

## *Introduction*



### DISCIPLINE AND REVOLUTION: CLASSICS IN VICTORIAN CULTURE

*Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* is intended to make a contribution to three major areas of scholarship, nineteenth-century studies, Classics, and what is often called Reception Studies. A short version of the agenda will seem straightforward enough: Victorian culture was obsessed with the classical past, as nineteenth-century self-consciousness about its own moment in history combined with an idealism focused on the glories of Greece and the splendor of Rome to make classical antiquity a deeply privileged and deeply contested arena for cultural (self-)expression. This is, or should be, a fundamental area of concern for nineteenth-century scholars. Classics as a discipline has always been interested in its own development, and it has supported the history of classical scholarship as a small but lovingly tended genre within the field; and there are few centuries as important for classicists' self-awareness as the nineteenth, whether we focus on scholarship itself or on the classicists' complicity with imperialism, racism, and nationalism. This is, or should be, highly pertinent for working classicists, explaining how we have come to be who we currently are. Reception Studies—often called by classicists the history of the classical tradition—has become in recent years both a growth field and an area where methodological issues central to the very idea of classics are hotly debated: where better to test the waters than in the Victorian engagement with Classical Antiquity?

My dull title inevitably threatens such apparently self-evident delineations of my project's questions. But this book also sets out to produce some new questions and new understandings in each of these areas. For example, let us think for a moment about the discipline of Classics and its place in Victorian culture.

One lasting icon of the nineteenth-century's new organization of the discipline of Classics is Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, instigator of the tutorial system of teaching, translator of Plato, and public intellectual who articulates as strongly as anyone the connection between university education and public life.<sup>1</sup> As Classics itself took a turn away from the high and dry philological training toward political philosophy, with Plato becoming a central subject, so Jowett's one-on-one Socratic classes,

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prepared the young men of class to become the administrators of British power. The Oxford man knew when he walked down the Broad that he ruled the world (the Cambridge man, of course, when he walked down King's Parade, didn't care who ruled the world: different style, same arrogance). Classics has found it hard to shake off the connection between itself as a discipline and the power structures of empire ever since. Jowett placing his men, well-read in Virgil, in the India Office, is too strong an image. Classics has a reputation of being the imperial subject par excellence, despite geology, encyclopedias, and even botany playing catch-up in recent decades of scholarly analysis.<sup>2</sup>

It is not hard to see why Classics has this reputation. At least it is not hard to see why this has become the standard story, and why Classics functions as the paradigmatic discipline for thinking through the relations between disciplinarization and the ideological and institutional structures of authority, privilege, and education, especially in the Victorian era. By the nineteenth century, Classics—by which is meant primarily the learning of Greek and Latin, the reading of the great texts of the canon, and the study of ancient history—took up a major part of the curriculum in the burgeoning public schools. According to the Clarendon Report, the average public school spent eleven of its twenty weekly lessons, every week, on classics (compared to two for drawing and two for science, say). Most pupils who passed through elite education learned reams of Greek and Latin poetry by heart. Classics was simply the furniture of the mind for the Victorian upper classes, often somewhat shabby or threadbare furniture, sometimes thrown out on the rag-and-bone cart, but always a recognizable style of decoration, whether homely or grand.<sup>3</sup> In defense of this curriculum, J. K. Stephen could argue that it was not whether you actually knew Greek or Latin that counted, but whether you had once learned it: to have forgotten Greek and Latin was, for him, a better education than knowing science.<sup>4</sup> Virginia Woolf's cousin had his own version of (not) knowing Greek. The great arguments about education in the nineteenth century were always integrally and essentially arguments about the place of classics, and since the great arguments about educational reform were also arguments about political enfranchisement, the study of Classics had an inevitable political formation. Part of the justification of the continuing study of Classics was that it formed, as well as informed, the mind, and formed the mind not just for a gentleman but for a figure of authority. A training in how to rule. So, paradigmatically, Macaulay on his way to a colonial position in India reads Virgil, Livy, Homer, and the other classics. And this training is fully institutionalized: there were twice as many points available in the civil service exams for the classical papers. For ruling India, it was more valued to know ancient Greek than modern Hindi or Urdu.<sup>5</sup>

So Classics can easily be seen as the archetype of discipline formation in the nineteenth century, and so it has been discussed by some very fine modern studies: Classics was central to the curriculum, its place as a subject was publicly and extensively discussed, its increasing institutional structures were debated and a major part of educational reform, it proved itself capable of absorbing new sciences like archaeology or art history into its learning, and it provides the perfect example of the connection of education and privilege mutually supporting each other, as the classically educated moved into the church, the government, and the arts of empire. The anecdote, as ever, is the clincher: the famous one word message of triumph sent by Napier back home read just “peccavi”—“I have sinned,” that is, “I have captured the Indian province of Sindh.” The point is not whether the punning message was really sent, but its loving circulation, from *Punch* in 1844 onward, among generations of guys to indicate how the gentleman soldier of empire does witticism—which articulates precisely enough the iconic and complicit image of Latinist as imperialist.

This story of the discipline is standard, and much beloved of anyone who feels like attacking Classics to make themselves feel modern or self-satisfied in their own political stance. And it is a story that is easy to tell because it does accurately represent one strand of classics as a nineteenth-century discipline. But there are some very strong challenges to it as a story, which constitute a need for a major redrafting of the account. I want to express three of these first, before moving on to what I will argue is a major gap in the current versions of the disciplinary formation of Victorian Classics.

The first challenge is familiar especially to those working in the early decades of the nineteenth century. When Shelley said “We are all Greeks,” it was a battle cry of a philhellenic Romantic to join the revolution.<sup>6</sup> The idealism associated with classicism was for many at the turn of the nineteenth century a clarion call to change the world—beginning with a revolution in contemporary Greece to overthrow their Ottoman rulers. Bernard Shaw described Plutarch as a “handbook for Revolutionaries.” This may seem like Shaw’s customary overstatement, but Rousseau, the intellectual godfather of the French revolution, claimed to have learned all of Plutarch by heart by the age of eight. Now that certainly is Rousseau’s self-serving exaggeration—there are twenty-four volumes of Plutarch in the Loeb edition—but he did write “Ceaselessly occupied with Rome and Athens, I lived, so to speak, with these great men”—he is talking of Plutarch’s *Lives*—“myself born the citizen of a Republic and the son of a father whose love of fatherland was his strongest passion, I caught fire with it. . . . I became the character whose life I read.” So Madame Roland, no doubt with half an eye on Rousseau, wrote from prison that “at the age of eight I used to take Plutarch to church instead of my prayer book.” Charlotte Corday, too, or

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so the story goes, read her beloved Plutarch all the day before assassinating Marat. For the luminaries of the French Revolution, reading Plutarch fired the imagination, provided exemplars, and stimulated revolutionary zeal.<sup>7</sup> When Marx wrote that the French Revolution was conducted in Roman dress, he was referring primarily to the Republican political theory that underlay so much of the principled action, as well as the neoclassical stances adopted by so many figures of the period (all those letters and tracts signed by “Brutus,” “Cincinnatus,” . . .). But one shouldn’t forget that it also involved the reading of classical texts with revolutionary fervor. It is simply not the case that Classics is inevitably linked to empire or to conservative values in the nineteenth century. Rather, for many, especially at the beginning of the century, Classics was a visionary, revolutionary subject. Indeed, it might be better to say that the increasing institutionalization of Classics, followed by its association with the corridors of power, was a response to the challenge provided by Romantic philhellenism. What should the immense popularity of Byron and the Byronic mean for the study of Classics? It is not clear in the first years of the century where Classics will end by the last years of the century. The history of Victorian Classics as a discipline could benefit from a comparative history with European Classics, as it weaves in and out of the years around 1848—and a comparative history between the discipline—school, university, publishing—and the role of Classics within a broader cultural milieu. One strand of the story of Classics in the nineteenth century would tell how its revolutionary force was tamed, *disciplined* by the subject becoming a discipline—or rather how its revolutionary potential was redirected away from the radical politics associated with Romantic philhellenism. For, despite the regulation of becoming a fully institutionalized discipline, Classics never wholly lost its power for disruption. As we will see when we turn to the religious arguments of the second half of the century, there was another, passionately felt and contested revolution fueled by classical study.

The second area of challenge will also be familiar, especially to those working in the later decades of the century: sexuality—the empire of the senses. Although Payne Knight may have privately circulated his work on the ancient phallus as a pagan challenge to a dominant Christianity at the end of the eighteenth century, by the end of the nineteenth century, Classics and sexuality were linked in fascinating ways within the discipline as an institution.<sup>8</sup> Hellenism and homosexuality went together like a horse and carriage in the Victorian university, and the trial of Oscar Wilde brought it into the limelight of public scandal. Again, this has been very well discussed by modern scholarship. From the use of Greek philosophy as an alibi for male desire for males, to the idealization of the classical male body, to the artistic and literary fantasies of a pre-Christian sexuality, Greek writing became a way of constructing a revolutionary sexual world, a world of

change from the mundane realities of Victorian Britain.<sup>9</sup> Deliberately and self-consciously counter-cultural, using the privilege of cultural value against the dominant cultural models. (So, too, Virginia Woolf or H. D. or Michael Field turned to Greek in particular for their intellectual feminism but also for their sexual self-definition.) This sexual turn has had a long heritage. The Uranians were only one of the groups who linked male desire for males with a Greek idealism, which thus set Greek pederasty at the center of its self-presentation—and one might say that the contemporary popular association of homosexuality with child abuse is one offshoot of the Victorian marriage of convenience between Greek idealism and homosexual self-presentation.<sup>10</sup> From another angle, Freud's revolutionary sexual understanding is informed throughout by his classical training, not just in the naming of complexes, but in his models of analysis, the archaeology of the self. As scholars from Rudnytsky to Gere have shown, Freud, seated at his desk surrounded by his figures of classical sculptures, used Classics as much more than a metaphor in his science.<sup>11</sup> The point is a simple one: From Freud to Foucault, Classics has been central to modern sexual revolutions particularly—though not only through the analysis of male sexuality via the example of Greece. Again, there is a history waiting to be written of how the institutionalization of Classics, especially in the public school system, dealt with the troubling picture of the bearded man pursuing the youth in the gym.

The third area of challenge is in the history of democracy. One of the best-selling books in the middle of the nineteenth century, and certainly one of the most renowned, was Grote's *History of Greece* (as I will further discuss in chapter 5). Grote was a banker, and an MP, and wrote as a private individual. But his impact on the discipline was huge. If Wolf debunked the status of Homer, and Niebuhr the status of the legends of Rome, Grote's history turned the first fully critical eye on the legends of Greece.<sup>12</sup> But for my purposes in this introduction, what matters about Grote is that his history was written self-consciously against the historical stance of his predecessors, in opposition to Mitford's *History*, and as a sharper version of Thirlwall's—and was perceived to be so by his contemporaries. This was not just a question of historiography or of accuracy, but of politics. Grote was seen as—and wrote as—a defender of democracy, and of Athenian democracy at that.<sup>13</sup> In the controversy over his publications, both sides agreed that history was written to exemplify a political view, and that Grote supported democracy. In short, in these years of political reform, ancient Greek history, rather than being the conservative force that the traditional story of the history of the discipline would seem to require, was the means and matter of challenging modern conservative historiography. Again, the disciplinarization of the field needs to be seen in and against the anti-establishment, anti-conservative political potential of its study. A potential

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activated most strikingly in the field of political history in the century where political and historical self-consciousness is a defining characteristic of a cultural identity.

The standard account of the development of the discipline of classics, then, with its drive toward political conservatism and its role as the educator of imperial gentlemen needs some serious qualification. Alongside, interwoven with this narrative, runs a political challenge to which the discipline is responding: political revolutionary idealism; sexual counter-culturalism; the authority of the past in service of a democratic political vision. These are not minor or simply marginal trends. From Rousseau and Shelley through Grote to Wilde, we are talking of major cultural icons for whom Classics is the opposite of a conservative or imperialist educational resource or cultural value.

What I have offered so far is in many ways the standard response to the standard story, for all that there is still a need for much of this challenge to be worked out in detailed research. I want now to look at a much under-researched and under-appreciated topic. My discussion aims to do two things: first, to explore another, and to my mind, absolutely crucial way that Classics played a role in what we could call the most important revolution of the nineteenth century; and second, to question the boundaries of the idea of a discipline in what might at first sight appear to be the clearest case of disciplinarianization.

So what, then, is the most important revolution of the nineteenth century, and how does this affect our understanding of a discipline as a discipline? The revolution has different names, and the choice of what we call it is highly politicized, but for the moment I will call it the loss of the dominant place of Christian religion in Britain. I need hardly emphasize that this loss is often connected to Darwin and the growth of scientific disciplines. But I want to start with a telling comment by the novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward. This starting point is not random. Not only was she connected with many of the luminaries of trendy thinking in Victorian Britain, including Benjamin Jowett with whom I started, but she also wrote *Robert Elsmere*, perhaps the most celebrated and widely circulated novel of loss of faith ever written. It is a long, serious book about an Anglican vicar who gradually loses his faith in the church and in church history, and it was a passionately debated bestseller in England and America for a decade following its publication in 1888.

Mrs. Humphry Ward wrote that it was not science, as our contemporary academy tends to think, but “*the education of the historic sense which is disintegrating faith.*”<sup>14</sup> That is, the greatest challenge to religion, to faith, is not Darwin, but the work of critical history. This is the process she represents in her novel, where her hero’s crisis of faith is prompted precisely by the study of ancient history. As she wrote to a friend, “What convinced *me* fi-

nally and irrevocably was two years of close and constant occupation with materials of history in those centuries which lie near the birth of Christianity.”<sup>15</sup> And she depicts Robert Elsmere going through the same process in her novel. Ancient history as a subject proved a profound threat to the self, the religious self.

*Robert Elsmere* was a hugely successful novel in part because it summed up perfectly a current trend, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. Wolf’s work on Homer had suggested at the beginning of the century that Homer’s texts were the result of a long oral tradition, and that the legends and myths it included had the most fragile of historical status. Niebuhr had challenged Roman originary legends from Livy, the great historian of the early Roman Empire. But it was perhaps the work of David Strauss in Germany, and above all Ernest Renan in France, which had the biggest impact. Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, translated into English by Marian Evans, soon to be the novelist George Eliot, looked with care at the historical evidence for Jesus and applied standards of historical plausibility to the accounts of early Christianity. Renan was read very broadly in England (and Mrs. Humphry Ward had met him in Oxford). His *Life of Jesus* combined a romantic travelogue with critical history to suggest a very human Jesus in a non-Jewish Galilee. The humanity of Jesus—as opposed to his divinity as the son of God—became a watch word of the opponents of conservative, institutional Christianity, and was bitterly contested by Anglicans and Catholics alike. Together with the sniffy dismissal of miracles as impossibility—God does not interfere with the laws of nature—this move away from the traditional evidences of the church depended on a careful, critical, historical reading of the Greek and Latin sources of the first centuries. So Robert Elsmere’s crisis of faith is summed up in one climactic line: *miracles do not happen*. Cardinal Newman and the Tractarians wrote saints’ lives, complete with extraordinary tales, to bolster precisely the belief in the early church’s authoritative truth. The Catholics claimed unbroken apostolic succession from these early figures. Even the lowest of Anglicans had studied the miracles of Jesus as an evidence of divinity. So Gladstone, obsessed with *Robert Elsmere*, invited Mrs. Ward to breakfast in Oxford, where in defense of social order and the British system, he stated with passion: “if you sweep away miracles, you sweep away *the Resurrection!*”<sup>16</sup> But the historical study of early church texts, as texts of their own time and designed for their own audience, led Elsmere and many others to conclude that *miracles do not happen*. The study of Classics was, as opponents of Erasmus had feared back in the sixteenth century, the beginnings of heresy.

Between 1834 and 1843, fully 93 percent of all clerics were graduates, almost all (84.6 percent) educated at Oxford or Cambridge, and the majority in Classics, before theology. In the same period, over 70 percent of all graduates were ordained. As late as 1906, some 65 percent of all British

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clerics were still graduates, mostly educated at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>17</sup> From 1864–73, still over half of all Oxford and Cambridge graduates were ordained into the church. The connection between the university and the church was profound. The texts of the early church—the ones that mattered at least—were mostly in Greek and Latin. So T. S. Eliot as late as the 1930s wrote, justifying a continuing educational focus on classics, “It is only upon readers who wish to see a Christian civilization survive . . . that I am urging the importance of the study of Greek and Latin.”<sup>18</sup> For similar reasons around the end of the nineteenth century, out-of-town clerics duly voted to keep compulsory Latin and Greek at Cambridge and swung the vote for many years of failed educational reform.<sup>19</sup> But in the very same period, it was precisely the study of the texts of the classical past that was undermining the church’s own history and, with it, its historical authority. Classics, at this level, proved very dangerous indeed to the Christian order of things. Kept because it was essential, in its modern disciplinary form it was still essentially a profound threat.

So starting within the discipline of Classics with Wolf in the German research university, or in a theology department with Strauss, moving through public intellectuals such as Renan or novelists such as Mrs. Humphry Ward, into the general intellectual world of newspapers and journals where ideas were circulated and contested in a broader arena, the study of ancient Greek and Latin sources was an essential element in the most insistent challenge to the institutional and ideological structures of Victorian Britain—the Anglican Church itself. The truth of the Gospels and the truth of the saints’ lives were scrutinized and found wanting by new historical, critical methods. The loss of the historical truth of the texts of early Christianity was a crisis in self-understanding, religious authority, and the institutional structures of the communities of Britain. To assert *miracles do not happen* was a deeply destabilizing claim. By 1899, in the hands of the satirical novelist W. H. Mallock (who deliciously parodies Mrs. Humphry Ward amongst other notables), it has become a recognizable stereotype of crisis: his hero, Tristram Lacy, once very religious, “came in contact with the criticism and scientific thought of to-day” at Oxford, “forgot an appointment at a house of a highly reprehensible character, in reading a German history of the growth of the early Church,” and became a “disbeliever in everything.”<sup>20</sup> It is striking that Benjamin Jowett, icon of Classics as a training for imperialism, at the center of the institutional structures of Oxford, had his professorial salary withheld by the fellows of Christchurch for several years because they regarded his critical views on ancient history, and thus religion, unacceptable to their Anglican vows. Jowett was to them a disgraceful, unwanted heretic.<sup>21</sup> It is essential to (re)build the image of Jowett the religious renegade into the image of Jowett the standard-bearer of imperialism and the Classics.

This very brief and necessarily oversimplified account of how Anglican Christianity and Classics interweave shows just how hard it is to limit the boundaries of the discipline of Classics. It is not just that Mrs. Ward was marginal to institutions, or Renan kept outside the standard university networks. (He was appointed Professor at the College de France but suspended because of the religious views of his first lecture. . . .) Nor is it just that Victorian intellectual luminaries could move between classics and theology, novels and preaching, school teaching and the church. Nor is it that the work of scholars and artists cross-fertilized and influenced each other. Rather, we haven't quite yet been able to write a history of the disciplinary formation of classics that can take account of how the discipline appears sometimes to move in complete separation from work outside the discipline, but sometimes acts in opposition to it, in an attempt to control it, in earnest or angry or anxious response to it. The interface of classics and theology is precisely the place to conduct such an enquiry into the dynamics of disciplinary formation, one which is, I suggest, essential to understanding how we have arrived at where we are.

This book takes a very broad view of the dynamics of Classics in the nineteenth-century, not just in looking at art, opera, and fiction but also in seeing how these different areas interact, and how each area, severally and collectively, can be properly understood only within multiple frames of cultural reference, multiple questions of cultural significance. Several micro-histories lie in this volume—detailed examples are integral to its exposition—but whether it is a classical picture on the walls of the Royal Academy or an opera performance by amateurs at Cambridge, or a blockbuster novel about the Roman Empire, in each case we need to scrutinize *what we need to know* in order to understand the artwork in its historical context—and how such multiple social, intellectual, aesthetic, political frames together form an image of Victorian culture. The first contribution that this book sets out to make, then, is to our understanding both of the development of Classics as a subject in the nineteenth century, and of the integral and essential place of classical antiquity in Victorian culture.

Now, it will be immediately clear from a glance at the contents page that although this book is called *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* the time scale is broader than the reign of Victoria, and the geographical area much wider than Britain. Every historian these days wants their century to be “the long century”; but the range of this book is actually from around 1760 to today, which is longer even than any normal claims for the “long nineteenth century.” There are two points of justification, beyond the standard resistance to arbitrary dating boundaries, which I hope will at least deflect worries about the title being too misleading. (*The Long Nineteenth-Century and Its Dynamic Engagement with the Past of Classical Antiquity* seemed

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a bit too clunky for a title.) First, there is a specific focus in the book on the last two decades of the nineteenth century, together with the first few years of the twentieth century, a period when there is a major revival of classicizing art in London in particular (on which chapters 1 and 2 are concentrated), when Gluck's operas, the subject of chapter 3, were revived in London, and when the majority of the novels discussed in chapters 5–7 were published for the first or second time, many of them in London. The center of this book is located in the culture of Victorian (and just post-Victorian) London between 1880 and 1910. These decades were a period of particular cultural and material richness, and an era when the practice and arguments about classical education, a fascination with ancient sexuality as a counter-culture to contemporary behavioral patterns, and an aesthetic engagement with antiquity, combined to make a perfect storm around the classical. The word "Victorian" appears in the title to indicate that the book focuses here (rather than on Romantic philhellenism, say), but no reader should be surprised or complain that the argument ranges much wider in space and time than the term indicates.

Second, and to my mind more importantly, I am particularly interested in the role of cultural forgetting, on the one hand, and on the myths of cultural tradition, on the other. That is, I am fascinated at one level by what has to be *forgotten* in the construction of a past. As we will see in chapter 3, the revolutionary aesthetic and political force of Gluck in the eighteenth century had to be forgotten for the cultural impact of his revival in 1890 in Cambridge or in 1910 in London to work as it did. In the same way, as we will see in chapter 4, the first production of Wagner's *Ring* in Bayreuth after the Second World War had to be blind to the nineteenth-century connotations of Richard Wagner's Hellenism, linked as it was to his fervent nationalism and, indeed, racism. Chapter 1 strives to rehabilitate Waterhouse from modernist scorn, which has made his pictures so unappreciated by contemporary art criticism, where a teleological art history has determined Waterhouse as no more than a failed harbinger of the modern. To hear these silences, to observe these failures of cultural memory, we need to move some way at least beyond the boundaries of a delimited Victorian era. Cultural tradition, that is, depends on the circulation of myths, of constructed charters, icons, and stories of the significance of the past. When the Victorians deploy narratives and images of the classical past, to appreciate the deployment we need to look back or forward beyond the Victorians to gain a perspective—just as we need to maintain as best we can a self-awareness of our own deployment of our images of the Victorians today. There is inevitably a set of contemporary political and cultural agendas in the much trumpeted but rather unnuanced recent discovery that Victorian classicists were racist, imperialist, and sexist—agendas which need careful analysis rather than simple concession or dismissal. *Victorian Cul-*

*ture and Classical Antiquity* has to take account of the complicities, misrecognitions, and hopefulness of both their and our contemporary gaze backward.

One word for this shady and shifting dynamic between past and present is “reception.” In literary studies, reception as a term is used first and foremost to indicate the self-conscious adaptation of the work of one artist, thinker, or writer by another artist, thinker, or writer: how, as it were, George Eliot reads, adapts, plays with Greek tragedy in her own fiction; or Shakespeare’s Ovid; Shakespeare and the Classics.<sup>22</sup> Or, starting with an ancient text rather than a modern author, how Sophocles’s *Antigone*, say, or even a phrase like *thalassa, thalassa* (“the sea! the sea!”) has been adapted and appropriated by later writers.<sup>23</sup> There are long-running arguments over how “reception” is to be distinguished from related terms such as “(classical) tradition,” or “intertextuality,” or even “literary history.” I stated above that I intend this book to be a contribution not just to Classics and Victorian Studies but also to Reception Studies, and I would like briefly to indicate *how* here.

The most important contribution is in the chapters themselves, where most of my detailed test cases have barely entered contemporary discussion of nineteenth-century classics, despite their importance and popularity at the time. There has been no study of the reception of Waterhouse, a major celebrity of Victorian painting—nor, more surprisingly, any systematic analysis of his art (although there is now at least the catalogue of the first full-scale retrospective exhibition to add to the fine critical biography by Trippi).<sup>24</sup> Nor has the reception of Gluck been studied in any depth, nor, despite his evident importance in the history of opera, are there any detailed discussions of his performance tradition (though many treatments of the music exist). A good number of the novels I explore in chapters 5–7 have no critical bibliography at all, and most of the bestsellers I discuss, even Nobel Prize-winning works, are now languishing in obscurity. This history of the genre of novels of antiquity (if it can properly be called a genre), both in scope and in argument, opens a fresh perspective on nineteenth-century classics within literary and popular culture. *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* intends in this way to broaden the view of what is understood by Victorian Classics. It brings together grand themes—desire, cultural politics, religion—with major genres—art, opera, fiction—to explore the role of classical antiquity in Victorian culture through sources whose importance for the nineteenth century has been undervalued in more recent years.

Beyond the range of material and genres, however, I also hope that each of the chapters is exemplary in its practice, and I would like to take the opportunity of this introduction to suggest at least in lapidary form some ways in which my work takes a position within current Reception Studies.

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It would be strange, after all, *not* to attempt to place my book's work on an intellectual map. Let me begin positively with four areas where I hope these studies build on what I regard as the most valuable current work in this field.

The first area concerns time. In each of these chapters, I am interested in how meaning comes into being over time, and as a process. We can see this on three interconnected levels. First, and most obviously, the making of the artwork, and the response of even the first audience to the artwork, take place as a process over time. So, to start with a particularly clear example, each of Gluck's operas that I discuss is composed over several years in a collective creative project, changing in response to rehearsals, reviews, new cities, new performance possibilities, and restrictions. The audience response to these performances is not just for the duration of the performance, but also develops in anticipation and retrospect, in response to reviews, in the production of reviews, in discussions, in the shimmer of memory's tricks, as part of the process through which the operas become successful, popular, significant (or forgotten). At a second level, the artwork is re-performed—re-viewed, reread—at different moments across (in the case of Gluck again) the long nineteenth century. His operas dropped out of the standard repertory after 1810 and were barely performed in Europe, but did have stunning revivals, each perceived to be a major cultural event, in 1847 in Germany under Wagner, in 1859 in France under Berlioz, and in 1890 and 1910 in England under Stanford. Each revival changed the sense of Gluck for contemporary audiences, and redrafted what Gluck's classicism meant. So, too, we will look at the changing senses of Wagner's Hellenism between the first performance of the *Ring* at Bayreuth and its first performance after the Second World War. Or the changing perspectives opened by the republication of a book such as Croly's *Sala-thiel*, published first in the 1820s, reissued in the 1850s, and then repackaged with a new title and published again in 1901. This "re-performance history" repeatedly changes what the classicism of an artwork means—and forms a necessary part of what we can understand by "reception." But—and this is my third and most complex level—the antiquity of the settings of classicizing art, as well as the recognition of older lost performances or readings, is part of the artists' and audiences' self-aware reflections on the modernity of the experience of the artwork. Classicizing art is haunted by memories or projected memories of a lost past—a classical past and a past of earlier performances. The question of whether one can experience Gluck's classical tragic opera as a classical Greek experienced his tragedy, or even as an earlier audience felt Gluck, is explicitly part of the emotional response to Gluck's music. The self-consciousness of modernity, of seeing oneself within a literary tradition or a performance tradition, runs through both the composition of these artworks, and the response to them. When

Dorothy L. Sayers complains that Wilkie Collins's "Goths and Romans alike hail from Wardour Street,"<sup>25</sup> she is not just mocking or lamenting Collins's anachronism as a flaw in characterization. She is also performing a gesture of a rather anxious self-awareness we see repeated throughout the critical tradition of classicism: Is this art Greek or Roman enough? Is my response authentic or modern? Is this re-performance true to the original? Was the original true to its model? I indicated earlier that I was particularly interested in *cultural forgetting*. We can now be more precise: classicizing art has an integral and heightened temporal self-awareness, but we need to appreciate how the acts of affiliation to the past, the gestures of appropriation, the proclamation of ancient models—typical marks of classicism—are in dynamic and creative tension with acts of repression. The reinvention of the Greeks is both a discovery and a forgetting—and the forgetting too needs its place in Reception Studies.

For all our love of epiphany, meaning takes time—and, I would add, flirts with its own temporality, its status as lasting or fleeting, its temporariness. Reception studies are most nuanced, I would suggest, when they are most aware of how meaning takes shape over time, and when they are most sensitive both to the dynamics of "re-performance history" and to the dynamics of temporal self-consciousness, integral to classicizing artworks. This book tries to follow such an agenda.

The second area concerns the space of meaning: where does meaning take place? This question is designed to draw out an argument implicit in the discussion of temporality, where I included audiences in the model of reception. This book is concerned with how artworks have an effect, a meaning, in society. Once meaning is conceived as a public event, as it were, the audience becomes a key part of what could be called the scene of reception. This is most pressing in a staged performance, of course, where Gluck's response to Greek tragedy, say, takes place with and for an audience, and, indeed, the audience's response takes place, as we will see, acutely aware of other audience members and their responses (an audience in the theatre always watches itself watching). In the Victorian art gallery, too, especially in the context of the circulation of reviews, the scandals over particular exhibitions, and the public debate over display, viewers are aware that their judgments and responses are like or unlike other viewers' judgments and responses—and are performed as such. Gallery goers look at each other as well as at the pictures. (Which is why scenes at the art gallery are so often scenes of falling in love at first sight. . . .) Even the private act of reading a novel is triangulated through other projected audiences, other readings. Ruskin is exemplary when he deposits in his diary the thought that "Everybody has a spite at Bulwer because the public thinks him clever and they don't"<sup>26</sup> (a remark that will be further discussed in chapter 5). As he reads and reflects on the novels of Bulwer Lytton (author of *The Last*

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*Days of Pompeii*), his response is articulated through his perception of what “everyone”—a self-appointed elect—believes, in contrast to the mere “public,” and how he himself fits onto this map. Imagined, denied, hoped for, despised audiences crowd in on the act of composition and the act of being in an audience (including reading). Artworks have power, value, status to the degree that audiences engage with them. Thus, in this book I am interested in meaning as a (messy) social process not as an imagined private (pure) communion between an artist and an artwork of the past. Not so much Gluck’s reading of Greek tragedy, then, as the meaning of the performance of Gluck’s operas, which certainly includes Gluck’s personal engagement with the classics, but only as one element in the production of a cultural event. We will see many difficulties in evaluating and utilizing an audience’s response, but nonetheless, it is, I would suggest, potentially a damaging oversimplification to exclude audiences from Reception Study. Audiences are part of the cultural event of restaging the past for the here and now.

One consequence of this paradigm—and this is my third area—is that each chapter is best seen as a form of cultural history as much as an aesthetic project. Or rather, I am concerned to locate aesthetics as one historically specific element in a series of frames in which any particular public display of art, performance in a theatre, or publication of a novel, needs to be comprehended. Now, for many literary scholars (let alone cultural historians), to raise a banner for cultural history will scarcely seem a provocative or even interesting gesture. It has no claim to novelty: much of the best literary criticism of Victorian fiction, for example, happily deploys science, psychology, glass, physiognomics, things—any aspect of cultural history—as an informative framework or cultural interface to help locate and appreciate the meaning of written texts. Yet, despite the predominance of cultural history in many domains, there is nonetheless one compelling reason to underline my commitment to cultural history in this book—namely, the resistance to cultural history in some popular styles of Reception Study within contemporary Classics. At one level, this is often just because of what could be charitably called the narrow focus of many a work of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*; or called, less charitably, “positivist history, often of a rather amateurish nature.”<sup>27</sup> It would be easy here to list books, which list translations of Aristotle (*vel sim*), as if such a *catalogue raisonné* could ever constitute a *history*. But at a more interesting level, the so-called new aesthetics, with its roots in Kantian thinking, has repeatedly *opposed* reception as an *aesthetic* project to cultural history, and indeed uses the term “historicist” as a sneer.<sup>28</sup> My starting point is with artworks that have made a significant difference by virtue of their public impact—these seem to me to be particularly worth our attention as historians and critics; this leads inevitably to thinking about meaning as a public event, which leads inevitably to cul-

tural history. I would be happy for this book to be seen as a positive and productive rejoinder to “the new aesthetics.”

One marker of public impact is the size and volubility of an audience. The paintings I discuss in chapters 1 and 2 were seen by audiences of hundreds of thousands in London, and these numbers expanded as the paintings toured England, Europe, America, and the works were also discussed in the widely circulated press. Gluck’s operas produced hundreds of pages of polemical pamphlets in Paris, as well as huge audiences of emotionally overwhelmed Parisians. They were produced all over Europe. Wagner’s operas were discussed across Europe and America, and, while they, like Gluck’s, changed the aesthetics of opera in the West, it was also the overheated audiences and commentators in the press that made Wagner’s music such a European *événement*. Many of the novels discussed in chapters 5–7 were sold in enormous numbers, and were read by many more—and many of the novels became plays, films, and paintings, which further spread their recognition. The subject of this book hovers between high and popular art. What’s more, the circulation of popular images of Classics introduces particular hermeneutic problems for reception studies: How are we to evaluate the impact of *Ben Hur* when it reaches an audience whose cultural knowledge is so different from the usual educated audience envisaged by Reception Studies? How are we to appreciate the circulation of the trivial use of classical icons—Venus de Milo in a corset in a newspaper advertisement? And, most interestingly, how are we to understand the imagery or ideas or representations that slip *between* the elite world of high culture and more popular exposure—when, for example, one generation’s provocation becomes another’s cliché? This book does not merely consider works of high culture or works of popular culture, but also focuses on the relation *between* high and popular cultures, and the awkward transitions and tensions between the elite and the demotic, which constantly provoke the unsettling question of *how shared* culture is. Here, then, is my fourth area of concern with regard to Reception Studies: the slippage between elite and popular culture of classical motifs or narratives, and the effect on both elite and popular culture of such slippage.

Now, it is no doubt a foolhardy hostage to fortune to attempt to locate one’s work in so varied and invested a field as Reception Studies in three pages, and each of these four areas could certainly be expanded to make a full-scale methodological exposition, especially now when Reception Studies is so absorbed with the theory of its own practice. But I hope enough has been said to indicate something of my slant on reception theory. I am interested in the messy business of how meaning or significance—and specifically the various responses of Victorian culture to classical antiquity—takes shape in society, over time, and between genres. I focus on the construction of cultural value in and through cultural performance, and how

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the development of nineteenth-century media and mass audiences alters not just the circulation of images of antiquity, but also the interplay between high culture and popular culture—a topic of special purchase for Classics, with its constant patina of privilege. How this plays out in practice, the chapters will demonstrate. I have tried—without complete success, I know—to avoid polemic in positioning my approach to Reception Studies, but it will not hurt to indicate, for the sake of clarity at least, that part of the drive behind this book is my dissatisfaction with one particular model of Reception Studies that, at least in its most aggressive form, privileges the unilinear response of the artist to a previous artwork—Milton’s reading of Virgil, or Titian’s reworking of Ovid—at the cost of severely downplaying the importance of historical contextualization, audience engagement, and cultural power. For me, reception Studies is most productive and interesting when we move away from the great man communing in his study with the great work of the past, toward the cultural significance of the representation of the past for a here and now.

I am now in a position to underline the force of my subtitle, “. . . and the Proclamation of Modernity.” In each of my chapters, there is a specific focus on how the artworks in question come to stand for a self-aware statement about modernity—through the classical past. Waterhouse and Alma-Tadema are very much artists of the moment, fashionable, of course, and engaged, as I will show, in contemporary discussions and anxieties about sexuality. Waterhouse’s *St Cecilia* was hailed precisely as “one of the most brilliant and essentially modern performances of this eclectic age,” and as an epitome of “the moderates of modernity.”<sup>29</sup> But both artists, in their reception through the twentieth century (and beyond), have been criticized, often with considerable vitriol, precisely for not being modern enough. In contrast to the art of their European contemporaries, neither Waterhouse nor Alma-Tadema reaches the illustrious status of being a harbinger of modernity. What is at stake here is partly a formalist teleological critique, where art must be seen to move toward abstraction (through impressionism and cubism and so forth), and thus the lush realism of these Victorian artists is seen as stylistically retrograde. But also at stake is our modern view of how modernity is to be conceptualized.<sup>30</sup> What place for Classics, for narrative, for representation in a realist mode—*today*, in a *modern* aesthetics? The word “Victorian” is still often used as a dismissive negative adjective to contrast with the self-definitions of contemporary culture. *They* were the Victorians, but *we* are. . . . The lack of appreciation for how Waterhouse and Alma-Tadema have serious contributions to make in the heady arena of sexuality, narrative, and viewing—the epicenter of modernity’s self-recognition—may be laid at the door of such historical oversimplification. The fact that Waterhouse and Alma-Tadema have been so popular as poster art may suggest that the images they put in circulation

have a greater hold on the cultural imagination than the dismissiveness of art historical criticism would suggest.

In a similar manner, Gluck was taken first to be a revolutionary figure of modernity in an age of revolution, and then became the icon of tradition set fast against modernity's inroads. Wagner was recognized—most famously by Nietzsche—to “sum up modernity.” But, as we will see in chapter 4, the narrative of Wagner as the modern or as the unacceptable and rejected past, becomes again a more complicated act of self-definition in Bayreuth after the Second World War. The novels I discuss in the final chapter are concerned with how the modern contemporary world understands itself as the endpoint of a historical development—and with how fiction can be new, or let us see the new for what it is (“new foes with old faces” or “old foes with new faces,” to quote a chapter and subtitle by Charles Kingsley). In each case, this is not just a question of changing fashion, but a question of how modernity reinvents itself as modern, and how classical antiquity has played a role in that act of self-definition. As Marx famously put it in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: “And it is just when they appear to be revolutionizing themselves and their circumstances, in creating something unprecedented, it is in just such epochs of revolutionary crisis that they nervously summon up the spirits of the past, borrowing from their names, marching orders, uniforms, in order to enact new scenes in world history.”<sup>31</sup> Marx is concerned primarily with political change, of course. But his sense of the paradox of the revolutionary reaching for the past captures an essential strand of the Victorian turn to the classical—which with a further twist of the paradoxical becomes itself the basis for the (even more modern) criticism of Victorian conservatism. The subtitle “. . . and the Proclamation of Modernity” indicates this repeated rhetoric of historical self-awareness and self-definition within the narrative of reception.

It may seem simply overweening to have attempted not only to study art, opera, and literature, but also to do so between Classics and Victorian England, two subject areas with fiercely defended and hard-earned specialisms. But the image of antiquity in Victorian Britain is one topic where intermediality (to borrow a term currently very fashionable in German cultural criticism) and interdisciplinarity (a term fashionable everywhere) seem sensible requirements. Even at a superficial level, it is evident that what antiquity means for the British in the nineteenth century will be constructed over a range of fields—education, art, literature, music, history, theology, at the very least—and that these fields will cross-reference each other. As we will see, many paintings proclaim they are based on poetry or novels, and contemporary criticism has commented on this extensively; both art and fiction borrow from scholarship; opera takes its plots from other fictional narratives; fiction imitates the tableau of art (and vice versa);

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art is part of the construction of a historical imagination—and so forth. Interdisciplinarity is integral to the Victorian engagement with Classics. One thing I have learned painfully from this project, however, and particularly from the members of the Cambridge Victorian Studies Group, is how hard it is to do interdisciplinary work seriously, and what level of knowledge of both Classics and Victorian studies is necessary in order to make a respectable contribution. Because of the interstitial space the book inhabits, all readers will need to be generous toward one or another aspect of the glossing that it has seemed foolish not to include. Not all Victorianists will know why Synesius is an especially riveting father of the church; not all classicists will know that Froude is Kingsley's brother-in-law. And especially in chapter 5, there are books discussed that have been read by very few modern scholars of any discipline.

But despite the vast and clumsy title of the book, and the subtitle's paraded range of disciplines, there is in this volume no attempt at being exhaustive in any of these areas, let alone in the complete range of Victorian engagements with the classical past. I have looked just at some central issues and a few central figures (alongside the lesser characters who frame their centrality). Each chapter is designed to be exemplary of a version of how Classics and Victorian Studies can engage with each other. So in the first section, I look at the art of J. W. Waterhouse, who has just had his first major retrospective in Europe and Canada, and then in chapter 2 at one painting of Alma-Tadema. In both chapters, the relation between desire, classical imagery, and nineteenth-century projections is paramount. In the second section on opera, I look only at Gluck in performance from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and then, in a shorter chapter, at what we can learn from comparing the first production of Wagner's *Ring* with the first production at Bayreuth after the Second World War. Here my concern is primarily with the relation between Hellenism and nationalism, or the use of opera in the construction of an image of political citizenship: what one might call "the politics of cultural performance" or "the performance of cultural politics." In the final section made up of three closely interrelated chapters, I look at novels about the Roman Empire written in the nineteenth century, of which there are more than 200 on the bookshelves: Here the connections between fiction, the classical past, historical self-consciousness, and in particular religion, come to the fore. So this book aims to explore desire, cultural politics, and religion, through art, opera, and fiction.

To cover the whole subject of Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity would take more than one lifetime, I fear. I am by no means the first to dip my toes into these waters, of course. Frank Turner's marvelous *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* is superb, particularly on historiography and political writing—I have learned from this hugely, but felt no need to go

over the same ground again. He barely mentions art, opera, or literature in what remains a magisterial study. Richard Jenkyns's *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* and his later *Dignity and Decadence*, well ahead of the game in their choice of subject and interdisciplinarity, certainly cover enough examples from art, architecture, poetry, and fiction, but because of the sheer range of material have had to sacrifice a certain depth of argument. Our questions sometimes overlap, but more often are aimed in quite different directions. Several books have also been hugely influential on specific areas—and again I have been happy to learn liberally from them. Risking invidiousness for exemplarity, one could name Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho*, Linda Dowling's *Hellenism and Homosexuality*, Norman Vance's *The Victorians and Ancient Rome*, and, on education and science, Christopher Stray's *Classics Transformed*, and for the micro-history of a subject, Suzanne Marchand's *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany 1750–1970* (as well as her more recent work on Orientalism). It is to the understanding of Victorian culture and the classical world mapped by these books that *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* will, I hope, also make its contribution.

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