

CLASSICS AND CELTIC STUDIES

BAKER (G.) *Classics and Celtic Literary Modernism. Yeats, Joyce, MacDiarmid and Jones*. Pp. xxiv + 299. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Cased, £75, US\$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-108-84486-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X24000040

B.'s volume is an excellent contribution to a growing field that combines classical reception studies and Celtic studies. The book's focus on modernism provides a new perspective on the intersection of the classical and the Celtic, an intersection notably also recently developed by F. and R. Kaminsky-Jones's 2020 collection, *Celts, Romans, Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities*. These studies of Celtic identity and classical reception represent a new and fruitful direction in the rapidly growing bibliography on classical reception in Britain and Ireland. B. points out, using W.B. Stanford's 1976 *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* as a representative example, that scholars used to argue that the Irish Revival and other Celtic revivals turned away from Greek and Roman antiquity, placing the Celtic and the classical in opposition to each other. B. demonstrates, however, that classical reception was an integral part of Celtic revivals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At a time when Classics was losing its status as a field that could guarantee social prestige and when knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin was declining steeply, Yeats, Joyce, MacDiarmid and Jones all lament their lack of knowledge of Greek, and sometimes Latin too. And yet, B. argues that their lack of traditional classical education drove these authors, all convinced that Classics held deep importance, to engage with the literatures, histories and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome in novel and idiosyncratic ways.

The book is organised into five chapters, in addition to its introduction and conclusion. B. devotes one chapter to each of the authors he studies, with the exception of Yeats, to whom he gives two chapters. Chapter 1, "A Noble Vernacular?": Yeats, Hellenism and the Anglo-Irish Nation', examines Yeats's early career, showing that he intended *The Wanderings of Oisín* to be a kind of Homeric epic for Ireland. Chapter 2, "Hellenise It": Joyce and the Mistranslation of Revival', argues that *Ulysses* intentionally mistranslates Homer's *Odyssey* as a way of satirising and mocking the authority of Homer among the Revivalists. Chapter 3, "Straight Talk, Straight As the Greek!": Ireland's Oedipus and the Modernism of Yeats', returns to Yeats, now later in his career turning away from Homer and using Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* as a way of resisting both English and Irish censorship. Chapter 4, "Heirs of Romanity": Welsh Nationalism and the Modernism of David Jones', shows Jones, and especially his 1952 *Anathemata*, positioning the Welsh as descendants and heirs of the Roman Empire. Chapter 5, "A Form of Doric Which Is No Dialect in Particular": Scotland and the Planetary Classics of Hugh MacDiarmid', argues that MacDiarmid aimed to invent a synthetic world language that included Greek and Latin, rejecting others' aspirations to make English a lingua franca. He did not want to make Scotland a new Greece, but instead thought that every nation could become classical in the way in which Greece had. This final chapter stretches into a tenuous kind of classical reception, and it shows just how far individual authors could make Classics their own and make it serve their own purposes. Each chapter describes a very different way of approaching Classics; and rather than arguing that there is any kind of classical reception characteristic of Celtic modernism, B. shows us the wild diversity of Celtic modernist classical reception.

There are a few features of the book that stand out, not as strengths or defects, but simply as characteristics worthy of note. First, since I am a Classicist and writing for *The Classical Review*, I found it striking that the methodological focus of the book is on a kind of literary history not usually available to Classicists. B. is concerned primarily with what the authors have told us about their interests, aims and methods. There is some quotation of poetry and of *Ulysses*, but this usually comes only near the ends of the chapters. More of the quotation is from letters, essays and speeches of the authors, and from evidence of the contemporary receptions of their work. The book is about literature, but, more than that, it is about what its authors thought their literature could do. Second, this is a book at least in part about politics, but I often found it difficult to align the literary history B. describes with the political events of the period. For example, in the chapters on Yeats and Joyce the formation of an Irish national literature is at the forefront, but the political and military events of the history of the nation at the time during which Yeats and Joyce were writing fade into the background. Chapter 4 notes Jones's approbation of Hitler in 1939, pointing out that Jones wrote that, although he could not agree with hate, he did agree with much of what Hitler was saying. Chapter 5 dwells briefly on MacDiarmid's expulsion from the Scottish National Party for his Leninism. Nevertheless, for all the book's interest in the political positions of the authors it studies, and for all its interest in how they attempted to use classical reception to advance their nationalist goals, there is little in the book about how well the literature accomplished its authors' political aims. Finally, the first three chapters focus entirely on Ireland and Greece, meaning that the book as a whole pays relatively less attention to Wales, Scotland and Rome. In my opinion, Yeats and Joyce are worthy of the unbalanced attention on Ireland, and the final two chapters on Wales and Scotland supplement the earlier three chapters well, showing especially Joyce's influence on Jones and MacDiarmid. Less obvious but just as noteworthy is the unbalanced treatment of the receptions of Greek and Roman material. There is very little in the book on Latin literature and Roman culture in the Irish Revival, despite plenty of reception of Latin in the literature. I was disappointed not to see B. address this particular interest of mine, but that should not be taken as a criticism. Rather, my disappointment is only an expression of my expectation that, if he had addressed the reception of Latin literature in the Irish Revival, I think he would have added something valuable to the discussion. Of course, the book is already a long one, and it would not have been possible to add material to it. In the end, B. had to be selective rather than comprehensive, and his representative examples show with admirable detail and clarity the variety of modernisms and classical receptions possible in the Celtic revivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

University of Western Ontario

RANDALL POGORZELSKI
rpogorze@uwo.ca