, 62-65; Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, ii. 281; Mary Rose Sullivan, 'Synge, Sophocles, and the Un-making of Myth', *Modern Drama*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Dec., 1969), 244, 245.
[22] Roche, 'Oedipus at the Abbey', 110. Both Lloyd and T.R. Henn also detect the presence of the *Odyssey*, as another 'Greek parallel for *Playboy*', regarding Christy as a version of Odysseus washed up among the Phaeacians, and 'with the Widow Quin as Nausicaa'. Lloyd, 'Playboy of the Ancient World?', 60; Henn ed., *Plays and Poems*, 58. Macintosh points out that *The Playboy* was staged at a time when the Abbey directors were collectively reading Sophocles, as Yeats was planning his Abbey *Oedipus*, Macintosh, 'An Oedipus for our Times?', 528.
[23] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 133.
[24] Grene, *A Critical Study*, 133.

attitude to tradition. This can be found in his efforts to bring the science of tradition to life on the stage. It might be more helpful, therefore, to understand the conflict between Christy and his father, Old Mahon, in terms, not of Oedipus's killing of Laius, but rather as a translation of comparatist theories of mythology into theatre.

2. Mock-heroic comparatism

> *It must be borne in mind that all classical writers had a light-hearted way of calling foreign gods and heroes by the names of their own divinities.*
>
> E.S. Hartland[25]

> *every nation has its heroes*
>
> E.S. Hartland[26]

By giving Christy the identity of a sun-god battling the dark, or of a figure who kills his father, Synge encourages his audience to compare his heroes with counterparts from other contexts. But, of course, his hero does not live up to the role. When Old Mahon walks onto the stage, it is discovered that Christy did not do what he says he did, but was rather, at least apparently, 'an ugly liar…playing off the hero' [*Plays II*, 163]. He ends up declining from 'the wonder of the western world' [*Plays II*, 143] and becoming instead the 'fool of the family', as a draft title for the play had it, tied up, branded, then hounded out of the village. Through this mock-heroic transgression, Synge creates a surprising disjuncture between Christy and his heroic prototypes (the father-killer, the sun-god, 'the god-begotten, the dragon-slayer…the Saviour of the World').[27] This can be seen as a challenge to the whole notion of heroism.

[25] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. 8.
[26] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 185.
[27] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, i. v

The comparison of heroes has been a constant feature of Graeco-Celtic relations so far: the effort to define Cuchulain, for example, in the light of Achilles, or Diarmuid in the light of Adonis; to identify the Achaeans with the 'true Celts'; or to ascertain whether the Fenians were Phoenicians or Finns. Still more contentiously, the ranking of Celts and Greeks, according to their relative barbarism or nobility, has been a persistent concern. 'If we allow a Celt to have been formed of the same materials with a Greek,' wrote John Smith, one of the Ossian-Homer negotiators of the eighteenth century, encountered in Chapter One, then 'his religion ought certainly to make him a better man and a greater hero.'[28] Synge's engagement with the mechanisms of such comparisons can be seen in his notes on Rhys's theory of the culture hero, as quoted in Chapter Six: 'Heracles = Ogmios = Greek Λογος…Dagda father of Aengus = Kronos…Gwydion = Hades = Heracles = Hermes, Prometheus, Ulysses, Orpheus, Jason.'[29]

Through his mock-heroic transgression in *The Playboy*, however, Synge's 'Christy as Oedipus as Cuchulain as Lug as Hermes' is dislodged from this rigid constellation. He remains part of a comparative pattern, but it is one full of holes, failures and rifts, as engineered by Synge's parodic heroism. These breaks allow the audience to draw their own connections. Kiberd has pointed out that Synge's intention in *The Playboy* was 'to shock his compatriots into an ever deeper awareness of their own dilemmas.'[30] Crucial to this shock tactic is Synge's simultaneous positing and displacement of heroic parallels. Not only does this challenge any straightforward connections between Christy and Oedipus, it also, most importantly, confronts the desire to rank the relative heroism of the Irish and the Greeks.

'The most striking difference', observes Roche, 'between Sophocles' *Oedipus* and Synge's *Playboy* is that the former is a tragedy while the latter is predominantly a comedy.'[31] T.R. Henn described Synge's play as 'a comic Oedipus' and 'a Dionysiac

[28] Smith, *Galic Antiquities*, 26.
[29] TCD MS 4378, ff. 44r-43v.
[30] Declan Kiberd, 'The Perils of Nostalgia: A Critique of the Revival', in Peter Connolly ed., *Literature and the Changing Ireland* (Gerrards Cross, 1982).
[31] Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 216.

comedy'.[32] Macintosh has helpfully positioned Synge within 'what one might term the parodic line of Irish Greek adaptation'.[33] 'The comic peripety', proclaimed Conacher, 'is upon us.'[34] In this light, another full-length study could be written on the relationship between comparatism and comedy (and tragicomedy) in Synge's work. *This* study, however, has aimed to provide a framework through which to view such a subject, to understand how Synge's engagement with the comic allowed him further to open up and multiply the possible, imaginative connections between traditions.[35]

For now, though, all that is needed is a return to *The Aran Islands*, where this analysis of Synge's comparisons began. Chapter Seven argued that Synge exploited the reader's ability to undertake comparison in this text. It can now be seen that he does so in order to make the same challenge to heroism as in *The Playboy*. Just as he does with Christy and his refractions in the sun-god, or Oedipus, or Christ, Synge encourages the reader to understand the protagonists of the sea-serpent story and the eviction scenes comparatively. By doing so he undermines the heroic archetype, at the same time as putting forward a new version of the heroic.

Within the context of the paired narratives, Synge suggests several parallels between the two central figures, the Perseus-type hero and Patrick the bailiff (both leave home to seek their fortune, for example, then end up committing several acts of great violence). He establishes Patrick as the counterpart of the cowherd, who is himself, according to Hartland, the counterpart of Perseus, Gilgamesh, Christ, Lug, Hermes, and so on. In reality, however, Patrick is anything but heroic, having betrayed 'the ancient loyalty of the island' and 'sold his honour' [*Prose*, 88]. Like Christy, he does not live up to the role bestowed on him by the parallel narratives.

However, by viewing him in the light of this pairing, the reader then begins to question the heroism of the other facet in the comparison, the cowherd, or Perseus figure. It becomes increasingly clear, as Hartland himself wrote, that 'the hero is

[32] Henn ed., *Plays and Poems*, 57, 58.
[33] Macintosh, 'An Oedipus for Our Times?', 526.
[34] Conacher, 'Some Profane Variations', 36.
[35] Such a framework would be productively applied, for example to what Roche rightly calls Synge's 'underestimated' tragicomedy, *The Well of the Saints*. Roche, *Synge and the Making of Modern Irish Drama*, 86.

deterred no more than the most bigoted fanatic by any considerations of humanity or even of kinship.'[36] The reader can appreciate, for example, that the cowherd does not only rescue the princess but also carries her off, in what emerges not as a marriage but rather as an abduction scene (as common in Greek mythology). This then becomes a version of Patrick's confiscation of the islanders' wealth.

By reading the stories comparatively, in this way, another pair of figures then emerge, whom Synge may be surreptitiously positing as alternative heroes. At the beginning of Dirane's story, he mentions in passing the mother of the cowherd, 'a widow living among the woods, and her only son living along with her.' When the cowherd leaves to make his fortune, he 'asked her to make him three cakes the way he might take them with him in the morning' [*Prose I*, 84]. She then disappears from the story. At the corresponding point of the eviction scene, Synge describes the mother of Patrick, raging and lamenting (in a manner reminiscent of Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*) about the treachery of her son. If the two stories are read as partners to each other, then the two women gain great significance. The cowherd's mother, in particular, who otherwise is forgotten, remerges again as a sort of concealed hero, revealed only through comparison.

Synge describes Patrick's mother, raging 'on a rock near the slip,' and notes how, 'in the fury of her speech I seem to look again into the strangely reticent temperament of the islanders'. He seems 'to feel', he writes, 'the passionate spirit that expresses itself, at odd moments only, with magnificent words and gestures' [*Prose I*, 92]. It may well be that the sort of hero who would emerge from Synge's plays, if they were read as a jigsaw puzzle addict would read them, is not the martial, masculine hero of the cowherd/Perseus/Oedipus type, but rather this 'strangely reticent temperament', combined, at times, with fury.

3. Epilogue

[36] Hartland, *The Legend of Perseus*, iii. 12-13.

one of the great features in Antigone is the heroine's vagueness about the motives of her action, another is her inability to see the glory of her death

J.M. Synge/Gilbert Murray [37]

There is necessarily something of the heretic in every hero and something of the hero in every heretic.

Stephen MacKenna[38]

In analysing a comparison between the classical Fury, Allecto, and the Morrígan, 'the Irish…battle-deity', in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Michael Clarke has demonstrated the sophisticated irony and wordplay at work in medieval Irish literature's engagement with classical antiquity.[39] This was a profoundly 'creative activity', which was then obscured in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Clarke argues, by the nationalist desire to straighten out Ireland's relationship with Greece and Rome.[40] In the *Táin*, however, he discovers 'a remarkable adventure in cross-cultural translation', at odds with the nineteenth-century notion of the *Táin* as an autochthonous, autonomous and primitive 'primary epic'.[41]

Unearthing the history of Graeco-Celtic relations in antiquarianism and scholarship since the eighteenth century has revealed many such 'subtle and complex' negotiations between the Greek and Celtic worlds, involving remarkable leaps of imagination.[42] These have been obscured, in their turn, by the critical sense that there is an inherent, straightforward relationship between Ireland and Greece, and, particularly, between its playwrights and the Greek tragedians. Hubert Butler's *Ten Thousand Saints*, with which this study began, was determined to draw attention to

[37] From Synge's notes on Gilbert Murray, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* (New York, 1897), 244. TCD MS 4378, f. 34v.
[38] 'Journal of Stephen McKenna [sic], 1907-1908', National Library of Ireland, MS 14,348.
[39] Michael Clarke, 'Demonology, allegory and translation: the Furies and the Morrígan', in O'Connor ed., *Classical Literature and Learning*, 103.
[40] Clarke, 'Demonology, allegory and translation', 122.
[41] Clarke, 'Demonology, allegory and translation', 101.
[42] Clarke, 'Demonology, allegory and translation', 118.

the vivacity of that tradition, and to gain recognition of it as multilingual, open, metaphorical, forgetful, wrong-headed, local as well as universal, intertextual, ironic, and reliant, for its connections, upon the imagination of the reader, antiquarian or scholar, more than on the material itself. It was designed, according to Butler, to reach an 'imaginative understanding of our ancestors.'[43] Synge was part of that tradition. He was also its interpreter.

Butler's preoccupation with 'our ancestors' suggests, as he himself acknowledges, the political and ideological dangers of Graeco-Celtic researches. These potential motivations – the possible lines of fracture or driving forces behind Graeco-Celtic relations – cannot be exclusively ascribed to any particular faction or discourse (Henry O'Brien, for instance, was a Catholic nationalist obsessed with mapping a firm line between Greek and Celt, in the same way as the Protestants Betham and Keane; Douglas Hyde conducted Graeco-Celtic comparative folklore for the sake of the Irish Revival). However, using Koselleck's asymmetric counterconcepts as a supportive framework, this study has suggested certain patterns and trends. It has revealed that the desire to connect the Greek and the Celtic has often been a desire to exclude certain groups from the equation, or to rank the two in an order agreeable only to the one drawing the connection.

It has explored the place of such connections within the discourse of 'primitive Aryanism,' in the first chapter, with the second investigating how the resistance to such new and close Graeco-Celtic relations (in the Homer-Ossian mode) was bound to certain political, religious and racial prejudices. Chapter Three then suggested an analogy between the search to establish a material connection between Greek and Celtic and the colonial desire for measurement and calculation, epitomised in the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. In Chapter Four, the comparative study of Irish mythology and folklore became part of an imperial attempt to 'know the Celt,' in the face of Home Rule, evident also in the attitude of comparative scholars towards India in the eighteenth century (and the cause of the crisis in comparative studies that has occurred in the last two decades). Linking Celtic to Greek brought Ireland into a

[43] Butler, *Ten Thousand Saints*, 51.

manageable orbit, for Nutt and Arnold, while, for Ridgeway, it allowed for the construction of a Homeric-Celtic 'conquering race.'

Chapter Five then demonstrated the significance of classical negotiations to the well-known Celtic debates within French nationalism, and the importance of such angles to the work of W.B. Yeats. In Chapter Six, the archipelago of the Aran Islands then provided a sphere in which all these elements came together, with a particular weight. The chapter suggested that, for many of its visitors, viewing Aran as embedded in the network of Graeco-Celtic relations became a means to contain the islanders safely, and usefully, in an antique constellation. It might be worthwhile for those scholars, in the growing field of Irish Reception Studies, who are interested in analysing the presence of ancient Greece in modern Irish literature, to bear in mind that this is, itself, an exercise in Graeco-Irish relations. It is salutary to acknowledge just how these have been studied, and manipulated, in the past.

Chapters Seven and Eight, together with this conclusion's glance towards *The Playboy*, have demonstrated, finally, that J.M. Synge plotted an original course through this difficult terrain. He was immersed in the tradition of Graeco-Celtic jigsaw puzzle addicts, absorbing its thought-processes and its strengths, but he relaxed and refined the angles. By combining comparative scholarship with a theory of reader response (putting into practice his interest in the relationship between scholarship and art) he situated the reader of *The Aran Islands* in the position of the comparative scholar, free to do what they liked with that tradition. By developing this technique with an interest in shock and recognition, he then created plays that allowed the audience to navigate the winding path of Graeco-Celtic relations themselves.

Finally, he ignited that strategy by applying it to an exploration of heroism, widening the spaces between traditions by means of the surprise of the mock-heroic. What remains to be seen is, on the one hand, how his exploration of the comic and the tragicomic further propelled the tradition of Graeco-Celtic relations into theatre, and, on the other, how later writers, playwrights and jigsaw puzzle addicts may have learnt from Synge's comparative technique.

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