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## Joyce and Modernist Latinity

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## Joyce and Modernist Latinity

### Abstract

For at least the past couple of hundred years, ancient Greece - by which I mean Greek literature, Greek studies, Greek philosophy, and especially the Greek language - has generally held a position of greater prestige in Western culture than has any of the Latin or Roman counterparts. This may be truer in some national cultures than in others. Whether it is generally the case in those nations where romance languages are spoken I would not say. In Germany it seems certainly to have been true for a long time, but that is not the subject of this paper. My concern is with the Anglophone world, which is itself not monolithic; but in respect of attitudes towards Greece and Rome, the prevailing trends have long been similar in British and American culture and in colonial cultures as well. This situation is sometimes explained as a product of the Romantic movement at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and cultural historians have amply documented the Romantic fascination with things Greek. During much of the time since, even if the Romans have had their advocates, many have expressed the opinion or have simply assumed that Greek literature, Greek art, and even the Greek language, are simply more beautiful, in an intrinsic sense, than their Latin and Roman counterparts.

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Classics

## CHAPTER 4

### *Joyce and modernist Latinity*

*Joseph Farrell*

For at least the past couple of hundred years, ancient Greece – by which I mean Greek literature, Greek studies, Greek philosophy, and especially the Greek language – has generally held a position of greater prestige in Western culture than has any of the Latin or Roman counterparts. This may be truer in some national cultures than in others. Whether it is generally the case in those nations where romance languages are spoken I would not say. In Germany it seems certainly to have been true for a long time, but that is not the subject of this paper.<sup>1</sup> My concern is with the Anglophone world, which is itself not monolithic; but in respect of attitudes towards Greece and Rome, the prevailing trends have long been similar in British and American culture and in colonial cultures as well. This situation is sometimes explained as a product of the Romantic movement at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and cultural historians have amply documented the Romantic fascination with things Greek.<sup>2</sup> During much of the time since, even if the Romans have had their advocates, many have expressed the opinion or have simply assumed that Greek literature, Greek art, and even the Greek language, are simply more beautiful, in an intrinsic sense, than their Latin and Roman counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The literature on this phenomenon is too vast even to summarize here. See, for example, Hildebrand "Hellas und Wilamowitz"; Janicaud, *Hegel et le destin de la Grèce*; Seidensticker and Vöhler (eds.), *Urgeschichten der Moderne*.

<sup>2</sup> Another enormous area; see for instance Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*; Hermand and Holub, *Heinrich Heine, The Romantic School and Other Essays*; Wallace, *Shelley and Greece*; Güthenke, *Placing Modern Greece*.

<sup>3</sup> For the most part, Roman art and literature have been regarded as derivative Greek models and therefore as inferior. The articles on "Greek art," "Roman art," "Greek literature," and "Latin literature" in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* provide a convenient overview of mainstream opinion just before the dawn of the Modernist period. As of this writing, the issue of originality vs. derivativeness is being actively rethought by specialists, but it is not clear that traditional attitudes have changed all that much among the broader community of interested parties. The Wikipedia entry on "Roman art," for instance, begins thus: "While the traditional view of Roman artists is that they often borrowed from, and copied Greek precedents (much of the Greek sculpture known today is

The focus of this paper is the work of James Joyce, and its purpose is to raise the possibility that Joyce is at least a partial and paradoxical exception to this rule. The paradox arises from the fact that Joyce is a consummately Modernist writer who is in many respects representative of Modernist aesthetics and values; but in respect to his creativity in using Latin, I believe, he is something of an exception.

The general issue has to do with the position of antiquity within a culture of self-conscious modernity. This relationship has received some useful attention from literary historians, but certain basic issues demand further thought. On the one hand, the very word "modern" seems to be the definitive antonym of "ancient," and certainly an important element of the Modernist movement involved a reaction against some aspects of "the past." But we cannot speak of early Modernism as rejecting antiquity, even if the Modernist reception of antiquity was highly and characteristically selective. Much of what the early Modernists did reject about the past involved the immediate past; but once again, in their general attitude towards the Greeks and the Romans, the early Modernists were very much the descendants of their Victorian predecessors. What was the immediate context of the early Modernist reception of "classics"?

The decisive formulation was pronounced by that consummate "eminent Victorian" Matthew Arnold. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold expressed the view that two forces in particular shaped the contours of British culture in his day, forces to which he gave the names "Hebraism" and "Hellenism."<sup>4</sup> Both terms require definition. By Hebraism, Arnold meant not Judaism, but the idea of obedience to a code of duty symbolized by the Ten Commandments, the Book of Leviticus, and the kashrut, but also by the moral code of Christianity and by the nominally secular but formidably Christianized social codes of the European nation-states. With this force Arnold contrasted Hellenism as an impulse towards intellectual inquiry not out of duty, desire for gain, or any reason other than the sheer joy of it. "The governing idea of Hellenism," he wrote, "is spirit of consciousness, that

in the form of Roman marble copies), more recent analysis has indicated that Roman art is a highly creative pastiche relying heavily on Greek models but also encompassing Etruscan, native Italic, and even Egyptian visual culture. Stylistic eclecticism and practical application are the hallmarks of much Roman art" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roman\\_art&oldid=300615191](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Roman_art&oldid=300615191), retrieved July 6, 2009 15:54 UTC). Even the apparent champions of the Romans tend not to base their opinions on aesthetics: see, for example, Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns*, pp. 119–45 on T. S. Eliot's famous designation of Virgil as "the classic of all Europe," and, especially, on the reaction that it produced.

<sup>4</sup> On the contemporary background of Arnold's formulation see DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England*.

of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.”<sup>5</sup> Arnold believed that a healthy culture balanced these forces, but that the England of his day suffered from an excess of Hebraism. This view won followers among the aesthetically minded, who (we are told) began to speak of old-fashioned Victorian moralists as “Jews” and of the socially liberated avant-garde as “Greeks,” according to a kind of slang shorthand derived from Arnold’s terms.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, was the attitude towards classics that these Arnoldian “Greeks” espoused? A few years ago I made a first pass at this question by commenting on certain passages from Virginia Woolf and W. B. Yeats.<sup>7</sup> I argued that both Woolf and Yeats represented a strong tendency among the early Modernists to esteem ancient Greek much more than Latin culture on the grounds of its greater inherent beauty, authenticity, and immediacy. The contrast is drawn most clearly by Yeats in a famous passage, a fictitious letter to his son’s schoolmaster directing him to teach the boy no Latin, but Greek instead and, if he should do well in Greek, Irish – “it will clear his eyes of the Latin miasma.”<sup>8</sup> In this same passage Yeats complains that “our schoolmasters read Greek even to-day with Latin eyes,” and opines that “Greece, could we but approach it with eyes as young as its own, might renew our youth.” Woolf develops this idea, making it clear that such opinions have to do with the fact that, for the majority of educated people in their day, Greek remained somewhat remote and inaccessible, certainly in comparison with the Latin that most of them had been compelled to learn at school (to whatever degree of accomplishment in each case).<sup>9</sup> The reception of Greek therefore was conditioned by the fact that it was more *recherché* and was fully accessible only to a select few, while conversely Latin suffered from its status as a too-familiar and compulsory subject. This paper resumes my former argument and applies it to the works of Joyce in order to extend, but also to complicate, the impression that Yeats and Woolf create.

<sup>5</sup> I cite from Super (ed.), *Complete Prose Works*, vol. v, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> See Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, p. 16, where it is stated that “By 1900 ‘Greek’ had become Bohemian slang for those who preached sensual-aesthetic liberation, and ‘Jew’ had become slang for those who were antagonistic to aesthetic values, those who preached the practical values of straightlaced [sic] Victorian morality.” This note is frequently cited as evidence for the colloquial usage, which I have not traced back to primary sources.

<sup>7</sup> Farrell, *Latin Language and Latin Culture from Ancient to Modern Times*, pp. 32–6.

<sup>8</sup> Yeats, *Explorations*, pp. 320–1.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the essays “The perfect language” in McNeillie (ed.), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, vol. II, pp. 114–19, and the more famous “On not knowing Greek” in McNeillie (ed.), *The Common Reader*, pp. 23–38; cf. Poole, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, pp. 173–84.

The indispensable starting point for this investigation is Joseph Schork's work on Latin and Greek elements in Joyce's writing.<sup>10</sup> In an important chapter entitled "Buck Mulligan as 'Grammaticus Gloriosus'" Schork places Joyce in a very particular position with regard to Greek and Latin and also with respect to Anglo-Irish political and social relations.<sup>11</sup> At school Joyce excelled in Latin, which was both a compulsory subject and a generally recognized mark of intellectual achievement. But he had no Greek, which was not commonly taught in Irish schools. An acquaintance of Joyce, Oliver St. John Gogarty, who was in many ways also his intellectual and social rival, received part of his education in England, where he did learn Greek; and in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*, the character who is based on Gogarty, Buck Mulligan, lords his superior education over Joyce's avatar, Stephen Dedalus: "Ah, Dedalus, the Greeks! I must teach you. You must read them in the original. *Thalatta! Thalatta!*"<sup>12</sup> Stephen, of course, as we later learn actually makes his living as a teacher, in fact teaching Latin and ancient history at a boys' school. Mulligan's remark thus alerts the reader to Stephen's ignorance of Greek as a kind of defect which his expertise in Latin cannot (in Mulligan's eyes) make whole. In the process it also orients the reader towards the Hellenic plot of adventure and discovery in which Stephen is involved. Does this gesture, then, also betoken Joyce's Modernist nostalgia for classical Greek culture, and his envy of those, like Gogarty, who were able to flaunt it?

Joyce more or less confessed such envy on more than one occasion. In a letter to his friend Harriet Shaw Weaver, editor of *The Egoist*, he wrote, "I forgot to tell you one thing. I don't even know Greek though I am spoken of as erudite."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere Joyce's friend Frank Budgen recounts an anecdote to illustrate that Joyce's ignorance of Greek "was a sore point with him." Budgen once told Joyce that one thing he regretted about his schooling was that he was never able to learn Greek. Joyce thereupon regretted his own lack of Greek, but then, according to Budgen: "as if to underline the differences in our two cases . . . he said with sudden vehemence: 'But just think: isn't it a world I am peculiarly fitted to enter?'"<sup>14</sup> On such evidence

<sup>10</sup> Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce* and *Greek and Hellenic Culture in Joyce*, with a summary of the main conclusions in Schork, *Joyce and the Classical Tradition*; Arkins, *Greek and Roman Themes in Joyce*, O Hehir and Dillon, *A Classical Lexicon for Finnegans Wake*; on the latter cf. Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, pp. 10–11 and *Greek and Hellenic Culture in Joyce*, p. xiv. See also Ruggieri, *Classic Joyce*.

<sup>11</sup> Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, pp. 28–39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ulysses* 1.79–80; I cite from Gabler (ed.), *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*.

<sup>13</sup> *Per litteras* June 24, 1921; see Gilbert (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, p. 167.

<sup>14</sup> Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses*, pp. 358–9.

it would be tempting to conclude that Joyce's attitude towards the Greek language is just like that of Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, and of many other artistic contemporaries. Did Joyce's ignorance and desire also cause him to overestimate the richness of Greek and breed contempt for the too familiar Latin of his school and church?

This system of values is unquestionably among *Ulysses'* governing ideas. Indeed, the novel's design is explicitly informed by Arnoldian (and for that matter Nietzschean) attitudes towards "Hellenism" and "Hebraism."<sup>15</sup> The titular allusion, after all, casts one Leopold Bloom, a character whose Jewishness is thematized throughout, in the role of Odysseus, the great Greek wanderer.<sup>16</sup> Bloom's Telemachus, an aspiring writer, bears the impossibly "Hellenic" name of Stephen Dedalus, a name that traces his spiritual progress from the "Hebraic" world of the Christian Church (represented through reference to the ur-martyr Stephanos) back to that of pagan mythology (in the form of Daidalos, the original artist). This theme of movement from "Hebraic" to "Hellenic" culture is again loudly advocated in chapter 1 by Mulligan when he comments on Stephen's "absurd name, an ancient Greek!" (1.34). But Mulligan acknowledges this absurdity with evident jealousy when he comments on his own (to this point) suppressed "Christian" name, which is that of an ancient Hebrew prophet: "My name is absurd too: Malachi Mulligan, two dactyls. But it has a Hellenic ring, hasn't it?" (1.41-2).<sup>17</sup> The parallelism thus established between the two characters invites further comparison; and in this context it seems clear enough that Stephen's name is more self-evidently "absurd" (i.e., impossibly Greek), while Mulligan must argue rather tendentiously for the curious status that Stephen's Hellenic nomenclature more obviously confers. The point may be that Stephen is, as it were, an *anima naturaliter Graeca* while Mulligan is a mere pretender.<sup>18</sup> Lest there be any doubt what all of this means, the reader is soon informed that Stephen, gazing out a window of the Martello tower, sees "a deaf gardener, aproned, masked with Matthew Arnold's face" (1.172-3). And just after that Mulligan declares, now in a

<sup>15</sup> On this theme in *Ulysses* see Theoharis, *Joyce's Ulysses*, pp. 142-99; Davison, *James Joyce, Ulysses, and the Construction of Jewish Identity*, pp. 106-26.

<sup>16</sup> Hildesheimer, *The Jewishness of Mr. Bloom*; Nadel, *Joyce and the Jews*; Reizbaum, *James Joyce's Judaic Other*; Ó Gráda, *Jewish Ireland in the Age of Joyce*.

<sup>17</sup> Gifford and Seidman, (*Ulysses Annotated*, p. 14) note that the name has Irish as well as Biblical resonances.

<sup>18</sup> As a further thrust at Mulligan's (and so of Gogarty's) pretensions, this time as a Latinist, it is argued that Joyce deliberately allowed an egregious solecism to stand in a passage of apparently expert Ciceronian parody that he put in the mouth of that character (Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, pp. 28-39).

Nietzschean vein, "I'm the *Übermensch*" (1.708).<sup>19</sup> A clearer statement of the novel's "Hebraic/Hellenic" program could hardly be desired.

The other side of the novel's apparent preference for Greek over Latin culture soon shows itself as well. Chapter 2 opens with Stephen teaching a lesson to a group of students whose command of history and of Latin seems shaky at best. He asks one of them, a boy named Armstrong, "What was the end of Pyrrhus?" What Stephen wants to know is how the great Greek general died. But Armstrong completely misunderstands, thinking that the question is about Latin grammar, not Greek history; and, misconstruing what Stephen means by "end," he subtracts the case-ending *-us* from Pyrrhus' name, and finds that the result is a perfectly good English word: "Pyrrhus, sir? Pyrrhus, a pier. . . A thing out in the waves. A kind of bridge. Kingstown pier, sir" (*Ulysses* 2.18–27).

One glimpses in this passage just the sort of classroom that Yeats hoped his son might be able to avoid. Schork has coined a phrase that aptly captures this aspect of Joyce's attitude: "the Parser's Revenge," or "the ability of a clever Latin student to use the tricks of his linguistic dedication to poke fun at the entire enterprise, especially to mock the ridiculously pedantic methods of instruction and the language-masters who expounded them."<sup>20</sup> In the context of *Ulysses*, there is an undeniable element of self-loathing involved in this mockery. Stephen, Joyce's stand-in, is portrayed as a Latin adept who is ignorant of Greek, and as a cog in an educational machine that uses Latin as a means of processing students into relatively standardized members of a spiritually atrophied society. His question about "the end of Pyrrhus" results in nothing but the "mirthless high malicious laughter" of his charges, which effectively dissolves the lesson. But the question that poor Armstrong flubbed is not permanently forgotten, even if the answer to it does not come until much later. In chapter 7, the "Aeolus" episode, a certain Professor MacHugh represents the eponymous hero of Pyrrhic victories not as the disappointed imperialist that he really was, but as a kind of rebel martyr against the Roman tyranny over Greece (which would not in fact come into being until generations after his campaigns). In so representing "the end of Pyrrhus" the embittered professor speaks for all who feel oppressed by Latinity and who long for the beauty and freedom that, as they believe, "Hellenism" represents.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> On Joyce and Nietzsche see Davison, *James Joyce, Ulysses, and the Construction of Jewish Identity*, pp. 106–26.

<sup>20</sup> Schork, *Joyce and the Classical Tradition*, p. 12. The concept first appeared in Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, pp. 1–12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ulysses* 7.551–71.



We were always loyal to lost causes, the professor said. Success for us is the death of the intellect and of the imagination. We were never loyal to the successful. We serve them. I teach the blatant Latin language. I speak the tongue of a race the acme of whose mentality is the maxim: time is money. Material domination. *Domine!* Lord! Where is the spirituality? Lord Jesus? Lord Salisbury? A sofa in a westend club. But the Greek!

KYRIE ELEISON!

A smile of light brightened his darkrimmed eyes, lengthened his long lips.

The Greek! he said once again. *Kyrios!* Shining word! The vowels the Semite and the Saxon know not. *Kyrie!* The radiance of the intellect. I ought to profess Greek, the language of the mind. *Kyrie eleison!* The closetmaker and the cloacemaker will never be lords of our spirit. We are liege subjects of the catholic chivalry of Europe that foundered at Trafalgar and of the empire of the spirit, not an *imperium*, that went under with the Athenian fleets at Aegospotami. Yes, yes. They went under. Pyrrhus, misled by an oracle, made a last attempt to retrieve the fortunes of Greece. Loyal to a lost cause.

He strode away from them towards a window.

At this point, the case that the author of *Ulysses* retained any fondness or admiration for Latinity may look pretty bad. Joyce frequently and undeniably gives voice to "Hellenic" characters who disparage Latinity openly, as does MacHugh, identifying it as he does with forces and institutions that exist in order to inculcate a "Hebraic" sense of duty. And there is no question that Stephen Dedalus must wrestle with his own complicity in these institutions as well as with his personal ambitions and integrity. But there are indications throughout Joyce's work that Latin is empowering as well, both for Stephen and for Joyce himself; and the rest of this paper will be devoted to exploring some of these.

To begin with some simple, formal observations, it is clear that Latin in various forms plays a huge and varied stylistic and textural role in all of Joyce's mature work.<sup>22</sup> Often it appears in satirical contexts that verge on the grotesque. Such elements evidently grew out of Joyce's own early experience with the language and its place in his educational and social milieu. One amusing aspect is the habit among his friends of conversing in a kind of student argot called "dog Latin." Thus in the *Portrait* Stephen overhears the following declaration of an unnamed medical student: "Ego credo ut vita pauperum est simpliciter atrox, simpliciter sanguinarius atrox, in

<sup>22</sup> As is abundantly illustrated by Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*.

Liverpoolio" (*Portrait*, p. 216).<sup>23</sup> Here too perhaps the point is to undermine pretension and to make glaringly clear the contrast between the archaic values of the education to which Joyce and his peers were subjected and the world in which they actually lived. But it has also been observed that Joyce's own inimitable style is closely implicated in the kind of linguistic play that such passages represent. In a reminiscence of Joyce, his friend Eugene Sheehy speculates that the author's own youthful conversations in dog Latin could have been "the first intimation of the vocabulary of *Finnegans Wake*."<sup>24</sup> It is unquestionably true and has been amply documented that the deracinated linguistic amalgam that is the language of the *Wake* draws heavily on the resources of Latin, both directly and by analogy.<sup>25</sup> Coming at the issue from another angle, one critic has convincingly analyzed the famously Latinate English style employed in chapter 14 of *Ulysses* (the "Oxen" episode) as using the linguistic history of Latin, from the "Song of the Arval Brethren" to medieval chronicle, to chart self-reflexively the development of Joyce's own style – this time in even more explicit anticipation of the *Wake*.<sup>26</sup> An impulse towards parody of the schoolroom is still an important point of reference – the passages in question read like a capable student's effort to convince a skeptical teacher that he really understands the syntax of a piece of Latin that he is translating in class<sup>27</sup> – but this is parody of a more generous sort than we find in the lampooning of characters like Buck Mulligan.<sup>28</sup> And crucially, such passages offer evidence that Joyce's own sense of familiarity and comfort with Latin is one factor, and evidently not the least powerful one, that made possible the development of his unprecedented literary style.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> I cite from Anderson (ed.), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

<sup>24</sup> Sheehy, *The Joyce We Knew*, p. 22; cited by Schork, *Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, p. 217.

<sup>25</sup> O Hehir and Dillon, *A Classical Lexicon for Finnegans Wake*, pp. xi–xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Downing, "Joyce's use of Latin at the outset of 'Oxen,'" pp. 255–66. Downing develops the insights of Joyce's first great explicator, Stuart Gilbert; see the following note.

<sup>27</sup> Or, as Gilbert puts it (commenting on the passage that begins "Universally that person's acumen," *Ulysses* 14.7–17), "this appalling sentence reads like the literal translation of a tract on child welfare written in medieval Latin – reminiscence of the *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, for instance – by a demented German docent" (*James Joyce's Ulysses*, p. 298). Gilbert gives evidence that Joyce gave considerable thought to calibrating the literary–historical effect of this passage in terms of Latin style when he cites a letter from Joyce to Frank Budgen describing the style of this passage, evidently at an early stage of composition, as "Sallustian–Tacitean." But, as Gilbert notes, "no style could be further than this" from either of those models, and he concludes that this was one of the changes that Joyce made while working on the episode (p. 298 n.).

<sup>28</sup> Gilbert, again, hits the mark: "the greater part seems to be devoid of satiric intention; that willful exaggeration of mannerism which points a parody is absent and the effect is rather of pastiche than of travesty" (*James Joyce's Ulysses*, p. 296).

<sup>29</sup> On the further stylistic relationship between "Oxen" and *Finnegans Wake*, see the letter of Stanislaus Joyce dated August 1924 in Ellman (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. III, pp. 102–3, cited by Downing, "Joyce's use of Latin at the outset of 'Oxen,'" p. 261.

To this extent at least I would suggest that Joyce's Latinity and his attitude towards it share the characteristic *jouissance* that marks his approach to language in general. This *jouissance* is compatible with the "Parser's Revenge," but goes beyond the low entertainment of retribution through parody and contributes to something much more positive and creative. A similar impulse does its work on other planes. Joyce does represent characters who worship Greek and hate Latin, but this is only one side of the story. In the first place, as we have seen, the pretensions of such characters are often satirized. To go further, it may be indicative that Stephen, arguably the most consummately Latinate character in Joyce's work, is in a sense more "Greek" than the "Greeks." The name of Dedalus, glossed in the epigraph to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by a quotation from Ovid (*ignotas animum dimittit in artes*, "he directs his mind towards unfamiliar arts," *Met.* 8.188), and orthographically a none-too-classical corruption of the Greek name, follows suit.<sup>30</sup> The title of *Ulysses* – not, that is, *Odysseus* – points in the same direction. Many times where one might expect Joyce's work to gaze upon Greek more openly, it squints instead through a Roman lens.<sup>31</sup> Joyce is in this respect a specimen of the type that Yeats lamented when he wrote that "our schoolmasters read Greek even to-day with Latin eyes." Yeats of course implicates himself in this critique of those who must "clear our eyes of the Latin miasma," and it would be easy to assume that Joyce shared such sentiments and focused them above all on the character of Stephen Dedalus as an embodiment of Latinate self-loathing and longing to transcend itself, to throw off the shackles of duty, conventional thinking, and social constraint, and to realize one's better nature – to become, at last, Greek. It is Stephen above all who yearns for the imagined simplicity, clarity, and wholeness that defines the Modernist canon of artistic excellence; and it would be easy to read this longing as congruent with Virginia Woolf's Hellenophile rhapsodies. But when, in *Portrait*, the young Stephen states his artistic principles, he draws upon the philosophical legacy of Aristotle as presented by Aquinas, whom he quotes in Latin and expounds at some length.<sup>32</sup> Nor is there any indication that he is frustrated by an understanding of Aristotle, whom he does not even mention by name, that is filtered through a Latinate, scholastic exegesis.

<sup>30</sup> On the epigraph itself and its larger significance see Senn, *Joyce's Dilocations*, pp. 73–8.

<sup>31</sup> The sheer volume of Greek and Latin in the *Wake* is documented by O Hehir and Dillon, *A Classical Lexicon for Finnegans Wake*, pp. xi–xii.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson (ed.), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 211–14, citing Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 39, a. 8, corp.; cf. Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas*, p. 105.

For Stephen, steeped as he is in Latin culture, this situation is both a fact of life and even a source of sustenance. It would be wrong to suppose that he devalues Greek culture, just as it would be wrong to deny that Joyce himself regretted his lack of it. But there is little if any indication that Stephen feels quite the same way as the disappointed Professor MacHugh about “the blatant Latin language.” Stephen is only the most prominent among the many characters who habitually think in Latin and whose use of the language is rich and varied, surpassing in importance all other foreign tongues and tapping veins of significance inaccessible to English – even to Joycean English – alone. Moreover, in presenting “stately, plump Buck Mulligan” as the embodiment of philhellenic aspiration, Joyce can hardly be felt to be endorsing the Romantic notion of what it means to go Greek. Rather, it is reasonable to suppose that the narrator’s satirical presentation of self-styled Arnoldian “Greeks” like Mulligan represents Stephen’s, and Joyce’s, skeptical stance towards the breed. Mulligan’s Greek is represented by the most conventional and banal elements of the schoolboy’s lexicon – Homer’s *epi oinopa ponton*, Xenophon’s *Thalatta! Thalatta!*, the scansion of his proper name as a pair of dactyls – and by a scheme to take the Grand Tour on borrowed funds.<sup>33</sup> He prattles cheerfully and insincerely in classical Greek slogans and mottoes, while Stephen broods tortuously over some of the greatest monuments of Latin culture. Mulligan’s mockery, of course, is bilingual: his first utterance is in Latin as he intones a phrase from the entrance antiphon to the Roman Catholic Mass (*Introibo ad altare Dei*), a passage comparable to his Homeric and Xenophontic tags in its triteness: as part of the introductory prayers to the Tridentine Mass, the phrase is among the most familiar in Christendom.<sup>34</sup> This bit of vulgar blasphemy is answered by Stephen’s exquisite and haunted recollection of verses from the funeral service, the *Ordo Commendationis Animae*, in connection with his mother’s death: *liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet: iubilantium te virginum chorus excipiat* (“may the company of martyrs, shining and bearing lilies, surround you; may the chorus of virgins, rejoicing, greet you”).<sup>35</sup> Mulligan’s Greek and Latin sources are generic, unimaginative, and obvious; Stephen’s specific, pointed, and recherché.

It is true, of course, that Joyce sometimes presents Latin merely as a learned language that few people actually manage to learn (as in “Pyrrhus, a pier”). But Stephen, crucially, has learned it and learned it well – better (the novel implies) than the more expensively schooled Mulligan, whose Latin (as Schork argues) is on at least one occasion signally exposed as

<sup>33</sup> Gabler (ed.), *Ulysses*, pp. 80 and 42–3, respectively.    <sup>34</sup> Gabler (ed.), *Ulysses*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Gabler (ed.), *Ulysses*, pp. 276–7, 736–8; Thornton, *Allusions in Ulysses*, pp. 17–18.

defective.<sup>36</sup> Stephen's expertise, we may infer, gives him access not only to the resources of Latinity itself, but to those of Greek culture as well. It may be paradoxical to say, particularly in the light of the opinions expressed by Joyce's contemporaries, but it seems possible that for Stephen and for Joyce the Latin adept possesses a means of more complete access even to Greek culture than does the slipshod scholar who gets caught up in reductive Arnoldian binaries.

In any case, Joyce's Latinity is by no means always or even regularly parodic or parodied, and at times it appears as an avenue of privileged access not only to conventionally defined cultural attainments, but to the much more inaccessible recesses of the psyche and the spirit. Near the end of the *Portrait*, Stephen and a friend named Cranly are found having a somewhat troubled discussion when they are interrupted by the sound of a girl singing in the distance:<sup>37</sup>

Behind a hedge of laurel a light glimmered in the window of a kitchen and the voice of a servant was heard singing as she sharpened knives. She sang, in short broken bars, *Rosie O'Grady*.

Cranly stopped to listen, saying:

– *Mulier cantat.*

The soft beauty of the Latin word touched with an enchanting touch the dark of the evening, with a touch fainter and more persuading than the touch of music or of a woman's hand. The strife of their minds was quelled. The figure of woman as she appears in the liturgy of the church passed silently through the darkness: a white robed figure, small and slender as a boy, and with a falling girdle. Her voice, frail and high as a boy's, was heard intoning from a distant choir the first words of a woman which pierce the gloom and clamour of the first chanting of the passion:

– *Et tu cum Jesu Galileo eras.*

And all hearts were touched and turned to her voice, shining like a young star, shining clearer as the voice intoned the proparoxyton and more faintly as the cadence died.

The singing ceased. They went on together, Cranly repeating in strongly stressed rhythm the end of the refrain:

*And when we are married,  
O, how happy we'll be  
For I love sweet Rosie O'Grady  
And Rosie O'Grady loves me.*

– There's real poetry for you, he said. There's real love.

<sup>36</sup> See n. 18 above. <sup>37</sup> Anderson (ed.), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 244–5.

In Stephen's reverie, a simple scullery maid is transformed by the power and beauty of Cranly's ironic and offhand Latinate comment (*mulier cantat*, "a woman is singing") into a figure of mythical significance, both pagan and Christian.<sup>38</sup> Appearing in a window "behind a hedge of laurel" she is a type of Daphne, the living symbol of poetic inspiration, and in the power of her song to soothe nature and the human heart she stands comparison even to Orpheus.<sup>39</sup> But she is also and more explicitly "liturgical": a servant herself, in Stephen's reverie she becomes another servant girl, the one who in the Gospels accuses Peter of being Jesus' follower (*et tu cum Jesu Galileo eras*, "you were also with Jesus the Galilean"), before whom Peter famously denies Jesus three times.<sup>40</sup> Stephen remembers this passage not from the New Testament but from "the liturgy of the church."<sup>41</sup> And, of course, he, Stephen, *is* Peter in this reverie. His conversation with Cranly has been about love and faith, two of the three cardinal virtues, and specifically about Stephen's inability to feel or to express either emotion. The exchange just discussed follows an earlier one in which Stephen observes that he has just quarreled with his mother over refusing to make his Easter duty:<sup>42</sup>

- It is a curious thing, do you know, said Cranly dispassionately, how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve. Did you believe it when you were at school? I bet you did.
- I did, Stephen answered.
- And were you happier then? Cranly asked softly, happier than you are now, for instance?
- Often happy, Stephen said, and often unhappy. I was someone else then.
- How someone else? What do you mean by that statement?
- I mean, said Stephen, that I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become.
- Not as you are now, not as you had to become, Cranly repeated. Let me ask you a question. Do you love your mother?

<sup>38</sup> Attridge (*Joyce Effects*, p. 76) comments perceptively on Joyce's deployment of a Latin phrase at this point. For a different approach to the scene cf. Gottfried, *Joyce's Comic Portrait*, pp. 74-5, who finds the scene "almost comically overdone" and downplays the significance of Cranly's *mulier cantat* in terms of Latinity as such. But these approaches need not be regarded as dichotomous: see Schlossman, *Joyce's Catholic Comedy of Language*.

<sup>39</sup> The Latinity of the passage is closely linked to the theme of musicality: see Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce*, pp. 44-5; Nestrovski, "Joyce's critique of music," p. 267.

<sup>40</sup> The passage is quoted from the Vulgate text of Matthew 26:69.

<sup>41</sup> On the liturgical use of this passage see Gifford, *Joyce Annotated*, p. 267.

<sup>42</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church the phrase "Easter duty" refers to an obligation to receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season; the exact span of time involved is defined by local authorities. In this way as well, Stephen's refusal of his mother's wish parallels Peter's denial of Jesus during the Passion.

Stephen shook his head slowly.

– I don't know what your words mean, he said simply.<sup>43</sup>

Stephen's inability to deal with this question recurs hauntingly in *Ulysses* when, shortly after (yet again) the failed history lesson about Pyrrhus, the boys are let out to play – but one named Sargent stays behind for help with his arithmetic.<sup>44</sup> He is an evidently unimpressive young man. “Ugly and futile: lean neck and thick hair and a stain of ink, a snail's bed,” Stephen thinks to himself:

Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life? His mother's prostrate body the fiery Columbanus in holy zeal bestrode. She was no more: the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire, an odor of rosewood and wetted ashes. She had saved him from being trampled underfoot and gone, scarcely having been. A poor soul gone to heaven . . .

Amid such thoughts Stephen helps the boy with the first problem, asking at length:

– Do you understand now? Can you work the second by yourself?

– Yes, sir.

In long shaky strokes Sargent copied the data. Waiting always for a word of help his hand moved faithfully the unsteady symbols, a faint hue of shame flickering behind his dull skin. *Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive. With her weak blood and wheysour milk she had fed him and hid from the sight of others his swaddlingbands.

“*Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive.” To such poignant thoughts that seem like messages from the depths of his soul Stephen responds by reducing them to grammatical categories. But this reaction extends to both poles of Joyce's Latinity. On the one hand, Latin is the deadest of all dead languages, an elaborate collection of fetishized rules to be lampooned or clung to as circumstances dictate. At the same time it is the language in which Stephen expresses, or tries to express, what matters most to him, a language that even in its hypertrophied taxonomy of grammatical and syntactic phenomena does not, finally, offer Joyce's gloomy hero the possibility of classifying and containing emotional unpleasantness, but

<sup>43</sup> Anderson (ed.), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 240.

<sup>44</sup> Gabler (ed.), *Ulysses*, pp. 123–67.

intensifies his discomfort by taking him to the very limit of dispassionate analysis and no farther. "*Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive." A mother's love and love for one's mother. In the ambivalence of the Latin phrase a perfect reciprocity is expressed, a reciprocity in which Stephen knows he has been judged and found wanting.<sup>45</sup> Just as the beauty of *mulier cantat* cannot shield Stephen from the guilt of the betrayer, so his teacherly instinct to parse that guilt becomes itself a particularly exquisite and ineluctable form of self-reproach.

Joyce thus complicates the rather one-sided picture of Modernist attitudes towards Greek and Latin with which we began. He is not alone in doing so; and yet the picture remains in general. Why is this so? I have suggested that the cultural ascendancy of Greek over Latin in the twentieth century has its roots in both the Romantic and, in some ways even more importantly, in the Victorian period, but that this ascendancy comes to be expressed in terms that show a particular affinity with Modernist aesthetics; also that within one of the great temples of high Modernism, Joyce's *Ulysses*, evidence can be found to suggest that the situation might in theory have been reversed. It seems clear enough that the Greek and Latin languages themselves play important and very different roles in Modernist reception. I hope at least to have shown that the Modernist engagement with Latin involves not just antipathy, but elements of a profound and even mysterious attraction as well. The evidence suggests, I believe, that there is much more to this phenomenon than the occasional engagement of one Modernist writer with one or more ancient forebears. Instead, I would say that we are dealing with a subject that has to be approached from both directions: with attention to specific intertextual relations at the level of individual texts, but also in the knowledge that Latin and Greek themselves occupy quite specific and challengingly complex positions in the constellation of Modernist aesthetics.

In a more general sense, I hope to have shown why I believe that the phenomenon of literature is profoundly conditioned by both the writer's and the reader's personal circumstances, and also why a historically contingent response to literature need not be at odds with an aesthetic one.<sup>46</sup> But such a response obviously challenges the notion of the aesthetic as a

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the heartbreaking anecdote with which Schork (*Latin and Roman Culture in Joyce*, p. 13) opens his inquiry into Joyce's Latinity.

<sup>46</sup> The idea of "the aesthetic" as a transcendent category has gained a surprising amount of traction in recent years. In the context of the conference where these papers originated, Charles Martindale's recent work on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* as an appropriate frame of reference for the interpretation of Latin poetry (Martindale, *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste*) stands as a particular salient example, and one that provocatively reverses what I have treated in this paper as the basic axioms of



transcendent category. Some Modernist writers did, it seems, regard Greek as a medium of literary and linguistic expression that was especially well-attuned to universal categories, and to have regarded Latin as quite unsuited or even antithetical to such purposes. Today, unless we share this belief, we can see that the identification of Greek with a universal aesthetic is a historically determined position, and one for which we can easily account. Indeed, from our (or perhaps I should say, from my) perspective, this belief looks a bit quaint or naïve. An appreciation of the capacity of Latin to serve similar purposes is no doubt equally contingent, depending on the intellectual and cultural formation of both artist and audience. Nor is the Arnoldian binary of “Hellenism” and Hebraism” itself more than an intellectual construct, useful under some circumstances, but inevitably limited by them. An appreciation of these facts does not mean that we (or even I!) cannot share a strong aesthetic response to some of the same Greek literature that inspired the Modernists. But it does, I think, call the universality of the responses into question. In my opinion, careful attention to those contextual factors that underlie the characteristic attitudes of literary Modernism, both in the reception of the classics and in other respects, can only improve our understanding of their aesthetic response and of our own.

literary Modernism. I do not find myself entirely in sympathy with Martindale’s thesis (see Farrell, Review of Martindale, *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste*), but I do welcome the book as, in some respects, a useful illustration of the points that I am making here about contingency in matters of reception.

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